

Tulane Commencement 2015: "Say yes... and..."

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Maya Rudolph, commencement speaker, mugs for the camera, as President Mike Fitts presides over his first Tulane University Commencement on Saturday (May 16) in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. Fitts also presented Rudolph with the Tulane University President's Medal. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Listen, say yes and celebrate today what you've accomplished so far.

That was the message to the over 2,800 graduates of Tulane University at Commencement 2015 on Saturday (May 16), during the ceremony in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome in New Orleans.

Tulane Commencement is like no other. From the swinging sounds of Dr. Michael White's Original Liberty Jazz Band, Topsy Chapman's singing of "Do You Know What It Means to Miss New Orleans," to the confetti, balloon-drop and fireworks send-off, the graduates were feted, lauded and served up advice.

"Say yes â say yes andâ" â those were the words of wisdom from comedian, actress and singer Maya Rudolph, the headliner commencement speaker.

Don't negate others' ideas, Rudolph said. "Create your own destiny. Hold onto your old friends. Kiss your momma. Admit what your dreams are. Don't beat yourself up if you don't know what you're going to do tomorrow. But work hard and don't be lazy."

Rudolph wowed the audience with her rendition of the "The Star Spangled Banner." In a variety of voices, a mix-up of the words and her own sound effects, she had the audience laughing uproariously.

Rudolph appeared right at home on the Tulane commencement stage. After all, her father, Richard Rudolph, is a 1968 Tulane graduate. He was in the audience, along with the rest of her family, her husband, their four children â and her cousin, Sabrina Rudolph, who received a bachelor's degree from the Tulane University School of Liberal Arts today.

Green Envy, the Tulane a cappella group, serenaded Rudolph with the hit song "Lovin' You," written by her father and recorded by her late mother Minnie Riperton.

After the ceremony, Richard Rudolph said, "This was an amazing day for me, such an emotional journey."

Student speaker [Matthew Marx](#), who received his medical degree from Tulane today (his third Tulane degree), described his own emotional journey through nine years spent at Tulane. He told the graduates, "Today is your day to celebrate something we all have in common â an amazing achievement, something that will be with you forever â your ties to this city, and your bond with each other."

For Tulane President Mike Fitts, it was the first Tulane Commencement ceremony he has presided over. For the first time, he instructed Tulane graduates to switch the tassels on their mortarboard caps to the left side after he officially conferred their degrees.

His piece of advice to the graduates: Listen.

“The importance of listening doesn't end once you leave the classroom. Indeed, it is one of the most powerful tools you will have as you build your lives after Tulane.”

Read President Fitts' entire [speech here](#).



“Create your own destiny. Hold onto your old friends. Work hard and don't be lazy.”—Maya Rudolph, Commencement 2015 speaker