

Southern Oregon University

Southern Oregon University (SOU) is a public university in Ashland, Oregon. It was founded in 1872 as the Ashland Academy, has been in its current location since 1926, and was known by nine other names before assuming its current name in 1997.

Southern Oregon University began as Ashland Academy in 1872, founded by Ashland's Methodist Episcopal Church. The Rev. Joseph Henry Skidmore served as its first president. In 1878, the school was renamed the Ashland Academy and Commercial College, and then renamed Ashland College and Normal School in 1882, Ashland State Normal School in 1886 and Southern Oregon State Normal School in 1895. While Oregon lawmakers designated the institution in 1882 as an official state normal school – a teachers' college – the state provided no funding. It closed in 1890 and reopened five years later, still relying on tuition and donations for revenue. The Oregon Legislature finally recognized the institution's needs in 1897 and approved a first-time appropriation of \$7,500. The school flourished, but the legislature reversed course in 1909 and eliminated funding for Oregon's normal schools.

Students in the manual training program at Ashland Normal School in 1908.

Southern Oregon State Normal School closed at the end of the school year and remained shuttered until state funding was reestablished in 1925. The state restarted Southern Oregon State Normal School in Ashland on 24 acres at its current location in 1926. Ashland residents passed the "Normal School Site Bonds" to purchase the campus property and the legislature approved \$175,000 to build the new facility, which now serves as SOU's administrative building. In 1932, the Oregon State Board of Higher Education renamed the institute Southern Oregon Normal School.

The college received full accreditation from the American Association of Teachers Colleges in 1939, and Oregon Governor Charles A. Sprague signed a bill changing the institution's name to Southern Oregon College of Education. In 1956 the institution was renamed Southern Oregon College.

The institution was further renamed Southern Oregon State College in 1975 and became Southern Oregon University in 1997. The campus now includes 175 acres with modern facilities, enrollment of more than 6,000 students and more than 1,100 degrees conferred annually.

Kreisman, Authur. Remembering: A History of Southern Oregon University . Eugene, Ore.: University of Oregon Press, 2002.