

## Ibrahim Demir invested as Michael A. Fitts Presidential Chair in Environmental Informatics and Artificial Intelligence

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Provost Robin Forman, President Michael A. Fitts, Carol Lavin Bernick and Dean Hriday Rajan join Ibrahim Demir (second from the right) at his investiture as the Michael A. Fitts Presidential Chair in Environmental Informatics and Artificial Intelligence. (Photo by Kenny Lass)

Tulane University invested Ibrahim Demir as the Michael A. Fitts Presidential Chair in Environmental Informatics and Artificial Intelligence during a ceremony held recently at Richardson Memorial Hall on the uptown campus.

The chair, established by Carol Lavin Bernick, a 1974 Newcomb College graduate and a longtime university supporter, aims to advance the work of an internationally recognized scholar who is addressing critical global challenges.

Demir, who is known worldwide as a leader in hydroinformatics, artificial intelligence and environmental information systems, uses artificial intelligence, data science and cyberinfrastructure to address environmental challenges and improve disaster preparedness. He is a professor in the Department of River-Coastal Science and Engineering in the School of Science and Engineering and a core member of the ByWater Institute.

At Tulane, Demir leads the Hydroinformatics Lab, which focuses on developing intelligent cyber systems, immersive augmented and virtual reality applications and big data analytics for environmental science, public health, engineering and educational challenges. Before joining Tulane, Demir was a professor at the University of Iowa, where he led transformative projects such as the Iowa Flood Information System, the Upper Mississippi Information System and the Blue Green Action Platform, which helps communities reduce nitrogen pollution.

“In the emerging field of hydroinformatics, he is quite simply a rock star,” Tulane President Michael A. Fitts said of Demir. “His scholarly approach aligns perfectly with Tulane’s strengths: our outward-facing focus, our interdisciplinary ethos and our relational, collaborative culture. As we build Tulane’s future as a world-class research institution, Professor Demir will be among those leading the way. We are proud to count him among our faculty at Tulane.”

During the ceremony, university leaders also recognized Bernick’s decades of service and philanthropy, including her support for the Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life, the Downtown Investment Fund, the Tulane Innovation Institute and multiple faculty initiatives. Bernick also served as chair of the Board of Tulane and was a member of the committee that selected Fitts to lead Tulane.

As part of the investiture, Fitts highlighted Tulane’s rapid ascent as a leading research university, noting unprecedented growth in the past decade across academics, research, admissions and campus development.

“At this moment, Tulane is on a trajectory that is truly unparalleled in higher education,” Fitts said. He pointed to major initiatives, such as a partnership with

LCMC Health to build a destination academic medical center and the expansion of the downtown campus into a hub of education and bioscience discovery.

Fitts credited Bernick with much of that progress. “Many of our achievements simply would not have been possible without the wisdom, guidance and transformative philanthropy of a legendary Tulanian.”

He also emphasized Bernick’s role in strengthening Tulane’s research enterprise. The Lavin Bernick Faculty Grant has led to a significant increase in external funding and laid the foundation for continued growth at Tulane. Over the past decade, Tulane has nearly doubled its federal research funding and expanded its global impact across fields such as medicine, public health, energy and artificial intelligence.

“All of us at Tulane are profoundly grateful and indebted to Mike for his steadfast and transformative leadership in guiding the university,” Bernick said. “His strategic foresight, resilience and exceptional ability to build and inspire teams have propelled our beloved Tulane onto an institutional trajectory that has surpassed even our highest expectations.”

Bernick said Demir exemplifies what’s possible as Tulane expands its impact as a leading research university.

“His work integrating artificial intelligence, cyberinfrastructure and data science to address water challenges will strengthen Tulane’s impact nationally and internationally while creating opportunities for students to participate in meaningful, hands-on innovation,” Bernick said.

Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost Robin Forman called Demir “a proven champion of discovery and innovation.”

“He is a leader of a new visionary generation of thinkers who are using artificial intelligence and environmental informational systems to discover the impact of natural disasters before they happen,” Forman said.

Hridesh Rajan, dean of the School of Science and Engineering, said Demir’s addition to the Department of River-Coastal Science and Engineering and the ByWater Institute “strengthens our capacity to deliver interdisciplinary solutions to some of the most pressing coastal, riverine and climate challenges, both locally and globally.

His leadership will also play an important role in shaping and advancing our new Bachelor of Science in Engineering degree in civil engineering.”

Demir thanked Bernick, Fitts, Forman and Rajan for supporting him and called his investiture “the honor of a lifetime.”

“My goal is to establish a tradition of excellence that mirrors the forward-thinking leadership President Fitts has provided to this institution,” he said. “As we continue to push the boundaries of what is possible, I am honored to do so at an institution as bold and forward-thinking as Tulane.”