

Who Dat? They Dat!

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During a morning punctuated by comical one-liners, offerings of gratitude and even a Saints highlight reel, perhaps the most succinct summation of the Tulane 2010 Commencement Ceremony found its expression emblazoned atop the mortarboard of one graduate: We Dat!



CNN's Anderson Cooper salutes the 2010 class for helping New Orleans "rebuild, renew and restart." (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

A riff on the now-familiar chant of New Orleans Saints fans, the mortarboard's message seemed a fitting pronouncement from a group of students who were being honored for choosing to come to Tulane even as New Orleans was in the throes of recovering from Hurricane Katrina.

"Four years ago, the future of this institution hung in the balance," said Tulane President Scott Cowen during his address on Saturday (May 15). "I had great faith that you would arrive in significant numbers to populate the class of 2010 â?; but not the certainty."

CNN anchor and author [Anderson Cooper](#) echoed Cowen in his keynote address in the Louisiana Superdome. "You came here anyway. You helped this city rebuild, renew and restart."

As the first cohort of students to complete the university's public-service graduation requirement instituted after Katrina, members of the class of 2010 took an active role in the recovery of the city.

Cooper, who poked fun at the academic regalia worn by all the participants in the graduation ("Does anyone else feel like they are at a Harry Potter convention?") as well as young people who aspire to be anchors and politicians ("I think you should become a real person before you become a fake one"), turned serious when talking about the graduates' relationship with New Orleans, a city that was home to his father for nearly 20 years.



Tulane graduates enjoy their special moment in the Louisiana Superdome, with thousands of families and friends in attendance.

"Remember what you have learned on the streets of this city," said Cooper. "Remember the triumph and tragedy, the richness and poverty, and remember how you made it better."

The spotlight was briefly taken off the graduates during a video of highlights from the New Orleans Saints' season. Cowen presented the Tulane President's Medal to Saints co-owner Rita Benson-LeBlanc, defensive coordinator Gregg Williams and

linebacker Jonathan Vilma. Cooper also received a medal.

Tulane's unified [commencement ceremony](#), which represents all of its schools and colleges, also featured musical performances by Dr. Michael White's Original Liberty Jazz Band and the Pipes and Drums of New Orleans.

Honorary degrees were awarded to Tulane alumna Dr. Regina Benjmain, surgeon general of the U.S. Public Health Service; Geoffrey Canada, president and CEO of Harlem Children's Zone; and John Ruffin, director of the National Institute on Minority Health and Health Disparities.