

Inauguration: Academic protocol and NOLA flair

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The campus community will celebrate the inauguration of Mike Fitts as the 15th president of Tulane University on Thursday (March 17). To aid in the festive occasion, giveaways will be available such as “15” pins and handkerchiefs suitable for waving at the second-line music procession. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

The inauguration of a university president is an event steeped in academic protocol, drawing in delegates from across higher education. But this is New Orleans, so when the inauguration of [Mike Fitts](#) as the 15th president of Tulane University takes place on March 17, expect an added musical flair from the city’s jazz roots.

Dr. Michael White’s Original Liberty Jazz Band, reprising its traditional role from Tulane commencement ceremonies, will play the entrance music in McAlister Auditorium for a procession of more than 200 celebrants. There to witness the event will be delegates from colleges and universities across the nation and representatives from community organizations, city government and every segment of the Tulane community.

When the ceremony is complete, the jazz band will lead the procession out to the Lavin-Bernick Center Quad, in second-line style, for an outdoor celebration.

“It will be distinctive to Tulane,” says J. Davidson “Dusty” Porter, vice president of student affairs and dean of students, who is co-chair of the inauguration planning committee along with Ken Schwartz, dean of the School of Architecture.

McAlister’s doors open at 1 p.m. on March 17, and the procession begins at 2 p.m. The entire campus community is invited to attend the ceremony and reception.

“It should be a really colorful event,” Porter says, noting the academic regalia worn by higher education delegates. “There are elements that are part of what happens at a presidential inauguration, but what will happen is also reflective of this particular president and this institution.”

Darryl D. Berger, chair of the [Board of Tulane](#), will lead the traditional induction of the president and present Fitts with symbolic keys to the university. Only at Tulane, however, will the audience hear a musical invocation played by renowned clarinetist Michael White; the National Anthem and alma mater sung by student a cappella group [Green Envy](#); and “Sonnet for the Inauguration of President Fitts” read by its author, English professor [Peter Cooley](#), the [poet laureate of Louisiana](#).

“President Fitts asked us to frame the event and activities as a celebration of where Tulane is right now in its own development as a university.”

J. Davidson “Dusty” Porter