

Class of 2028 enters their ‘Roll Wave era’ with Swiftie-inspired Convocation

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Using sunglasses, a cowboy hat, and a Polaroid camera as well as recorded excerpts from Taylor Swift’s songs, President Michael A. Fitts encouraged the Class of 2028 to, among other lessons, not be afraid to try something new. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

A flurry of excitement, cheers, music — and “Swifties” — filled the Avron B. Fogelman Arena in the Devlin Fieldhouse on Sunday afternoon at the President’s Convocation for New Students. Convocation, part of Hullabaloo Hello — a spirited week-long orientation for incoming students — is the ceremonial welcome for new

Tulane University students. It features addresses from President Michael A. Fitts, deans and senior administrators, and of course, Tulanian and New Orleans flair.

Tulane senior Anthony Priester, who emceed the ceremony, kicked off remarks by explaining the procession of the gonfalons, which represent all 10 of Tulane's schools and usher in every Tulane Convocation and Unified Commencement. The talented Tulane University Marching Band (TUMB) played the university's alma mater as students sang along. Dr. Michael White, acclaimed New Orleans jazz musician and Tulane alumnus, led The Original Liberty Jazz Band and the procession of university leaders to the stage. Fitts pumped up the class with cheers, fist bumps and high-fives along the way.

Anneliese Singh, chief diversity officer and associate provost for faculty development, read Tulane's Land Acknowledgement before Fitts addressed the class.

"Each August, every year, I get to see a new beginning — full of promise and potential, apprehension and opportunity. It's a clean sheet of paper, a fresh canvas, a wide-open highway with no speed limit," he said. "And you're in the driver's seat."

And in celebration of that, Fitts shared lessons from "one of the great thinkers of this generation."

Using song titles such as "Lavender Haze" and "All Too Well" as hints and descriptors like "record-setting artist," Fitts revealed who he was referring to — his fellow Pennsylvanian, Taylor Swift.

"Whether or not you're a fellow Swiftie, I'm here to tell you: when it comes to navigating transitions, chapters and seasons of your life, Taylor Swift has a few lessons for all of us," he said, tying those lessons to some of Swift's albums.

The first lesson for students: "Be authentic."

"Tulane is a place where you can be unapologetically yourself. It's a place where you can discover who you are, both academically and socially."

Highlighting Newcomb-Tulane College (NTC) as the perfect place to start, Fitts said, "NTC offers each of you an endless combination of academic specialties and interdisciplinary exploration."

“You have the flexibility to customize your educational experience and make it authentically your own.”

The second lesson: “Find your commonality.”

Fitts reminded the class that although it may seem lonely finding their place as new students, they already have something in common.

“You all chose Tulane,” he said. “In choosing, you became a community. Now it’s up to you to build and shape this community with your own unique contributions.”

And the final lesson: “Embrace every era. Don’t be afraid of something new.”

Citing Swift’s musical evolution, Fitts reassured students that it’s okay to try new things and change.

“Here is the place and now is the time to explore everything Tulane and New Orleans has to offer,” he said, noting that it takes courage to do so.

Closing his remarks, which included the use of sunglasses, a cowboy hat and a Polaroid camera as well as recorded excerpts from Swift’s songs, Fitts encouraged students to seize opportunities, find purpose and make a difference.

“This is an era that will become part of who you are for the rest of your life,” he said. “It’s your Roll Wave era, and it starts now.”

TUMB then played a lively musical interlude before Provost Robin Forman addressed the class, emphasizing the importance of a liberal, or “freeing,” education and introducing senior administrators and the deans, including NTC Dean Mollye Demosthenidy, who delivered the traditional class challenge. The challenge, which is inspired by Tulane’s motto “Not for oneself but for one’s own,” calls for students to reflect on how they can “do more and be more, for each other and the world.”

Sending off the class, Fitts encouraged students to grab their provided second-line umbrellas and decorate them to use at their Commencement ceremony — the bookend to their time at Tulane. Fitts then led a roaring “Roll Wave!” cheer and students second-lined behind Dr. White and his band onto McAlister Way where the Hullabaloo Hello block party commenced.





Students cheer at Convocation in the stands of the Avron B. Fogelman Arena in the Devlin Fieldhouse. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

Students second-line from Convocation down McAlister Way with umbrellas in tow. (Photo by Kenny Lass)