



PHOTO: RYAN RIVET

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Spring 2017



PHOTO: GILES KEYTE

Dear alumni, parents, faculty, staff and friends,

I want to tell you a story about seven extraordinary Tulanians who built something literally out of this world. A month ago, they participated in a competition held by NASA called “The BIG Idea Challenge.”

You see, NASA had a problem it couldn’t solve. It needed to send larger and larger loads of equipment to the space station, but it needed to pile that equipment into as small a package as possible. It’s a puzzle—imagine you were asked to fit as many potato chips as possible into a small container—stacking them like Pringles might be your best bet.

NASA had a great idea—it decided to ask college students around the country to try to solve the problem for them. Most of the 29 teams were made up of students from the top aerospace engineering programs.

Seven Tulane students—with a heck of a lot of chutzpah among them—got together and formed a team. None of them were aerospace engineers. Instead, they came from physics, economics and architecture.

At the competition, they watched each team present their meticulous ideas. Every other design worked to tweak the traditional NASA idea of a satellite: a sphere with rectangular flaps that fold into it.

Then, it was Tulane’s turn. They presented something entirely different. Like Pringles, they thought to load a bunch of hexagons into a tube. Then, once the

ROYAL SEND-OFF

Academy Award-winning actress **Helen Mirren** will deliver the keynote address to graduates at Tulane University’s 2017 Commencement on May 20 in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome. She will also receive an honorary degree at the ceremony.

Mirren, one of the world’s most accomplished and versatile actresses, has starred in roles ranging from real-life heroine Maria Altmann in *Woman in Gold* to the voice of Dean Hardscrabble in *Monsters University*. She won an Oscar in 2007 for her portrayal of Queen Elizabeth II in *The Queen*.

“I am very proud and happy to be receiving a doctorate from Tulane and look forward to giving the commencement speech. I have had a long and very passionate affair with New Orleans, and this will make my relationship official,” Mirren said.



PHOTO COURTESY OF DAVID ROSTON

TUNE IN

David Roston's voice is calm and collected as he welcomes listeners to his radio show, "NOLA Matters—The Public Health Radio Hour," which airs weekly on the community radio station 102.3 WHIV-FM in New Orleans.

Roston, a first-year graduate student in the Tulane School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, is interested in using media to promote social justice within the field of public health. The show focuses on health initiatives and research regarding such topics as homelessness, food access and chronic diseases.

It airs live on Fridays from 5–6 p.m. on 102.3 FM and can be streamed online at www.whivfm.org.

"Storytelling is a timeless tool to shape and change our perceptions of the world," said Roston. "Whether through radio, cinema, art, music or theater, we must continue to express ourselves and chronicle the achievements of individuals and communities."

shuttle reaches space, those hexagons unfold into what the students have dubbed "the sunflower," exposing the shuttle's solar panels to the sun for fuel.

You could hear a pin drop. The judges had never seen anything like it. Ethan Gasta, a member of the team, said, "We knew, at that moment, we were either going to come in first place or dead last."

Ethan and the team won in an incredible upset, and they will all be continuing their research this summer with paid internships at NASA. Fittingly, they'll be working with the "Game Changing Development" team.

It's a quintessentially Tulane story, and it speaks to who we are and where we are heading.

I have this theory about the kind of student who chooses to come to Tulane and New Orleans. They've got a lot of guts. They're adventurous, willing to take risks and stray from the beaten path.

Tulane takes these students and helps them understand that it's not always an advantage to think exactly like your competitors. We show them the power of different perspectives and thinking across fields. As Walter Isaacson, a member of Tulane's Board and soon our faculty, once said: "Innovation will come from people who are able to link beauty to engineering, humanity to technology and poetry to processors."

At Tulane, we don't just think outside of the box. We tear the box apart, and rebuild it into something no one has ever seen before.

And this is how we train our students to solve the world's problems.

Or, in this case, how we solve intergalactic problems.

But why is Tulane so innovative? I think it has a lot to do with Tulane's origins. Most schools were started as liberal arts colleges on the ecclesiastical model—wonderful—but entirely inward-looking.

