

Hundreds gather for 'Call for Unity'

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Tulane University student Ellie Arbeit, left, and Edna Karr High School student Tevin Clark talk with Tulane President Mike Fitts, right, before the Call for Unity rally on Wednesday (Nov. 18), held in Pocket Park outside the Lavin-Bernick Center on the uptown campus. Speaking at the gathering, Fitts said, “Your presence here shows how much you care about Tulane University.” (Photos by Cheryl Gerber)

At the [Call for Unity](#) held on Wednesday (Nov. 18) on the Tulane University uptown campus, student organizers drove a conversation about confronting racism and discrimination on campus.

The event included speakers from Students Organized Against Racism and the [Tulane Black Student Union](#), as well as President Mike Fitts.

About 400 students, faculty members, administrators and others gathered at Pocket Park to hear organizers ask the university to address a list of concerns, like financial aid availability, student and faculty recruitment, and additional resources for the [Office of Multicultural Affairs](#).

“We anticipate thoughtful, honest dialogue â?¡ dialogue that would propel equity and justice forward at this university,” said Ryan Hitchens, whose comments opened the rally. “The intent of this dialogue is to prompt a response that would bridge the gap between the university and black students.”

“Having students of different backgrounds is absolutely wonderful and critical to the educational experience at Tulane,” said Fitts. “But that does not mean that students of color are here to provide teachable moments. You bring creative and intellectual energy to this university.”

Besides African-American students, Latino, Muslim and white students addressed the audience and issued calls to action for ongoing attention to instances of racism. President Fitts vowed that the university would continue to support its students of color.

After the rally, senior Charlie Joseph Draughter Jr., an African-American student, said of the event, “It exceeded my expectations,” adding that it was both productive and progressive, and that he was appreciative of the student turnout.

Student Jacob Maier of St. Louis, who is white, said he has attended similar rallies, including in Ferguson, Missouri. “This is really awesome and it's definitely the start of a conversation, and it was definitely needed, especially on Tulane's campus.”

The Call for Unity was organized partially to support student activists at the University of Missouri, Yale University and other schools, and also in response to insensitive and offensive posts on the social media app Yik Yak.



Students and other members of the Tulane community show their solidarity by filling the steps in Pocket Park at the Call for Unity rally. One student speaker said, “We stand with black student activists and their allies across the nation.”