

Thanks and praise, order of the day at Commencement 2014

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Job well done was the message, and joy, tinged with a little sadness, was the mood. At the Tulane University Commencement ceremony in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome on Saturday (May 17), accolades flowed for the graduates and President Scott Cowen, who was presiding over his last ceremony as leader of the university.



New Orleans renowned trumpeter Wynton Marsalis, right, serenades Tulane President Scott Cowen at an emotional commencement ceremony on Saturday (May 17) at the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. It was Cowen's 16th and final graduation ceremony as president. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

In a [ceremony](#) punctuated throughout by joyous, up-tempo music performed by some of the world's ? which by definition, means New Orleans" ? most accomplished musicians, a class of more than 2,800 graduates from all 50 states and 63 countries celebrated academic achievements. The ceremony was streamed live on the Tulane website.

Wynton Marsalis, New Orleans' own renowned jazz musician and the commencement speaker, praised the graduates for "endeavoring to pursue" their

dreams, for their hard work and for joining the elite ranks of college graduates. "You have survived this rite of passage," Marsalis told them. "You deserve to celebrate, but don't rest."

Gratitude with a prayerful attitude was a theme for Marsalis.

"Give further thanks," he told the assembled graduates and about 12,000 of their friends and families, "for all the obstacles and tribulations that made you reach deeper to raise yourself higher even as you recognize and appreciate all the advantages and incentives that have allowed you to float above the turmoil and chaos that have destroyed the aspirations of many."

Four times during his speech, Marsalis paused to play his trumpet, accompanied by Dr. Michael White's Original Liberty Jazz Band, performing triumphant and ascendant tunes, including "When the Saints Go Marching In."



Wynton Marsalis, right, joins Dr. Michael White, center, and his Original Liberty Jazz Band in a musical send-off for Tulane University graduates at Commencement 2014. At the ceremony, Marsalis was the commencement speaker and received an honorary degree of humane letters. White received the Tulane President's Medal.

When Marsalis was asked months ago to speak at the ceremony, he said that Cowen had one stipulation for him: don't say anything about me.

Well, Marsalis ignored that admonition and, instead, spoke highly of the Tulane president who is stepping down on July 1 after 16 years in office.

Cowen "has lived his most sacred belief," said Marsalis. "It's difficult to be an

exemplar of what comes out of your mouth. Words are easy to speak; *to be* is very difficult. This man showed the nation and the world the true meaning of leadership.”

And Cowen's “most sacred belief is that a university is its students,” said Marsalis.

To celebrate Cowen is to celebrate the graduates. “You are what he has worked tirelessly to manifest,” said Marsalis, who received an [honorary degree](#) at the ceremony.

Cowen, in his [speech](#) to the graduates, advised them to commit themselves to lifelong learning, making a difference in the world and finding their passion.

“No one will ever remember you for what you did for yourself,” Cowen said. “They will only remember you for what you did for others.”