



Transforming communities: academic institutions and the cities we call home

UPP Foundation Third Lecture & Dinner,
13th June at Lord's Cricket Ground

Lecture by Michael A. Fitts,
President of Tulane University
New Orleans



President Fitts giving the 2023
UPP Foundation Lecture

Introduction

Good evening, and thank you for inviting me to join you here in London.

I am truly honored to serve as the third speaker in the UPP Foundation annual lecture series.

The UPP Foundation's efforts to strengthen partnerships between universities and their surrounding communities resonate strongly with Tulane University and New Orleans.

So I was delighted to accept this invitation to address you at the iconic Lord's Cricket Ground.

I'll confess: when I learned the location of this lecture, I was not entirely aware of just how iconic Lord's is.

I am a huge baseball fan. And of course, baseball and cricket are both played with a bat and a ball...

But that's about where the similarities end.

So I did a bit of research on this venue. I learned that Thomas Lord established his first cricket ground almost 250 years ago.

And that the current ground has stood on this spot since 1814.

Lord's has clearly stood the test of time. And time has tested Lord's... with fire, insect infestation, and two world wars, among other challenges.¹

And Lord's has adapted – relocating, rebuilding, renovating, and improving the pitch –

Connecting cricket's international audience by hosting the first World Cup –

Opening membership to women –

Making the stands accessible to fans with mobility challenges –

And committing to environmentally sustainable operations.²

At the same time, Lord's has preserved beloved traditions – like the father time weather-vane³ – and created new ones, like the ringing of the five-minute bell.⁴

¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lord%27s>

² <https://www.lords.org/lords/match-day/plan-your-day/sustainability>

³ <https://www.lords.org/lords/our-history/father-time>

⁴ <https://www.lords.org/lords/our-history/bell-ringers>

A commentary on longevity

At this point you're probably starting to wonder why I crossed the Atlantic to tell you things you probably already knew about Lord's.

Yes, I'm a sports enthusiast. And as a baseball fan I find the history of cricket especially fascinating.

But the history of Lord's isn't just an interesting story. It's also a model for the talk I'm about to give.

The story I'll be telling you this evening is about how institutions evolve and stay relevant.

First and foremost, they must have a core vision of who they are, and what their comparative strengths are.

And over time, they must also constantly reassess and update that core vision in order to overcome the inevitable institutional challenges and respond to a constantly changing social order.

Lord's understands this. It has evolved, while always being fundamentally a shrine to the sport of cricket.

I don't think we'll see Lord's pivot to being a baseball stadium anytime soon.

The story of Lord's stands out to me because there are very few types of institutions that manage to survive and thrive over decades, let alone centuries.

In the business world, for example, there are not many companies that have managed to stand the test of time.

Out of the top 50 U.S. companies in 1917, only two still survived in 2017.

Perhaps even more telling – out of the 12 largest U.S. companies in 2000, only four were still among the top 12 in 2018.

But by and large, universities survive – and thrive.

The oldest universities in the United Kingdom... are older than the United Kingdom.

The oldest universities in the United States... are older than the United States.

Now, I will grant you that your oldest universities have a few hundred years of seniority over ours.

But our higher ed institutions are probably more heterogeneous than their elders in the UK and Europe.

This is partly due to our mix of public and private universities, which have widely varying political and financial pressures to contend with.

Beyond this, though, our founders also had different motivations and different core visions, and followed many different paths.

Some of these institutions – Princeton or Yale, for example – are rooted originally in the liberal arts and have historically been more internally focused and introspective.

Others, like Stanford or the University of Pennsylvania, were founded with a more outward-looking, pragmatic and professional approach.

My talk this evening is a case study, focused on one American university that lands squarely in the latter category: Tulane University in New Orleans, Louisiana.



A distinctive and evolving university

Tulane was founded originally in 1834 as a medical school to fight a pandemic – Yellow Fever.

As a result, its institutional outlook has always been more outward looking, pragmatic, interdisciplinary, and socially impactful.

This is also reflected in our school of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, which was the first public health school in the United States.

