

# A Brief History of Southeastern Louisiana University

PROFILE  
2024

Southeastern Louisiana University began as a grassroots 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, 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 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.

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.

On June 16, 1970, Governor John J. McKeithen signed into law the legislative act turning Southeastern Louisiana College into Southeastern Louisiana University.

In October of 1986, a group of faculty members launched Fanfare, a festival celebrating the arts and humanities. 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.

# A Brief History of Southeastern Louisiana University (continued)

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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 ninety 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. These standards were strengthened in 2003, in 2005 and again in 2012.

Fall 2003 saw the return of football to Strawberry Stadium. The Lions completed the season 5-7.

In Fall 2005, Southeastern implemented the Board of Regents Master Plan admissions criterion and then six days into the semester, Hurricane Katrina hit southeast Louisiana. While Southeastern suffered no major structural damages, many students, faculty, and staff were impacted. Also, 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.

In Fall 2006, Southeastern enrolled its very first doctoral students in the Ed.D. in Educational Leadership.

In Fall 2013, Southeastern football claimed its first Southland Conference title ever and its first football crown since winning the Gulf States Conference in 1961. The win also sewed up Southeastern's first-ever FCS playoff bid.

In the Spring semester of 2017, Southeastern received the largest

single donation in its 92-year history, a bequest totaling \$10 million. Seth W. Ryan, a 1953 Southeastern business graduate, bequeathed a significant portion of his estate to Southeastern's Foundation in the name of his wife, Thelma McNamara Nicaud Ryan.

In Spring 2020, Southeastern moved all its classes to remote learning in less than a week's time to combat the growing spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The fall semester saw a variety of course delivery methods.

In August 2021, Hurricane Ida made a near direct hit on Southeastern. The storm caused significant damage to multiple trees and buildings. However, despite the damage and extended power outages, Southeastern was able to recover quickly and welcome its students back resuming classes within three weeks.

In Fall of 2024, Southeastern kicked off its Centennial celebrations which will have a variety of events and specials throughout the year; culminating in its 100th anniversary celebration in Fall of 2025.

Since 1925, many dedicated individuals have led Southeastern from a junior college to the vibrant university it is today. Those individuals who have served as a Southeastern President 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, Randy Moffett, John Crain and William Wainwright.