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Greatness in adversity, beauty from pressure themes of two Honors Convocation speakers

Johnson, Williams applaud successes of students at separate events

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NEW ORLEANS (April 9, 2021) – Greatness during adversity and a comparison to diamonds created by extreme pressure were words of praise shared by the speakers for two live-streamed Honors Convocation events here on March 23 and 25.

Freshmen and sophomore honorees heard Dr. Eartha Johnson, dean of faculty and Student Academic Services, riff on the theme of greatness on March 25. And junior and senior honorees were reminded of how stressors can shape beautiful lives by Dr. Dorian Williams, interim dean of the College of Business.

The annual spring event honored students on the dean's list and honor roll for both fall and spring 2020. While some students, faculty and administrators physically attended the socially distanced

events in Lawless Chapel, both events also were live-streamed to larger audiences. The March 25 event had more than a thousand views.

President Walter Kimbrough noted that neither the freshmen nor the sophomore class had experienced a year of college without the pressures of the coronavirus pandemic. Even so, he noted, that of all nine classes he has seen at the university since his tenure began at Dillard, the current freshmen class – the Class of 2024 – had earned the third-highest semester GPA. He also said that of those nine classes, the Class of 2023 had the best freshman semester GPA.

Johnson, a DU alumna and former Miss Dillard, told students, “Great is the greatness of gratitude...Today, there is a tiger in your tank.” (The reference is a phrase used in a vintage Esso oil commercial; it is an idiom that refers to ones’ “vigor, determinism and motivation.”)

She quoted 2 Corinthians 5:17, which speaks of becoming a new creature in Christ, adding, “Inside of you, God has planted seeds of greatness, and those seeds are germinating and blossoming.”

Johnson acknowledged the tragic losses and changes many have endured throughout the coronavirus pandemic, which has lasted more than a year and encompassed both semesters in question.

“Let us remember in silence, if only for a brief moment, those who are no longer with us – those whose lives will never be the same after this,” she said.

She urged students to receive the coronavirus vaccine, offering Kimbrough’s participation in clinical vaccine trials as inspiration and motivation.

During the first event, Williams said students have been shaped and molded through academic pressure and challenging experiences, much like diamonds are formed 200 kilometers below the Earth’s surface in temperatures averaging 900 to 1300 degrees Celsius.

Williams said students have survived many stressful events in their short lives, including the Great Recession, Hurricane Katrina, Trumpism and now the challenges from the pandemic.

Yet the honorees found a way to persevere while facing the challenges, Williams said.

After the pressure has been applied to coal to make diamonds, the rewards come in the end, he noted.

“We are the jewels of Gently to the world,” he said.