Freeman welcomes new energy students with inaugural Hard Hat Ceremony

August 26, 2026



Master of Management in Energy students Dylan Guillen, left, and Matthew Gurvich pose for a photo in the Templeton Trading Center on Aug. 21 after

receiving their hard hats at the inaugural Master of Management in Energy Hard Hat Ceremony. (Photo by Alexis Pastrana.)

You've probably heard of a white coat ceremony, but what about a white hat ceremony?

Inspired by the matriculation ceremonies that initiate first-year students into medical school, Tulane University's A. B. Freeman School of Business hosted its own version in the Templeton Trading Center on Aug. 21, welcoming students into the Master of Management in Energy program. Instead of white lab coats, however, the 35 students in this year's MME cohort received white hard hats, a requirement for their class trips to oil refineries, offshore production platforms, solar farms and power plants across the region.

"Our primary objective was to mark the students' beginning of the Master of Management in Energy program in a memorable way and to build a sense of cohort, but there's also a parallel between medical school white coat ceremonies and this event," said Pierre Conner, executive director of the Tulane Energy Institute and faculty director of the MME program. "Like healthcare, we're preparing students to enter a profession that will have a profound impact on people's lives, affecting their health, happiness and financial well-being long into the future. When they put on their hard hats, we want them to be reminded of the responsibility that goes along with that."

In his remarks to the class, Conner invoked Tulane's motto *Non sibi sed suis* — "not for oneself, but for one's own" — to encourage students to seek energy solutions that are not just profitable but also reliable, resilient, affordable and sustainable.

"In addition to providing for yourself and creating a good career, you have a bigger objective as well," he said. "And this ceremony is symbolic of that fact."

Eric Smith, professor of practice and associate director of the Tulane Energy Institute, added, "We think these hats are fitting reminders of the close ties between the Tulane Energy Institute's academic goals and our pragmatic goals of producing graduates who are capable of financing and delivering energy hedges and infrastructure projects that work, but are also able to deliver projects that are well researched, based on a realistic market context and that meet the goal of being economically and financially viable."

The ceremony also featured welcome remarks by Freeman School Dean Paulo Goes as well as the recitation of a class pledge and a reception.



This year's incoming Master of Management in Energy class members pose with their newly awarded hard hats following the Aug. 21 ceremony in the Templeton Trading Center.

This year’s class hails from 15 states and brings to the program a wide variety of backgrounds and interests.

Erin Hirsch previously worked as a consultant on utility demand response programs, but, through the MME program, she hopes to expand her knowledge of the wider industry.

“My job exposed me to this little niche of the energy industry, and that made me want to look for other things in the field,” she said. “I did research on a bunch of different master’s programs, but this one had a really specific blend of finance and energy, so that drew me to it.”

A Tulane graduate from the School of Liberal Arts with a degree in environmental studies, Will Dassel was attracted to the program’s “all of the above” energy philosophy.

“I think the energy-agnostic approach was a big draw for me,” he said. “You can make the program what you want it to be. Some of my friends are going to be traders or work in oil and gas, and I’m going to do something else. I think that’s kind of interesting that it’s so varied.”

Vance Bolyard was looking for two things — a good graduate program and a good football school — and he found both at Tulane.

“I’ve always been interested in energy, and then when I saw the MME program, I thought this is the best of both worlds: It’s a great football town, it’s a great school and a great program,” said Bolyard, a tight end on Tulane’s football team. “I studied public policy at Duke so I was more on the political side, but I think this is a great first step for me to get into the industry space and really make a difference.”

Mia Stolakis graduated from Tulane’s School of Science and Engineering with a degree in engineering physics, but when the opportunity for a fifth year at Tulane arose through an athletics scholarship, she pivoted to energy.

“Since I was younger, I always wanted to do something in the engineering world, but I wondered what the business side would look like inside of a world like this,” she said. “Energy is a growing market right now, and so I thought it would be a good idea to look and see what it was, and I’ve really enjoyed everything the program has to offer.”