Tulane started as a medical college with a purpose—to solve the problem of yellow fever. And then Tulane grew with public health, law, English and business.

TULANE HOSTS NBA WEEKEND

During NBA All-Star Weekend in February, Tulane University welcomed the NBA to its uptown campus for several days of activities including panel discussions with front-office executives and basketball clinics for local schoolchildren.

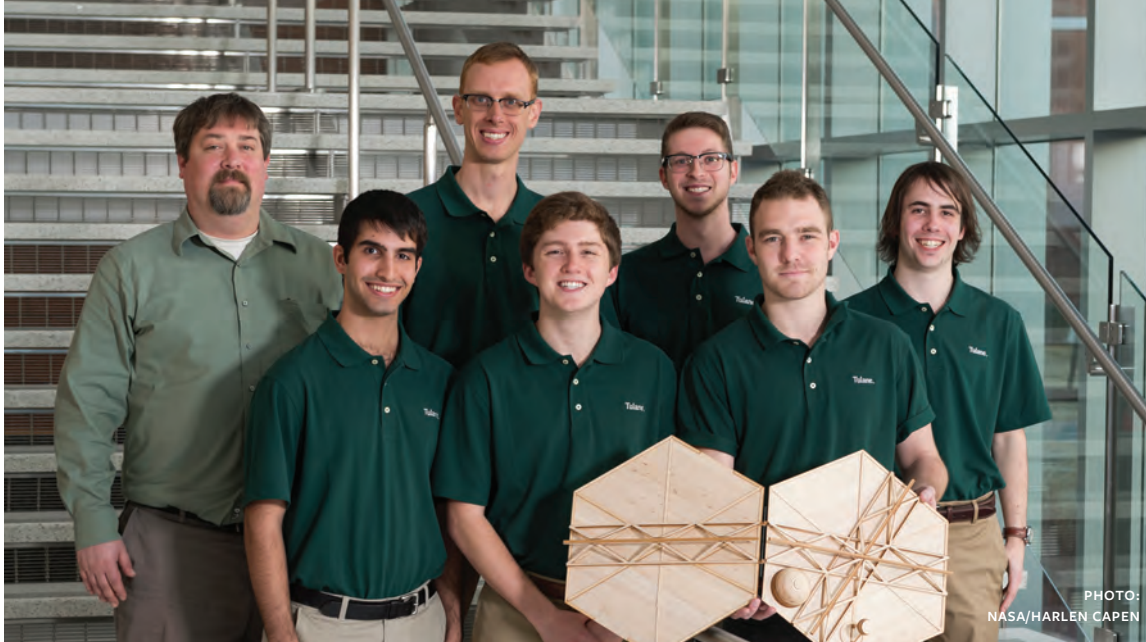
In addition to Tulane, some of the panel sessions were sponsored by Tulane Law School, the Tulane Sports Law Program and the Tulane English Department.

Jr. NBA Day allowed hundreds of middle-schoolers the chance to meet—and ball—with some of their favorite NBA stars at the Reilly Recreation Center. The students enjoyed games and drills with Jr. NBA Day volunteers and then a skills challenge and a mini combine with current players.

The players, during their NBA Day of Service, even offered one-on-one tips to the budding basketball stars.



PHOTO: RYAN RIVET



Members of the Tulane team hold a model of their winning design from the NASA BIG Idea Challenge. Top row from left to right are: Professor Timothy Schuler, John Robertson and Matthew Gorban. On the bottom row are Afsheen Sajjadi, Ethan Gasta, Otto Lyon and Maxwell Woody (not pictured: Ben Lewson).

TULANE UNIVERSITY ROSE TO NO. 39

in *U.S. News & World Report's*
nationwide Best Colleges rankings.

RANKED NO.

39

IN 2017

RANKED NO.

41

IN 2016

RANKED NO.

54

IN 2015

We excel in liberal arts, but also in connecting across disciplines. We teach knowledge for its own sake, but also to solve the world's toughest problems.