Because Tulane’s vision is somewhat distinctive, it obviously does not serve as a universal roadmap.

This is a story about how one particular institution is navigating a number of current issues around higher education.

For historical reasons, my story is framed by crises – particularly Hurricane Katrina and Covid-19 – that tested Tulane’s identity as an outward-looking institution.

As president John F. Kennedy famously observed many years ago, in every crisis there is also opportunity.

The history I am recounting reveals both aspects to the Tulane story.

For, out of each crisis, and over time, Tulane has refined and extended its model as an outward-looking academic institution.

This is most obvious in how Tulane has evolved from a focus on public service, to service learning, to translational research –

Deepened and updated its interdisciplinary philosophy –

And recently launched a new research and medical campus in the heart of our city –

Which serves physically and philosophically as the modern embodiment of our impactful approach.

In this sense, the crux of this talk is about the evolving relationship of an outward-looking university with its city.

Perhaps I’m a bit biased, but I think you’d be hard pressed to find another university with the same kind of relationship that Tulane has with the city of New Orleans.

One of my favorite university professors in college was Daniel Patrick Moynihan, a renowned urbanologist who later served in the United States Senate.

Moynihan famously said that the way to create a great city is to “create a great university and wait 200 years.”

Tulane is eleven years away from our bicentennial. Despite historic challenges in the past two decades, we are in the process (we hope) of making Moynihan’s axiom come true.

As I will describe, this relationship is culminating in an historic redevelopment and revitalization of the downtown area of New Orleans with the creation of a robust urban campus.

Most universities are not defined by their cities – or vice versa... but Tulane is.

There are significant debates today about the value and importance of higher education.

My story is about how one university is seeking to address these questions by pursuing true academic excellence with social impact.

And ultimately, this is a story about some of the ways higher education, which is constantly under challenge in our society today, may be able to improve its reputation and public status.

Tulane's place in higher education was forever framed by the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina.

That is why it's an appropriate place to start my history.

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President Fitts giving the 2023
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Hurricane Katrina and a civic university

These events afford me unique insights, since I was actually not at Tulane at the time.

In late August of 2005, I was Dean of the Law School at another institution, the University of Pennsylvania, on the East Coast.

I heard about a major hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico, heading for New Orleans.

By the time Hurricane Katrina made landfall, it had weakened enough that most thought New Orleans had “dodged a bullet.”

But then the levees failed, and the region was turned upside down.

The world watched with horror as 80 percent of the city filled with water and residents were rescued from rooftops.

The grim statistics mounted: well over one thousand casualties.

Twenty thousand stranded at the iconic superdome arena in unbearable conditions.

Over a million people displaced.

Of course, those of us in Higher Ed also watched as our peers at New Orleans-area institutions confronted unprecedented challenges.

After shuttering for the autumn term, Tulane developed a renewal plan to guide the university’s recovery and provide a roadmap for the future.

This plan represented the most dramatic reorganisation of a major American university in more than a century.⁵

It also served to re-affirm, strengthen, and focus the university’s academic mission, and to build on its vision and core values.⁶

As I watched Tulane make this remarkable recovery from afar, I never imagined I might find myself leading that same institution.

Now that I’ve been at Tulane’s helm for nearly a decade, I’ve come to understand a key factor that positioned Tulane to succeed and thrive post-Katrina.

Katrina did not change Tulane’s identity – it reinforced and reaffirmed it.

As I have noted, Tulane’s origin was unique: it was originally founded in 1834 as a medical school, in response to a yellow fever epidemic that was ravaging the local community.

We were thus an outward-facing institution from the very start, founded to solve problems for the public good. This is ingrained in our DNA.

Katrina re-energised our commitment to the city.

⁵ <https://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/jheoe/article/view/987/986>

⁶ Ibid.

It also demonstrated our worth to the local community in an unprecedented way.

Universities often struggle to articulate their value to the outside world.

Their impact can be diffuse, and difficult to convey.

But in the aftermath of Katrina, our real impact on the city of New Orleans was suddenly crystal clear.

As the city's largest private employer, and with thousands of students returning to our campuses from around the country, Tulane's decision to reopen was absolutely critical to the city's recovery.

