

"Freshman President" welcomes Class of 2018

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Tulane University President Mike Fitts addresses the Class of 2018 at Convocation on Saturday (Aug. 23) in McAlister Auditorium on the uptown campus. (Photos by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Strains of “When the Saints Go Marching in” welcomed them as they streamed into McAlister Auditorium on Saturday (Aug. 23). They politely donned forest green T-shirts announcing, “Only at Tulane. Only in New Orleans.” Initiated as new Tulanians and New Orleanians, the Class of 2018, more than 1,600 strong, cheered Tulane University [President Mike Fitts](#), welcoming him as one of their own.

“I have a special insight into how you must be feeling today because we're in the same boat. I am also a freshman at Tulane ? a freshman president,” said Fitts, who

took office on July 1.

There were many firsts for Fitts to celebrate along with the Tulane University Marching Band, cheerleaders, deans and new students in standing-room-only McAlister. Parents of the new students watched the happenings on video in nearby locations.

It was Fitts' first official university ceremony and came with a nod to Crescent City traditions, as Michael White's Original Liberty Jazz Band led the platform party procession down McAlister's center aisle, playing "Just a Closer Walk With Thee," first in slow jazz funeral rhythm, then up-tempo, getting the crowd ? and Fitts ? bouncing. Fitts high-fived and shook hands with students all along the route.

Fitts, the former law school dean at the University of Pennsylvania, told the students he made the decision to come to Tulane "for a simple reason. Tulane is magical. It is a place that will profoundly transform who you are today and how you live the rest of your life. The reason: It impels you to engage like no other institution in the United States."

To start them off in engagement even before classes begin on Monday (Aug. 25), Fitts challenged the students to send him photographs of their favorite spot at Tulane or in the city, [emailing to him](#) by Sept. 23. He said he wants photos that are "meaningful to you," illustrating the grandeur, diversity, grit and innovation of the community. He promised to post the photos, choose the best two, and treat the creators and two others to dinner at Commander's Palace.

Underscoring his connection with the new students, Fitts ended by saying, "Tulane is a place that will change us for the better, intellectually and professionally. And will enable us to succeed in life and to make a difference in the world. This is what college is about. So congratulations. You are Tulane. Welcome to the family."

The new students cheered and gave the president a standing ovation. A [transcript](#) of his speech is available.



“You are now a member of an incomparable family, the Tulane family ... a supportive and resilient family that celebrates its matchless traditions, all while building a better world.” -- President Mike Fitts