

President Fitts celebrates year of growth and achievement in 2024 State of the University address

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bbronst@tulane.edu



Tulane President Michael A. Fitts delivered his annual State of the University address last week, lauding Tulane's dedicated staff and expert faculty for a year of achievement in everything from research and admissions to facilities and fundraising.

It's no secret that Michael A. Fitts loves Tulane University. As Tulane's president for the past decade, he relishes the opportunity to tout the school's successes, accomplishments and triumphs, be it to civic groups, business organizations or governmental bodies.

For his annual State of the University address, the spotlight lands on Tulane's staff and faculty, a group of employees he describes as family, who "are moving Tulane forward in a million different ways" and who are taking Tulane from "bright to brilliant."

Those are just a few of the words that Fitts shared last week during State of the University speeches at Hutchinson Memorial Building on Tulane's downtown campus and the Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life on the uptown campus. A date for the event at the Tulane National Primate Research Center in Covington will soon be announced.

During the uptown and downtown events, he shared his "Top 10 List" of everything he admires about Tulane, from its world-class research enterprise to the academic caliber of the student body, and from the physical transformation of Tulane's campuses to the *Always the Audacious* campaign, which has raised more than \$1.7 billion from nearly 100,000 donors. He noted that none of this would be possible without the dedicated staff and expert faculty who have demonstrated stellar work in an incredible variety of roles across the university. "The big picture," he said, "is truly an inspiring sight."

"The State of the University is my opportunity to share this inspiration with you," Fitts continued. "It's a celebration of all of your accomplishments and a recognition of the myriad ways that you are each contributing to our success."

In an exceptionally monumental year, one of Tulane's greatest milestones was the renaming of the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine to the [Celia Scott Weatherhead School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine](#) in honor of the woman whom Fitts called a "devoted alumna and iconic Tulanian.

"Celia's total lifetime giving has now surpassed \$160 million — a new record for the university," Fitts said. "Her support will provide more scholarships and fellowships, establish new research centers, attract more academic experts and create new spaces to drive discovery."

Fitts said Tulane is building international recognition as a research university on the rise, with federal research funding up by more than 75% over the last seven years and faculty garnering accolades across the globe for their work on everything from ancient societies and aging to coastal erosion and disease.

Underscoring Tulane's ascent as a preeminent research institution, Fitts recalled a recent visit by the President and First Lady of the United States to announce that the bipartisan Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health, also known as [ARPA-H](#), had committed up to \$23 million to fund cancer research at Tulane. The funding will support a project called MAGIC-SCAN, which will help surgeons identify, during surgery, whether they've successfully removed all cancer tissue. It will be led by Quincy Brown, associate professor in biomedical engineering, and Brian Summa, associate professor in computer science.

"This will improve outcomes, reduce the need for future surgeries and save lives," Fitts said. "MAGIC-SCAN is the epitome of what we excel at. It's interdisciplinary, collaborative, innovative and transformative."

Among other highlights, Fitts noted:

- Each year, the academic caliber of Tulane's student body continues to climb, attracting academically ambitious scholars from around the world. The acceptance rate has dropped from 41% to 15% over the last decade, and new scholarships and pathway programs are expanding access to qualified students regardless of their financial backgrounds.
- Tulane's physical transformation over the past year includes the [Steven and Jann Paul Hall](#), a state-of-the-art home for the School of Science and Engineering; the [National Pan-Hellenic Council Plots](#), which honor the legacy of historically Black Greek-letter organizations; renovations to Richardson Memorial Hall, home of the School of Architecture, and Newcomb Hall, home of the School of Liberal Arts; and the continued expansion of [The Village](#) residential living and learning community.

[Revitalization of the downtown campus](#) includes new research labs at Hutchinson Memorial Building; amenities such as new lighting, landscaping and food options; and the eventual transformation of the iconic Charity Hospital into the centerpiece for Tulane's downtown footprint.

On the North Shore, Tulane recently broke ground on a new administrative building for the [Tulane National Primate Research Center](#).

- Tulane has taken major steps to harden campuses against hurricanes and weather events, including the addition of 16 megawatts of backup power to prevent disruptions to research.
- Tulane’s motto — “Not for Oneself But for One’s Own” — is informing the way students, faculty and staff engage with each other and the world at large. Fitts highlighted two examples that received national exposure — [School of Architecture students](#) designed and built a “tiny home” for a man who had been unhoused for two decades, and [biomedical engineering students](#) in the School of Science and Engineering are designing and producing child-size wheelchairs for children with physical challenges.
- A recent study measured Tulane’s annual economic impact at \$5.2 billion, up from \$3.1 billion five years ago.
- [Tulane’s partnership with LCMC Health](#) is a major step toward building a world-class destination academic medical center.
- Athletics saw conference championships in baseball, sailing and women’s cross country, with the football team going undefeated in conference play.
- Fitts interspersed his speeches with the bestowing of staff and faculty awards:

Staff Excellence Award

- Charles Applewhite, Senior Mail Technician, Mail Services
- Scott Cordes, Manager for Property, Accounting Office
- Laura Kreller, Senior Program Coordinator, Newcomb Institute
- Norah Lovell, Accountant II, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, School of Science and Engineering
- Valerie McGinley, Associate Director, Stone Center for Latin American Studies
- Connie Nockton, Senior Accountant, Department of Psychiatry, School of Medicine

- Jeremy Pelegrin, Chief Information Security Officer, Department of Information Technology
- Tonya Rhodes Jupiter, Associate Dean for Experiential Learning and Public Interest Programs, Tulane School of Law
- Guido Salvatierra, Director of Operations and Maintenance, Facilities Services

Heroes and Helpers Award

- Sgt. Bernard Enclarde, Ofc. Caleb Smith and Cpl. Kevin Tillman, Tulane Police Department

Spirit of Tulane Award

- Roxanne Johnson, Director of the Human Research Protection Office, Office of Research

Team Excellence Award

- Africana Studies Program, School of Liberal Arts
- Clinical Research Team, Department of Surgery, School of Medicine

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Tulane President Michael A. Fitts