Consider your own universities and surrounding communities.

Has anyone ever been faced with the natural experiment of what the community would look like without the university?

New Orleans was— not only because of its size in relation to the university, but also because of the possible exodus of tens of thousands of students and jobs.

As a result, the city recognised, politically and philosophically, the essential importance of the university to the wellbeing of the community.

Katrina also underscored the need for the university's relationship with the city – and the region – to evolve into a deeper and more meaningful partnership.

So as part of the renewal plan, the university implemented a public service requirement for all undergraduate students –

The first major research university to do so.

Our academic program was evolving to become more deeply connected to our community.

This transformation led to us seeing a new kind of student applying to Tulane.

We started attracting students who wanted to make a real impact on the rebirth of a great American city.

Another significant component of the renewal plan was the decision to bring all of our undergraduate schools under a single unit with one-portal entry.

Students would no longer apply separately to our programmes in business, architecture, public health or engineering –

But would arrive as one class, ready to embrace the interdisciplinarity of scholarship and education.

This was a daring investment in interdisciplinarity that was controversial at the time –

But reflected a doubling down of the core philosophy on which Tulane was founded as a medical school.

As I will later explain, that approach, which has evolved and deepened, is now paying further dividends in educational innovation, impactful research, and skyrocketing admissions.

It's now been 18 years since Hurricane Katrina shifted the course of history.



Help students, graduates, and universities fulfil their potential to transform lives and communities

Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP,
Chair of the UPP Foundation Advisory
Board, introducing President Fitts



Another challenge, another test of durability

But in 2020, the course of history was shifted once again – on a global level this time – with the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This is a second crisis that challenged Tulane and forced us to evolve.

In light of our experience with hurricane Katrina, Tulane was perhaps better positioned than most universities to navigate such an existential crisis.

We knew that we had emerged as a stronger institution after that experience, and we were prepared to leverage what we'd learned.

One key lesson was to keep sight of one of the fundamental characteristics that defines our identity as an institution: our relational, engaged culture.

Covid-19 disrupted this culture, which characterizes both Tulane and New Orleans.

The graduation celebrations, the music festivals, and the Crawfish boils that once filled our calendars suddenly disappeared.

And let me observe: I think you call Crawfish “Cray-fish” over here. You call them, they are delicious—but way too much work.

We never quite figured out how to have a socially distanced Crawfish boil, but we did successfully pivot to remote teaching and work to finish the spring 2020 term.

Still, we knew early on that we needed to return to in-person operations as soon as we could safely do so.

Tulane surprised many after Hurricane Katrina by reopening for the spring 2006 term.

The city's infrastructure was still under repair and many employees were living in temporary housing – but it was the right decision.

An incredible 85 percent of students returned⁷, and the Tulane spirit was rekindled by students, faculty and staff who felt a new level of dedication to their school and their city.

This experience underscored our decision, in the throes of the Covid-19 pandemic, to reopen in person in August 2020.

While we acted in line with the recommendations of six committees of public health experts, university leaders, faculty, staff, and students, and incorporated community feedback, it was still very controversial.

We were one of the few national universities in the United States to bring all of their students back on ground.

⁷ https://www.nola.com/news/education/scott-cowen-brought-Tulane-back-after-katrina-but-only-after-conqueringuncertainty/Article_82b9af24-9890-5ef8-9aa8-5a7770d7898c.html

By comparison, Princeton and Yale taught most of their classes online, and Harvard's classes were 100 percent remote.⁸

As we developed our plan to return to campus, we kept in close communication with the city of New Orleans.


Our city officials clearly understood the importance of an in-person return, just as they had understood the importance of Tulane returning after Katrina.⁹

I won't go into all the details of the protocols that allowed us to successfully reopen for the Autumn 2020 term.

But perhaps the most crucial piece of our plan was that we leveraged the in-house expertise of our schools of medicine, public health, and our national primate research centre to develop one of the most robust surveillance testing programmes in the United States.

