

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Fall 2015



October 13, 2015

Dear alumni, parents, faculty, staff and friends:

It's 2025 at Tulane University.

New Orleans just completed its 20th anniversary commemoration of Hurricane Katrina, and people marveled at how much the city had changed since the last big observance of that historic moment. Students continued their long tradition of public service, spreading out across town for Outreach Tulane. Since Katrina, Tulane was particularly noted for public service projects. Now the empathetic values, practical experience and leadership preparation that come with public service are even more deeply infused throughout the curriculum.

Everyone is settling in for the 2025–26 academic year. The uptown and downtown campuses bustle with students encountering each other at recently developed gathering spots. They converse about their latest experiences and observations, learning not just from their studies, but from each other. In place of some of the previous residence halls, Tulane has additional residential colleges with academic and service themes thoroughly interwoven with students' classroom work. The first-year students are clustered into their own vibrant, supportive village, giving them a strong class identity. Artists and engineers work alongside each other and trade structural ideas for aesthetic ones at the uptown campus Maker Space, which 10 years ago was itself an idea in development.

The latest thing Tulane has become known for nationally and globally is interdisciplinary education. The university built a popular array of courses that blend the liberal arts and sciences with professional education. Almost all students pursue a major and a minor across different fields. A cadre of professors rotates among different schools, invigorating this multidimensional perspective. The world is moving and changing faster than ever. Technology continues rapidly

MOVING UP AND MAKING A DIFFERENCE

What university shot up 13 points in one of the most important rankings of academic institutions? Hint: It's the same one that has more than a \$1 billion annual impact on the Louisiana economy.

In early September, the 2016 *U.S. News & World Report* Best Colleges rankings listed Tulane at No. 41 among the best national universities, higher than the previous year by 13 points. Tulane ranked No. 38 by high school counselors and No. 33 among best colleges for veterans.

Earlier this year, a new economic impact study showed that Tulane, the largest private employer in New Orleans, is a \$1 billion economic engine for Louisiana, generating 11,800 direct and indirect jobs within the state.

President Mike Fitts (top) leads the Convocation that kicked off the fall semester.



LOWER THAT BLOOD PRESSURE

The Tulane University School of Medicine was one of the sites for a large National Institutes of Health study of blood pressure treatment. Preliminary results of the landmark clinical trial found that doctors should more intensively manage hypertension in adults over age 50, aiming for blood pressure targets well below current guidelines. Researchers found that adjusting medication to achieve systolic pressure of 120 mm Hg instead of the current recommendation of 140 mm Hg significantly reduced rates of cardiovascular disease and lowered risk of death.

"This finding is very important because it will change our daily clinical practice in hypertension management," says **Dr. Jing Chen**, associate professor of medicine and principal investigator of the Tulane study site with **Dr. Jiang He**, Joseph S. Copes Professor of Epidemiology in the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

advancing. Employers are heralding approaches like Tulane's for preparing the creative, broad-minded, nimble thinkers they need to compete.

At the same time, Tulane has greatly grown its reputation for interdisciplinary research and leadership on crucial issues felt worldwide. The university stands out in three areas that have grown tremendously in importance: health and bioinnovation; energy, the environment and resilience; and global studies. The university, in fact, has expanded all kinds of worldwide connections. Most students spend a semester or a summer internship abroad. Tulane is noted for its visiting faculty from around the world, international students and partnerships with universities abroad.

When people think about Tulane, they think about a place that attracts the best students, instills in them the ability to adapt and step up to leadership and launches them into careers that make a difference in the world.

This is a wonderful picture of Tulane in 2025. We are painting it now.

Back here in the present day, my theme for tying together all of our initiatives is "Crossing Boundaries." That can mean literal boundaries between countries, as in our global studies efforts. Or it can mean boundaries between ideas, fields of study, different aspects of university life and people from different backgrounds. Many researchers and writers have described how making connections between different pieces of knowledge, in our own minds and in our collaborations with others, is the key to creativity and innovation. Focusing on this principle also is Tulane's key for standing out in the increasingly competitive landscape of higher education. We are primed to run with this, considering our range of disciplines, unified undergraduate college, strategic size and the distinct character we draw from our quirky, colorful New Orleans roots.

That's why I've been excited at the start of 2015-16 to share with the university community two reports from task forces I convened in my first

REVEALING THE ANCIENT PAST

Earlier this year in Guatemala, Tulane researchers were part of the team that made significant hieroglyphic finds in a Maya stela from the El Achiotal site, dating to the 5th century AD. **Marcello A. Canuto** (left), director of the Middle American Research Institute at Tulane, is co-director of the excavations at El Achiotal; Tulane graduate student **Luke Auld-Thomas** (right), with funding from a National Geographic Young Explorer's Grant, uncovered a shrine that contained fragments of the broken stela.

Tulane anthropology professor **Trenton Holliday** was on the team of 40 international researchers involved in the discovery of a new species of human relative in a South African cave. The new species is called *Homo naledi*, which according to National Geographic appears to have intentionally deposited bodies of its dead in a remote cave chamber. The discovery brought international media attention.





