

Letter from the President



SPRING 2021

Dear Tulane Community:

In his 2019 Tulane Commencement keynote, Apple CEO Tim Cook said, “Steer your ship into the choppy seas. Look for the rough spots, the problems that seem too big, the complexities that other people are content to work around ... The status quo simply won’t last, so get to work on building something better.”

This past year, in the face of historic challenges presented by COVID-19, Tulanians took those words to heart. Passion, determination, innovation and grit – combined with the unbreakable Tulane spirit – ensured that our great university not only survived but emerged as a national leader.

We were among a small number of universities nationwide to implement a rigorous surveillance testing and contact tracing program and to complete a full semester of in-person classes last fall, while protecting our campus community and neighbors. Despite the ongoing pandemic, we continue to perform at an incredibly high level in every dimension of university life – education, research, healthcare and public service. Nearly 90 percent of our students returned for classes in the fall, and 93 percent are back on campus this spring. Our faculty and students continue to display remarkable commitment and ingenuity in using technology to create an engaging educational experience. These advances in technology-based instruction, which underwent further upgrades during the winter break, will enhance teaching long after the threat of COVID-19 has passed.

Our researchers, funded at record levels from both federal and private sources, continue to seek new treatments and improved vaccines for COVID-19 and numerous other infectious diseases. We are also



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ONLY THE PIONEERING

Tulane has been awarded an \$8.7 million grant to work with Black churches to eliminate cardiovascular health disparities.

The National Institutes of Health awarded Tulane the grant to implement a comprehensive health and lifestyle coaching program that will focus on healthy eating, exercise, weight loss, improving cholesterol numbers, addressing high blood pressure and controlling other risk factors.

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States. Louisiana residents, especially African Americans, bear a disproportionately high burden of cardiovascular disease due to lifestyle factors, diet, limited access to healthcare and higher rates of obesity and other cardiovascular risks.

“The burden of cardiovascular disease risks among African Americans in Louisiana is staggering and reflects an inequity that we must all play a part in remedying,” said study principal investigator Dr. Jiang He, professor and chair of the Department of Epidemiology at Tulane University School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.



Only the Aspiring

President Michael Fitts has announced **LOUISIANA PROMISE**, a new initiative that will make a Tulane undergraduate degree more accessible and affordable for Louisiana residents from low- and middle-income families and increase access to higher education for all students in New Orleans.

Around 11 percent of Tulane’s undergraduate students come from Louisiana — Louisiana Promise will increase that number by opening access to a much wider applicant pool that reflects the diversity of New Orleans and the state.

“Louisiana Promise is a commitment to our state and community to make higher education more accessible,” Fitts said. “If a Louisiana student’s dream is to come to Tulane, we don’t want financial concerns to be a barrier for them to become a part of the Tulane family. These programs will help keep the state’s best and brightest students in Louisiana.”

pursuing funding for an early warning system that would detect and track disease threats before they burst onto the world stage as full-blown health crises like COVID-19. Such a system could give researchers in universities and labs around the country a head start to develop vaccines and treatments for new or re-emerging diseases before they spread globally.

While many institutions pared down plans and reduced expectations during these difficult times, Tulane has continued to grow. This year, we will break ground on Steven and Jann Paul Hall, the new home for the School of Science and Engineering. We will also continue to enhance the on-campus living experience through the construction of a new residential quad Uptown where Bruff Commons used to stand. These new, state-of-the-art residential learning communities will enrich the student experience by giving more undergraduates, including all juniors, the opportunity to live and learn together on-campus. Downtown, we will transform the former Warwick Hotel into residences for graduate students, researchers, physicians and faculty – a necessity fueled by Tulane’s rapidly expanding research enterprise. Another major component of our downtown expansion is the redevelopment of the Charity Hospital building where we plan to add Tulane laboratories, classrooms, offices and more. Both projects will bring long-vacant buildings back to life and help revitalize the core of our great city.

But creating a truly world-renowned institution of higher education requires more than the construction of buildings. It requires a laser-focused commitment to the hallmarks of a great university: a transformative and accessible learning experience, a pathbreaking research mission and public service that changes lives. For this to be possible, a truly great university must have equity, diversity and inclusion as part of everything it does. Recognizing the urgent need for action, we announced “A Plan for Now, A Strategy for Tomorrow,” which builds on current initiatives and identifies new opportunities to advance these goals. We recently announced Louisiana Promise, a comprehensive pipeline program to make a college education more attainable and affordable for Louisiana students. In January, we also welcomed the inaugural cohort of the Tulane University Leadership Institute. The institute’s year-long programs are designed to identify and nurture future university leaders, provide new pathways for advancement, and strengthen our culture of equity, diversity and inclusion. I invite you to visit tulane.edu/racial-equity to learn more about these and a host of other initiatives.

With our sights set on a post-pandemic world, Tulane’s mission is steadfast: to continue meeting the challenges of today while creating the opportunities of tomorrow. This requires shared purpose, vision and effort. It also requires infrastructure that builds community, supports scholarship, fosters innovation, inspires creativity and welcomes the input and ideas of all. As Tim Cook said, “We can create more prosperity, more beauty, more wisdom, and a better life when we acknowledge certain shared truths and act collectively.”

Above all, a great university needs the dedication of its entire community – and to be fortunate enough to have as ardent and dedicated supporters as Tulane has. It is because of you that we continue to navigate the choppy seas, look for the rough spots, solve the big problems and challenge the status quo.

Thank you for being a part of the Tulane family. Roll Wave!

Mike



With our
sights set
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Tulane’s mission
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to continue
meeting
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while creating
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of tomorrow.



Learn more about the
Only the Audacious campaign
and how you can be involved
at audacious.tulane.edu.



Tulane biomedical engineering students, from left Stephen Hahn, Morgan Bohrer, Alex Verne and Michael L'Ecuyer, won the Arrow Electronics People's Choice Award at the annual Collegiate Inventors Competition. The photo was taken before the COVID-19 pandemic.

(Photo courtesy of TrachTech)

ONLY THE INNOVATIVE

A team of Tulane biomedical engineering students captured a prestigious award for their invention of a specialized device to clean intubation tubes without the risk of extubation.

TrachTech – whose members are Morgan Bohrer, Stephen Hahn, Michael L'Ecuyer, Alex Verne and faculty advisor Mark Mondrinos – won the Arrow Electronics People's Choice Award at the annual Collegiate Inventors Competition, a program of the National Inventors Hall of Fame.

The team developed the device as a response to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, saying that with ventilators in high demand, it's essential that these machines remain clean and safe.

Only the Bold

Tulane researchers have developed a **15-MINUTE COVID-19 TEST** that is read by a smartphone.

The exciting new advancement meets the need to expand testing capacity in community-based settings. Rapid PCR tests typically use nasal swab samples and are performed in laboratory settings by highly trained individuals using sophisticated equipment. This new saliva-based COVID-19 test, which doesn't require lab processing, could rapidly expand testing capacity in outpatient clinics, community testing sites and other locations.

The assay developed by researchers at Tulane detects SARS-CoV-2 virus RNA in saliva to diagnose COVID-19 and is more sensitive than PCR-based tests, the current gold standard for COVID-19 diagnosis. A report describing the development and validation of this test has recently been published in the journal *Science Advances*.

“This test addresses the critical needs for a rapid, ultrasensitive COVID-19 diagnosis along with effective large-scale screening efforts,” said Tony Hu, PhD, corresponding author of the study and Weatherhead Presidential Chair in Biotechnology Innovation at Tulane University School of Medicine.