

# 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. The main house served as the president's residence and women's dormitory. Classrooms, laboratories, and the library occupied the servants' quarters, while the barn served as the locker room for the football team.

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 the 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.

## **A Brief History of Southeastern Louisiana University, (continued)**

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. 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.

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 forty thousand degrees.

Southeastern celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2000. The Fall 2000 semester also marked an exciting change, as Southeastern implemented screened admissions standards for the first time.