

Commencement Krewe Ready for Show

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For Debbie Grant and the krewe that produces commencement, the May 12 Tulane unified ceremony is a bit different this year. It's on a Thursday instead of the usual Saturday, and at the Morial Convention Center rather than the Louisiana Superdome. But as the producer of the commencement "show," Grant promises a memorable celebration that mixes academic traditions, New Orleans music and a party atmosphere.



The combination of New Orleans music and academic traditions make the Tulane commencement ceremony special. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

"Many of our keynote speakers have said this is one of the most entertaining commencement ceremonies in all of academia," says Grant, the vice president of university communications and marketing who has spearheaded the production since Tulane President Scott Cowen brought back the universitywide celebration in 1999, shortly after he became president.

The change in venues brought about months of additional planning to make sure that everything runs smoothly on a day that is the crowning event in the academic

lives of more than 2,000 graduates.

“Business is really good in New Orleans, which is excellent news, but that's what brought about our changes this year,” Grant says. “The Superdome is being renovated, so we moved to the venue that can handle our audience of more than 10,000. And the convention center was booked for nearly all of May, so we had to juggle our date.”

The [ceremony](#) itself offers national headliners, with a talk by Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* journalist Thomas Friedman and [honorary degrees](#) going to musician Stevie Wonder and television news commentator Cokie Roberts. A live [video stream](#) on the Internet also will be available at 4 p.m. when the unified ceremony starts.

For lagniappe, the annual [Wave Goodbye](#) party for grads and their families and friends, normally held on commencement eve on the uptown campus, will follow the unified commencement ceremony at 6:30 p.m.

Celebrants will walk about two blocks to reach party central at Mardi Gras World on the banks of the Mississippi River. The venue is a party in itself, filled with spectacular Carnival floats and providing picturesque stages for the two bands that will be playing.