⁸ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelnietzel/2020/07/06/harvard-princeton-and-yale-announce-fall-plans-as-Covid-19-causes-new-limitations/?sh=7379b2d2473d>

⁹ <https://Tulane.edu/sharon-courtney-community-testingnew-limitations/?sh=7379b2d2473d>



Dinah Caine CBE, Chair of Council Goldsmiths University of London and member of the UPP Foundation Advisory Board, asking President Fitts a question

Although high-frequency testing is the gold standard for disease mitigation¹⁰, only about 6 percent of American Universities¹¹ had implemented such a protocol for the Autumn 2020 term.

We performed over a million tests; built scores of temporary classrooms so students could be socially distanced; and took over hotels for isolation space.

By reopening in person and conducting regular, a-symptomatic testing of our students and employees, we dramatically bolstered the city's public health efforts.

In addition, we jump-started the local economy –

Which relies heavily on tourism and took a heavy hit from the pandemic.

In a hospitality city that saw its economy nose-dive, we retained our entire workforce.

With no layoffs, and brought all of our students back on campus.

We also provided testing for community members, including residents of nursing homes, first responders, and the incarcerated.

And we continued our research on infectious diseases, which ultimately proved critical to the research efforts to combat the pandemic.

From Katrina to Covid-19 to Hurricane Ida, which challenged us last year –

These crises underscored the need for Tulane to refine its mission –

Harness its research and educational expertise –

And update its curriculum to solve the newest problems which are challenging us and our society.

The first and most immediate change occurred in the public service program, which began in the aftermath of Katrina.

Initially focused on helping to literally rebuild the city, we have since recognised that our Service learning courses should not be focused on hanging sheetrock –

But rather, on applying academic knowledge to meet genuine community needs.¹²

Over the years, the public service graduation requirement has shifted the culture not just among students, but among faculty as well.

Building on the example set by our early adopters, new faculty and administrators have been drawn to Tulane because of our leadership in integrating service into our curriculum –

Which has inspired a new generation of civic-minded leaders.

Our efforts in this area have been at the vanguard of a revolution in educational pedagogy around experiential learning.

Service projects have become more closely aligned with subject matter, as more professors intentionally design new courses around service opportunities.

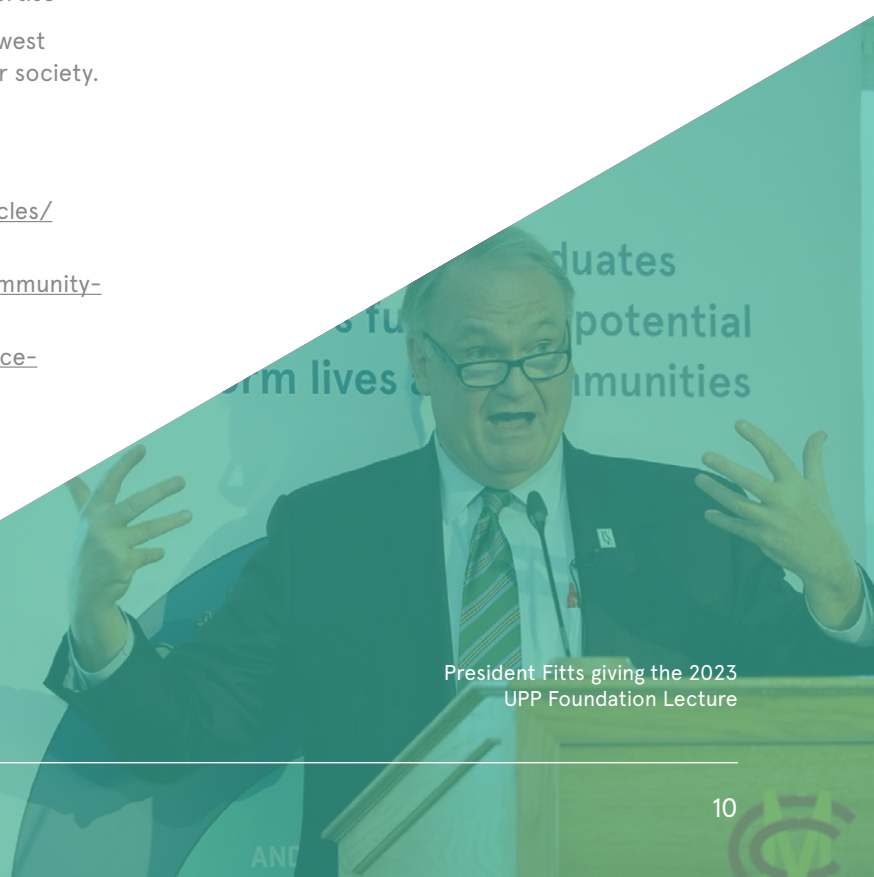
As part of this initiative we received a major grant from the Mellon Foundation to develop a graduate program in community-engaged scholarship for our PhD students.

