

A Brief History of Southeastern Louisiana University

Southeastern Louisiana University began as a grass roots movement by the people of Hammond and the surrounding area, who recognized the need for an institution of higher education in order to further the educational, economic, and cultural development of southeast Louisiana. What began as a junior college supported by local taxes has developed into a major university as Southeastern has grown to meet the evolving needs of southeast Louisiana and the Florida parishes.

On July 7, 1925, the voters overwhelmingly approved a bond issue that created Hammond Junior College. Operated under the auspices of the Tangipahoa Parish School Board, President Linus A. Sims opened the doors on September 14, 1925 with a faculty of three women, two men and forty students. The two-year coeducational institution offered basic undergraduate work in arts and sciences that culminated in a teaching certificate.

Rapidly increasing enrollments quickly forced the college out of its two rooms in Hammond High School. In 1927, voters supported the purchase of the Hunter Leake estate on Hammond's north end. In 1928 Hammond Junior College became Southeastern Louisiana College, formally adopted into the state educational system under the control of the State Board of Education. The purchase of sixty acres adjoining the original fifteen-acre plot provided the space to develop a suitable campus, and in 1934, a state bond issue provided for the construction of McGehee Hall and a gymnasium.

In 1937, the State Board of Education authorized curricula for four-year programs in liberal arts, teacher education, business administration, music, social sciences, and physical education. The first baccalaureate degrees were conferred in May 1939.

Voter approval of Act No. 388 in 1938, an amendment to the 1920 Louisiana Constitution, granted Southeastern Louisiana College the same legal status as other four-year colleges. The amendment did not, however, require the state to fund Southeastern at the level of other institutions of higher education, despite strong local support.

On January 18, 1946, the State Board made available funds to purchase seven city blocks east and west of the campus, and 275 acres of land north and northwest of the campus, increasing Southeastern's total area to approximately 365 acres.

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On March 3, 1946, Southeastern was formally approved and accepted into full membership in the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), as a four-year degree-granting institution.

After WW II, returning G.I.s caused exponential growth of the college, necessitating construction of classrooms, a student union, a cafeteria, a health center, dormitories, apartments for married students, and many surplus temporary buildings donated by the federal government. In 1948, the U.S. Navy contributed two steel barracks for use as dormitories, one of which, substantially remodeled, remains in use as a counseling center (McNeely Hall).

In 1960, the State Board authorized Southeastern to offer master's degrees through the newly-formed Division of Graduate Studies. Southeastern began awarding the Education Specialist degree in 1967.

Governor John J. McKeithen on June 16, 1970 signed into law the legislative act turning Southeastern Louisiana College into Southeastern Louisiana University. Early 1970's also saw the construction of D. Vickers, the Athletics Building, and the C.E. Cate Teacher Education Building.

In October of 1986, a group of faculty members launched Fanfare, a festival celebrating the arts, humanities and sciences. Since then, Fanfare has become an acclaimed month long event, drawing nationally and internationally recognized artists and providing recognition for those closer to home. In addition to providing entertainment for the North Shore, Fanfare has an educational outreach program that works closely with local schools. In October 2005, Fanfare proudly celebrated its 20th anniversary.

Southeastern's enrollment, continually increasing since its inception, reached an important milestone in 1997, registering over fifteen thousand students for the fall semester. Since 1925 Southeastern has conferred over fifty thousand degrees.

As Southeastern celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2000, the Fall semester marked an exciting change as Southeastern implemented screened admissions standards for the first time. Also during the 2000-2001 academic year, the Village, Fayard Hall and the Claude B. Pennington, Jr. Student Activity Center were completed.

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In May 2001, Southeastern received full approval from the Board of Regents for its first new graduate degree program in more than a decade, a MS in Integrated Science and Technology. Since then, Southeastern received approval for seven additional programs: MA in Organizational Communications, MS in Applied Sociology, BS in Athletic Training, BS in Health Education & Promotion, BS in Health Studies, BS in Occupational Health, Safety & Environment, and Master of Arts in Teaching.

In Fall 2003, Southeastern hit a record enrollment of 15,662 students. Fall 2003 also saw the return of football to Strawberry Stadium. The Lions completed the season 5-7.

In Fall 2004, Southeastern began implementing portions of the Board of Regents Master Plan admissions criteria, a full year ahead of schedule and before any other schools in the state. In Fall 2005, Southeastern began its first year under the full Board of Regents Master Plan admissions criterion.

On August 29, 2005, just six days into the semester, Hurricane Katrina hit southeast Louisiana, devastating the parishes of St. Bernard, Orleans, Jefferson, Plaquemines, and St. Tammany, as well as the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Southeastern fared well and suffered no major structural damages (although the University campus did lose many trees). After the storm, Southeastern was able to play an instrumental role in the relief effort by providing housing for the National Guard, disaster relief teams from across the country, and utility workers. The University also provided housing for its displaced faculty, staff, and students as it re-opened its doors on September 6, 2005. In addition, the University re-opened enrollment and provided housing for many displaced students from other universities and community colleges in the disaster area; this also included the hiring of several displaced faculty from these institutions. By the 14th class day, in spite of Katrina, Southeastern had again enrolled a record breaking number of students, 16,068.

Since 1925, many dedicated individuals have led Southeastern from a junior college to the vibrant university it is today. Those individuals are: Linus A. Sims, Yves Leon Fontenot, J. Leon Clark, George W. Bond, Gladney Jack Tinsley, Luther Dyson, Clark LeBlanc Barrow, J.B. Wooley, Clea Parker, J. Larry Crain, G. Warren Smith, Sally Clausen, and Randy Moffett.