

Presidential Town Hall addresses university issues

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President Mike Fitts, left, answers an audience question with moderator Gabe Feldman looking on at the 2016 Town Hall held during Homecoming weekend. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

"It's a great time to be at Tulane University," said President Mike Fitts in opening the annual Homecoming Town Hall on Friday (Oct. 28).

With a string of superlatives in college surveys (such as happiest students and most engaged in community service), the recent launches of the [ByWater Institute](#) and the [Brain Institute](#), as well as the renovation and expansion of buildings across campus, Tulane is well poised to continue

offering “the best education in the United States,” he said.

In the first half of the hourlong session, Fitts answered questions from social media and a [live blog](#). The second half of the town hall was devoted to audience questions.

Joining Fitts onstage as moderator was [Gabe Feldman](#), Paul and Abram B. Barron Associate Professor of Law; director of the Sports Law Program; and associate provost for NCAA Compliance.

Overall, the questions mostly fell into three categories: maintaining academic excellence, ensuring student safety and well-being, and addressing faculty issues. Other topics included financial matters and athletics.

Of academic excellence, audience members asked Fitts to address topics like strengthening the engineering programs, the recent rise in *U.S. News and World Report* rankings, and how to maintain high faculty standards.

“Great universities are defined by the quality of their faculty,” Fitts said. “The ability to attract the best faculty, to support the best faculty ... is critical.”

Parents of students asked questions about campus safety and security, career counseling and mental health services.

As for the diversity of both the faculty and student body, “Diversity is incredibly important to good debates and good decision-making,” he said. “As president it’s very important to me to articulate the value of that and the need for us to have dialogues on campus that bring people from all different perspectives.”

Fitts also answered questions on what he is most proud of — a high level of community engagement, community service (“it’s part of our identity”) and what sets the university apart (“the culture, the warmth”).

At least one student wrote in with helpful suggestions about a fee-based service.

“I’m a freshman in Monroe, and our doors lock automatically, so I’ve locked myself out a few times this semester,” Feldman read from the student’s statement. “It costs \$25 for the lockout code, which I think is too much. Isn’t the shame of walking to the front desk with nothing but boxers on and a toothbrush in hand punishment enough?” The audience laughed and applauded.

“Dusty Porter ...” Fitts suggested, perhaps looking for some support or advice from the vice president of student affairs. “Dusty’s not going to save me on this one.”

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President Mike Fitts