The purpose: to help them become leaders in teaching service learning when they enter the academy as faculty around the country.

¹⁰ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7979144/>

¹¹ <https://Tulane.edu/sharon-courtney-community-testing>

¹² <https://cps.Tulane.edu/academics/service-learning-course>



President Fitts giving the 2023 UPP Foundation Lecture

Meanwhile, we have shifted our relationship with our community partners away from a top-down approach and toward a truly collaborative partnership.

With the help of peer educators, our students step out of a traditional charity mindset and focus on building reciprocal relationships.¹³

This leads to better outcomes for both our students and our community partners.

And our students also benefit from one of the high-impact educational practices that George Kuh identified as key to student engagement and success.¹⁴

A second major change after Hurricane Katrina – our shift to a single-portal undergraduate system – has successfully encouraged our students to embrace an interdisciplinary approach, with remarkable results.

We now have as many – or more – double and triple majors as any institution in the United States.

We attract and educate students who are interested in the spaces in which fields collide.

I'd like to share a story that, to me, is a perfect illustration of Tulane's undergraduate model.

A few years ago, a team of Tulane students entered the big idea challenge, a national space-craft design competition hosted by NASA –

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

The Tulane team, made up of six undergraduates and one graduate student, was competing against 28 other top schools.

Most of the other teams were made up of aerospace engineering students... as you would expect for an aerospace engineering competition.

Not Tulane's team.

Our team had students from biomedical engineering, architecture, economics, engineering physics, and other disciplines.

This allowed them to think outside the box and approach the challenge with a level of innovation and creativity that far exceeded what the other teams brought to the table.

As one of their faculty advisors explained to the national media:

"Our hybrid, cross-disciplinary team embodied the Tulane vision of finding innovative solutions from totally different and unique perspectives.

It was unlike anything the judges had seen before."

So what happened? Despite their lack of specific aerospace expertise, the Tulane team won the competition against all of the top aerospace teams in the country.

¹³ <https://cps.tulane.edu/programmes/community-engagement-advocates>

¹⁴ Kuh, George D. "Excerpt from high-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter." Association of American Colleges and Universities 14.3 (2008): 28-29.



An interdisciplinary approach

To me, this story perfectly illustrates the strength of the interdisciplinary approach that is embedded in the modern Tulane.

The third change which has occurred in recent years has been more incremental, but no less impactful.

We have launched a broad series of new research institutes and initiatives that have been thoughtfully developed over time, but that can also be traced back to Katrina's impetus.

While growing out of very different fields and confronting very different problems, they all reflect the increased importance of translational research –

Whether it be in medicine, engineering, public health, energy, or the environment.

A university which was founded as a medical school was fertile ground for a series of interdisciplinary initiatives.

Our Bywater Institute and Department of River-Coastal Science and Engineering integrate engineering, geoscience and ecological science to address the complex impacts of climate change and sea level rise on river-coastal systems.

Tulane's Brain Institute unites faculty from across campuses to conduct neuroscience research, oversee interdisciplinary academic programmes and conduct community outreach.

The Tulane Energy Institute leverages our location in a major energy hub to offer innovative academic programmes focusing on energy markets, policies, technology and the environment.

We recently convened the first Offshore Wind Conference in the U.S. to explore the vast untapped potential for offshore wind energy generation in the Gulf of Mexico.

