

A Brief History of The University of Memphis

The University of Memphis was founded under the auspices of the General Education Bill, enacted by the Tennessee Legislature in 1909. Known originally as West Tennessee State Normal School, the institution opened its doors Sept. 10, 1912, with Dr. Seymour A. Mynders as president.

Students in the first classes selected blue and gray as the school colors and the tiger as the mascot. Tradition holds that the colors, those of the opposing armies during the Civil War, were chosen in commemoration of the reuniting of the country after that divisive conflict.

Over the next decade, The Desoto yearbook was created, the first library was opened in the Administration Building, the first dining hall was built and the first men's dorm was built; today that dorm, Scates Hall, houses the College of Arts and Sciences' Dean's offices.

In 1925 the name of the college changed to West Tennessee State Teachers College. Three years later, the Brister Library was built, named after two-term president John W. Brister. In 1931 the students created a campus newspaper, *The Tiger Rag*; and in 1935 the school's agriculture department was discontinued.

The college changed names again in 1941, becoming Memphis State College, and in 1946, J. Millard "Jack" Smith became president - the first alumnus to hold the position. In 1950 graduate studies were initiated, and in 1954 the school switched from a quarter to a semester system.

In 1957 the state legislature designated Memphis State full university status. In 1959 the university admitted its first black students, and the first doctoral programs began in 1966. The 1970s, under President Cecil C. Humphreys, saw new buildings constructed across the campus, including a University Center and a 12-story library. In 1983 MSU became the first public university in Tennessee to gain accreditation of its entire curriculum.

The 1990s were characterized by another name change and another building boom. In 1994 MSU became the University of Memphis, and the Ned R. McWherter Library was completed. Moving into the 21st century, the Kemmons Wilson School of Hospitality and Resort Management and the FedEx Institute of Technology have made their mark on the University landscape.

Today, the University of Memphis is one of Tennessee's three comprehensive doctoral- extensive institutions of higher learning. Situated in a beautiful park-like setting in the state's largest city, it is the flagship of the Tennessee Board of Regents system. It awards more than 3,000 degrees annually.

With an enrollment of approximately 21,000 students, The University of Memphis has 24 Chairs of Excellence, more than any other Tennessee university, and five state-approved Centers of Excellence.