Neuroscience major *Alix Youngblood* (left) checks on the growth of breast cancer cells for a research project studying the circadian rhythm in peripheral tissues in the lab of *Brian Rowan*, professor of cancer research with the Tulane Cancer Center.

year as president. They illuminate areas where Tulane can take the lead. The faculty, students and administrators on the Undergraduate Experience and the Academic Collaborations task forces have given us our first glimpse of Tulane in 2025. We're also planning how our physical campus can better accommodate the connected culture described by the two groups.

The Undergraduate Experience group outlined enhancements to the Honors Program and TIDES first-year interdisciplinary seminars. Its recommendations include deeper community service experiences for students, more scholarships for underrepresented populations, a more cohesive residential experience, a broader approach to campus health and wellness, and increased advising to help students navigate all the new options.

The Academic Collaborations team identified major challenges in the world where Tulane has strengths and expertise, as well as the opportunity to further heighten its leadership. Those include the environment, energy and resilience, with our New Orleans vantage point putting us at the forefront of some of the most urgent issues of the 21st century. They also include global studies, particularly growing Tulane's strong ties to Latin America and Africa. And they include health and bioinnovation, where we have tremendous capacity for collaboration because of the resources brought by our schools of Medicine, Public Health and Tropical Medicine and Science and Engineering, in addition to our National Primate Research Center.



GREAT START FOR FALL SEMESTER

Tulane welcomed more than 1,700 first-year students this fall, its largest freshman class ever. Total enrollment now exceeds pre-Katrina numbers at Tulane, one of the most geographically diverse universities in the country with 85 percent of students traveling more than 300 miles to attend.

And on the downtown health sciences campus, the class of new medical students began their Tulane careers, receiving their white coats at an annual ceremony in early August. The School of Medicine welcomed 185 new students into the Class of 2019. More than 9,880 applied to join the class, whose members hail from 38 states and Canada.

RECORD FUNDRAISING YEAR

Tulane University had record-breaking fundraising in the year that ended June 30, 2015, receiving \$125.4 million from more donors than ever before in university history. A total of 23,344 supporters gave to the university during the fiscal year, an 8 percent increase over the number of people who gave to Tulane in 2013–2014.

Students (left) work with lecturer *Derek Shackelford* at the *Phyllis M. Taylor Center for Social Innovation and Design Thinking* in Flower Hall.





Nov. 6–8 is Homecoming, Reunion and Family Weekend on the Tulane uptown campus. Celebrate with the reunion classes (1970, 1975, 1980, 1985, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2005, 2010 and 2014) as the Green Wave play the UConn Huskies in Yulman Stadium.

WELCOMING NEW LEADERSHIP

- **David Banush** is the new dean of libraries and academic information resources. He came to Tulane from Brown University, where he was the associate university librarian for access services and collection management.
- **Richard Matasar** has joined Tulane as senior vice president for strategic initiatives and institutional effectiveness. A nationally known scholar and expert in higher education finance and innovation, he was vice president for university enterprise initiatives and professor of management at New York University.
- The Board of Tulane has four new members: **Dr. Jeff Balsler**, vice chancellor for health affairs and dean of the School of Medicine at Vanderbilt University; **Jenny Kottler**, founder of the consulting and conference planning company Kottler Works; **E. Pierce Marshall Jr.**, president and chief executive officer of Élevage Capital Management, LLC; and **Irwin Simon**, founder, president, chief executive officer and chairman of the leading organic and natural products company, The Hain Celestial Group.



The silvery exterior of Yulman Stadium on the Tulane uptown campus conceals a secret: The new sports facility is green on the inside. The stadium achieved LEED Silver certification from the U.S. Green Building Council, for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design.

When you look around Tulane today, you can easily see that the right ingredients and mindsets for a truly distinctive higher education environment already are in place. With the unified Newcomb-Tulane College, undergraduates are empowered to explore different subjects. **Madeline Lafuse** did just that, graduating in the class of 2015 with an incredible array of four majors: Asian studies, gender and sexuality studies, history and linguistics. She's now in Beijing, teaching high school students who want to attend business school at Tulane.

"Everything is connected," she said. "Once I mastered literary analysis, I could take classes in everything from phonetics to Chinese language to film and get at the perspective I was after.

"The world is only changing more rapidly, and the information and skills you've acquired in one field are likely to become obsolete more quickly than you expect," she said. "If you know more, then you are more robust and able to adjust to new challenges and environments."

Looking to research, a Tulane team recently won a five-year, \$1.4 million grant from the National Institutes of Health to combine psychology with computer science in studying how attention works in the brain. **Edward Golob**, associate professor of psychology, is leading the effort, focusing on how we process the locations of sounds and react to them. He's working with psychology researcher **Jeff Mock** and computer science associate professor **Brent Venable**, using computer software to simulate brain activity.

"The language of computation is the language of the brain," Golob said. But, he said, "It tends to be in different camps. I study what neurons do and Brent studies computation. We need to understand both to understand the brain."

Tulane 2025 might not be so distant after all. Maybe it's the year we'll reflect and remember how we pushed Tulane to achieve more and greater things than ever before, starting out with all of our efforts back in 2015.

Mike Fitts