And with a lineage that traces back to Tulane's founding during the 19th-Century yellow fever epidemic –

Our centres of excellence in infectious diseases are leading the way in reducing and preventing disease and mortality, from Zika to Malaria to Covid and beyond.

These are just a few of the discipline-spanning centres and programmes established over the last ten years. The list goes on and on.

Our progress in all of these areas – toward a robust service learning curriculum;

Toward dissolving the barriers between disciplines;

And toward transformative research – emerged from a crisis through creativity and innovation.

And the benefits to Tulane institutionally have been noteworthy.

Our government research funding has risen over 75% during the last few years, perhaps as much as any other major school in the United States.

Our applications from prospective students have also skyrocketed, up 40%, with our admissions selectivity rivaling some schools in the Ivy League.

Like every institution, there is more work to be done – but we have seen noticeable benefits from our approach.

This leads me to our most ambitious project, which is the culmination of the outward facing, interdisciplinary vision upon which Tulane was founded.



Professor Timothy Quine,
University of Exeter



Building alongside the city

Tulane is currently engaging in a holistic and revolutionary revitalization of New Orleans' downtown area, where our schools of medicine, public health, and social work are already located.

Expanding on this footprint, we are developing a 14 block campus in the centre of New Orleans.

Ultimately, we plan to generate over 300 million in research funding, host five Tulane schools, and create scores of start-up businesses.

At the centre of this initiative is the massive rebuilding of the historic charity hospital, which has stood vacant since Hurricane Katrina took it offline in 2005.

Charity Hospital has been a New Orleans institution since its founding in 1736 as a medical centre of last resort.

Since the 1930s, it has occupied a full city block, a one-million-square-foot art deco building in the heart of New Orleans' downtown.

It has also served as a teaching hospital for generations of physicians and nurses.

In Katrina's aftermath, over 1500 patients, staff, and community members were trapped in the building without water, food, or power for up to a week.

Just weeks after the storm, the building was cleaned and repaired, but the State ultimately decided not to reopen.¹⁵

Since then, this deserted behemoth has served as a painful reminder of the city's tragic past.¹⁶

We are thrilled to be redeveloping this building and the surrounding area –

Breathing new life into the abandoned spaces and parking lots surrounding our campus.

It will be the centre of a new bioinnovation district, expanding our ability to serve the public good through lifesaving and life-improving advances and breakthroughs –

And reinforcing public faith in our capabilities.

We'll serve as the anchor tenant, occupying close to one half of the building with state-of-the-art research and teaching facilities.

In addition to the research and teaching spaces, it will house our recently launched Innovation Institute.

Which is designed to support entrepreneurs from Tulane and the surrounding region in bringing their ideas to market.

¹⁵ <https://www.wvlv.com/article/news/local/orleans/charity-hospital-Tulane-redevelopment-timeline-update/289-e689ce63-8118-4f0e-a2a7-d3893ea90022>

¹⁶ <https://www.chronicle.com/article/one-of-americas-oldest-hospitals-lay-abandoned-then-a-university-stepped-in>

Similar efforts at other universities have seen incredible success. The idea centre at Notre Dame University has launched 145 start-ups since its founding in 2017.¹⁷

When you're planning to visit the States on holiday, South Bend is probably not the first destination that comes to mind... or the second... or even the fiftieth.

It's no wonder that Steve Case, the co-founder of A.O.L., recently announced that small, creative cities like New Orleans are the future of innovation.

In the U.S., we have seen time and again the power of startup culture to create or transform communities when paired with a major research university.

Silicon Valley, anchored by Stanford University, turned a quiet agricultural area into home base for the tech revolution.

Similarly, Pittsburgh, a former steel town, thanks in part to investments by Carnegie Mellon University and the University of Pittsburgh Medical Centre, saw new startups raising more than \$534 million in 2022.¹⁸

New Orleans has a ways to go before we join those ranks.

But the Innovation Institute has the resources in place to make it happen.

Side-by-side with the Innovation Institute, our research labs and our teaching facilities –

The charity space will include apartments and retail –

Drawing in the community and creating more jobs and affordable housing for local residents.

