

Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow— San José State University 150 Years 1875-2007

San José State University (SJSU) has the distinction of being the oldest public institution of higher education on the West Coast. The early history of SJSU began in 1857 in San Francisco with the formation of the Minns' Evening Normal School. During this time period San Francisco had moved from a wild western outpost for gold seekers to a cosmopolitan city. The first public school opened in 1848, but by 1857 it became clear that the city needed to improve public school attendance and improve teacher training. The San Francisco City Board of Education responding to the demands of the population for a comprehensive system of education formed the Minns' Evening Normal School. Minns' provided the foundation for the formation of the first California State Normal School in 1862 and firmly established the college and university system in the state.

As the school administrators worked toward building a comprehensive teaching program, it became clear to many that the location of the school in San Francisco lacked the ideal social climate to train young women. In 1869 when the State School Board announced its intent to relocate the school, several California cities offered inviting bids to the school administrators, including the city of San José. After a very successful tour of the city, the school trustees appealed to the Legislature to select San José as the new home for the school. State Superintendent Fitzgerald in his report to the Legislature described San José as an ideal city to host the school. In addition to good climate and open-space, he wrote "...the people are intelligent, hospitable and moral." The school he argued would become an "...object of local pride and attachment, while, like "a city set on a hill," it would cast its beams of light over the whole state." Principal Lucky concurred with this view, and in an 1870 speech he emphasized the need to shelter the young female teachers from the big city.

In 1870 the Legislature agreed to move the school to San José, and the area known as Washington Square became the new home of the State Normal School. On October 20, 1870, the cornerstone was laid marking the beginning of construction on the 27-acre parcel of land donated to the state by the city of San José. Instruction began in 1871 in temporary buildings until the construction was completed in July of 1872. The first graduating class in San José consisted of seventeen students, and the class oration featured Edwin Markham, author of the "*The Man With the Hoe*" and one of SJSU's most famous graduates.

In the early hours of February 10, 1880, a fire destroyed the Normal School building, which was regarded as one of the most significant wood buildings in the state, and cost approximately \$285,000 to build. In the interim, classes moved to the high school building located on Santa Clara Street. Following the fire, there was a failed attempt to move the school to Los Angeles. As a compromise, the Branch State Normal School in Los Angeles was established, which eventually became the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). The California State Legislature authorized \$200,000

to construct a new building on the same site, which was completed in 1881, and was commonly referred to as the Second State Normal School.

In 1887 the California State Normal School was renamed the San José State Normal School, after the California State Legislature formally established a normal school in Chico and gave the Los Angeles Branch Normal School its independence.

The San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 caused major damage throughout the San Francisco Bay area. Although the San José State Normal School building initially appeared to be only lightly damaged by the quake, further inspection showed sufficient structural damage to declare it unsafe. The building was demolished, and construction began on a quadrangle-type structure similar to the quad at Stanford University. This building, with its signature tower, was completed in 1910.

In 1921 the various State Normal Schools were renamed State Teachers Colleges, reflecting the increased needs and curriculum requirements for the education of teachers. That same year, the San José Junior College was established, sharing the facilities and staff of the San José State Teachers College. The college began offering education-related bachelor's degrees at this time and the first degrees were conferred in 1923.

In 1928 the college offered general academic bachelor's degrees, and formalized the merger of the junior college with the teachers college. The institution transformed from a vocational school to that of a full-fledged academic institution offering four-year degrees. This change paved the way for a more formal curriculum and new programs, which led to another name change in 1935, when the California State Legislature renamed the San José State Teachers College to the San José State College. By 1941 enrollment reached peaked at 4,100, only to fall to 2,960 in 1942, and by 1943 the population shrank to 234 male students and 1,349 female students. The post-war years brought a new student boom, with 7,041 in 1948 and by 1964 enrollment surpassed the 20,000 mark.

In 1972 the school was renamed California State University, San José, a change long overdue since the institution had been providing university-level curriculum and degree programs for several decades. This change met fairly broad opposition from students, alumni, and faculty, since the institution had long been known as San José State. Their persistence paid off, and in 1974, the school was renamed San José State University.

Today SJSU is part of the California State University system, and is one of the largest of the 23-campus. The student population reflects the cultural diversity of the region and state. In contrast to the largely white population of the school in the early 20th century, SJSU has reached cultural pluralism, with no ethnic majority. The 150th celebration, "Where Tradition Meets Tomorrow" will launch a full-year of events around the heritage of the first state normal school and will highlight the vision of SJSU as a cutting edge university in the 21st century.