During Mardi Gras, I had another epiphany about what makes Tulane so special.

I was watching the Muses parade, shedding the last of my dignity in an attempt to obtain an elusive shoe, when I realized that nearly everyone in the parade seemed to be a member of Tulane's community.

As I watched them, I realized the full extent of the extraordinary creativity they were engaged in—from creating beautiful shoes, to composing intricate dance numbers. *I'm looking at you, 610 Stompers.*

New Orleans is unrelentingly creative. I've seen its adventure and quirkiness and magic. Every day, I witness that spirit propel New Orleans to new heights. It's no surprise that AOL co-founder Steve Case believes New Orleans is "poised to re-emerge as one of the great startup cities in the country, maybe even the world." And I've now seen how that energy has infected Tulane. Watching the Muses parade go by, I saw a willingness to push boundaries. I saw a reimagining of what the world should look like. And I saw a serious dedication to glitter.

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RENDERING COURTESY OF ESKEW+DUMEZ+RIPPLE

DOWNTOWN BOUND

The A. B. Freeman School of Business at Tulane University will be a tenant in the New Orleans Culinary & Hospitality Institute (NOCHI), a new culinary and hospitality industry training hub that will open in the former Louisiana ArtWorks building at 725 Howard Ave. in fall 2018.

Freeman is planning a new hospitality entrepreneurship initiative at NOCHI unlike traditional hospitality management programs. It will use the hospitality industry to gain new insights and solve problems across business disciplines and industries.

The Freeman School will lease one and a half floors for classroom, office and programming space in the five-story facility, which is under renovation. The venture will give Freeman space to create new programs for graduate and undergraduate students as well as working professionals close to the city's Central Business District.



PHOTO: PAULA BURCH-CELENTANO

TOUGH TURF

Tulane researchers are studying the resilience of certain species along the Louisiana coast — species such as *Spartina alterniflora*, an iconic type of marsh grass in the wetlands. After the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010, *Spartina* bore the brunt of the leaked oil, with thousands of acres covered in the sludge.

According to Sunshine Van Bael, assistant professor of ecology and evolutionary biology, *Spartina* doesn't just take the punch; it fights back. With the help of symbiotic microbes called endophytes, which act similarly to gut flora in the human microbiome, bacteria within *Spartina* tissues may be breaking down the hydrocarbons in oil to render it less toxic.

Aided by a grant from the Gulf of Mexico Research Initiative, Van Bael's lab has been studying this process using oil samples collected directly from the BP spill. The research could have long-term impacts on the future of Louisiana's coast, said Van Bael.

"Oil spills will keep happening, unfortunately," she said. "But it's good to know what we can do with endophytes. Our goal is to find species that can help these grasses break down oil, and to help these plants respond to stress."

PRISON OUTREACH

Tulane University students are collaborating with the inmates of Lafayette Parish Correctional Center through an introductory creative writing class taught by Zachary Lazar, an associate professor of English in the School of Liberal Arts. This spring, 12 Tulane students are partnering with an equal number of inmates to produce a book of original works.

In another prison-based project, doctoral student Annie Freitas heads The Newcomb Prison Project, a new initiative of the Newcomb College Institute that will connect students with local organizations to help bring classroom-style learning to both incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people.

The Newcomb Prison Project will host speakers, film screenings and workshops that explore the intersections of race, class, gender and incarceration, and the effects of education on prison re-entry rates.



PHOTO: THINKSTOCK.COM

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New Orleans is the driver of that signature Tulane innovation. New Orleans adds syncopation to our teaching. Improvisation to our research. It inspires us to become creative risk-takers who succeed. It's the reason our students don't just march to the beat of their own drum—they dance.

I wouldn't have it any other way, and I am proud of the edge Tulanians have over their peers as a result. Tulane is what happens when you take a world-class research university and inject it with magic and joy.

That is what Tulane is all about.

Mike



EXTERNAL RESEARCH FUNDING SUBSTANTIALLY INCREASED

Funding increased from \$115 million in FY 2015 to \$160 million in FY 2016