

Special Place in My Heart

by Mike Fitts



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The following is an excerpt from President Mike Fitts' commencement address on May 19, 2018, in the Mercedes-Benz Superdome.

The class of 2018 has a special place in my heart. They were my first class at Tulane.

I watched them grow, transformed by the magic of New Orleans and Tulane, into leaders ready to take on the world. We are all so proud of them.

One member of the class of 2018, Dr. Adaora Okoli, who received a Master of Public Health from the School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, came to Tulane from Nigeria after she had recovered from Ebola. She wanted to merge her passion for clinical work with epidemiology research in developing countries. This would mean combining medicine, statistics, public health, biology, engineering and social science—all with an international focus—under one umbrella.

Most universities couldn't provide such a wide net for study.

But Tulane was different.

At Tulane, we actually push our students to merge and link distinct fields and disciplines. We revel in the innovation that such academic exploration and curiosity can breed.

Adaora's story is the story of so many Tulanians.

It is one of resilience, perseverance and overcoming adversity.

It's one of living out our motto: "Not for one's self, but for one's own."

And it's a case study in how ambition—and immense intelligence—will help this class accomplish anything they set their mind to.

PRAISE FOR THE CLASS OF 2018

President Fitts celebrates the ambition and intelligence of Tulane's latest graduating class.

I have watched, with enormous pride, all the ways they have lived out these Tulane values in their time here.

Law students represented victims of domestic abuse.

Social work students provided vital medical services to some of New Orleans' most at-risk populations.

Together, the class of 2018 completed more than 100,000 service hours.

And their efforts expanded across the region and across the globe, as well.

This summer, when our neighbors in Houston suffered terrible flooding and damage, the class sprang into action—rallying and organizing first-response efforts.

And when Hurricane Maria devastated the Caribbean this fall, the class took the lead in Tulane's effort to host the displaced Puerto Rican students.

But perhaps what I am most proud of is how the class pushed the Tulane community to reckon with its own flaws, inequalities and injustices.

They pressed their peers, and their university, to address some deeply concerning issues of our own—from racism to sexual violence to systemic inequity.

In the face of these immense challenges, they came together with compassion, strength and resolve.

They supported each other, and bound together closely as a community of leaders committed to positive change.

Remember that: There is nothing that a group of motivated, empathetic people can't accomplish together.

I have watched them over these four years, and it is clear to me that, more than anything we taught them in a classroom, they have learned the single most important lesson of Tulane—to meet the challenges of the world head-on, with grit, determination and the unyielding belief that any answer can be found—any solution can be obtained—and any problem can be solved.

Graduates: This is your time. It's your moment to take the baton. I want you to go out there and show the world what Tulane means. We are all rooting for you.

You have been equipped with the tools of greatness. I can't wait to see what you build with them.

Let the good times roll!!