

It's a Superdome commencement for class of 2012

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More than 2,700 prospective graduates from all Tulane schools and colleges – the largest class in recent memory – will march into the spotlight at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome on Saturday (May 19) for the Unified Commencement Ceremony.



A Superdome celebration with New Orleans overtones makes the Tulane Unified Commencement Ceremony special for graduates. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

As they emerge from several entrances onto the Superdome floor, they will make their way to seats that Billie Banker and event organizers have painstakingly arranged. Banker, the special assistant to President Scott Cowen and a longtime member of the commencement crew, will breathe a grateful sigh when the ceremony begins.

Because of the larger class, “the biggest challenge this year was definitely floor seating,” she says. “That means we need more volunteers, more signs, more

planning as to who goes in rooms together (before the ceremony) to fit into the seating and how to get that many onto the floor quickly.”

Rebecca Ancira, associate vice president of enrollment management, notes that most of the graduates arrived in fall 2008, when incoming class numbers were on the upswing three years after Hurricane Katrina.

She and the staff in the registrar's office are busy. All the diplomas are stacked in Gibson Hall, with boxes going back and forth to President Cowen's office. “Most graduates have no idea that the president actually signs the diplomas,” Ancira says. “It's just something he wants to do.”

This year's [ceremony](#), the 14th since President Cowen reinstated the unified ceremony, returns to the Superdome, a happy change for both organizers and the audience. Superdome construction meant the 2011 ceremony was at the Morial Convention Center.

In addition to those in attendance on Saturday, others will watch via the Internet. The ceremony will be [streamed live](#) from the university's website and its [Facebook](#) page.

The behind-the-scenes planning will be transparent to the 8,000 or more parents and friends who will be cheering for the graduates.

“Tulane University is here to educate, enlighten and ultimately graduate students,” Banker says, “and to see that come together, year after year, is very rewarding.”