This project illustrates the incredible power of universities: we can literally create a neighborhood.

We can create not just jobs, but commerce, housing, restaurants, entertainment, and a vibrant culture.

We are generating investments of close to a billion dollars in the campus, shifting our workforce and relocating two schools to create an urban core.

By creating a new Bioinnovation District and revamping the local health care system, we are setting the stage for translational medicine and clinical trials to make a visible and positive impact on the community, on a level we have not seen before'

We are also leading the way in diversifying the regional economy away from its heavy reliance on tourism.

We will provide a sustainable future for the city we call home—the city we love.

That is the ultimate expression and demonstration of what an outward-facing university can do for, and with, its city.

The truth of that Daniel Moynihan quote – that if you want a great city, you build a great university and wait 200 years –

Rests partly on the fact that fundamentally, universities are not rapidly changing institutions.

¹⁷ <https://ideacentre.nd.edu/news-events/news/idea-centre-launches-28-startups-in-2022-its-companies-raise-86-million-and-generate-136-million-in-revenue/>

¹⁸ <https://startupgenome.com/ecosystems/pittsburgh>

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Rt Hon Chris Skidmore MP,
Chair of the UPP Foundation Advisory
Board, introducing President Fitts

Over time, we generate ideas that impact our surroundings.

We plant the seed, and sometimes it takes a generation before we can enjoy the fruit of the tree.

But the pace of change has itself changed. We now live in an idea economy.

And the impact of our academic efforts, through translational research, has skyrocketed.

This forces us to question our assumptions about how universities should operate, while ensuring that we remain true to our core values and mission.

Higher ed has been under siege lately.

This is partly because we are more visible than ever before.

We have come a long way from the old university model:

A finishing school for the elite, where professors and pupils retreated from society into libraries and labs behind ivy-covered walls.

At Tulane, when the world intruded on the university in the form of Hurricane Katrina, this led us to new initiatives and an enhanced relationship with our city.

But it doesn't have to take a hurricane for such a shift to happen.

We learned that after the physical rebuilding, we could turn our focus to fostering a more reciprocal partnership with the city.

Our goal is to honor its history and people while building a model of urban innovation for the 21st Century.

At Tulane, we are fortunate to have a historic opportunity to create a new physical landscape to help us connect our research with our community.


We saw this illustrated during the pandemic, when Covid-19 served as a trigger for the world to hold us accountable in new ways.

Our response demonstrated that our success is tied to society's success.

It also showed the world that our pursuit of excellence is linked to moving society forward.

Before I conclude, I would be remiss not to acknowledge the recent passing of Bob Zimmer, the former President of the University of Chicago who delivered the last UPP Foundation lecture.

In a climate where free speech has come under attack from both ends of the political spectrum, Bob was a tireless and fearless advocate for freedom of expression.



Richard Brabner,
Director of the UPP Foundation,
welcoming guests to the event



Conclusion

I'd like to leave you with a brief epilogue, inspired by my reflections on Bob's impact on higher education.

I've been talking about the ways that crises can offer us opportunities to prove our worth to our communities.

The recent push toward censorship represents a crisis of free expression—and an opportunity for our sector to demonstrate our value.

Universities are one of the few institutions in society that bring together individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds and perspectives to live, learn, and work together in an intensely relational atmosphere.

In a way, we are microcosms of today's society:

Made up of unique individuals pursuing their own passions in a million different directions.

University presidents don't serve as autocratic leaders telling everyone what to do...

Even if we're sometimes tempted to take that approach.

We oversee a decentralised, dispersed community that allows creativity – and challenges – to bubble up.

This affords us a unique potential to facilitate civil discourse and find common ground across ideological lines.

Just as Tulane's team brought together insights and ideas from different disciplines to win the NASA big idea challenge...

Universities can bring together scholars, leaders, and community members to find innovative solutions to the problems we all face today.

If we tap into this potential, we can transform not just the communities we call home, but society as a whole, for the better. Thank you!

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Professor David Green CBE,
Vice-Chancellor of the University of Worcester,
asking President Fitts a question

