

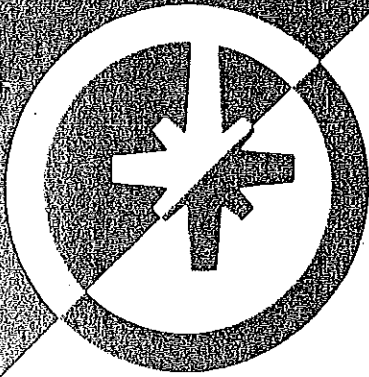
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Fact Book

THE UNIVERSITY

A Brief History

The 1965 Legislature of the State of Florida authorized the establishment of a state university or a branch of an existing state university in Jacksonville. After intensive study, the staff of the Board of Regents of the State University System concluded that the higher educational needs of northeast Florida could best be met by a university offering junior, senior, and graduate-level programs.

Subsequent sessions of the Legislature appropriated necessary planning money and construction funds from the sale of bonds. In 1969, a 1,000 acre campus site was donated by the Consolidated City of Jacksonville and area landowners, and in that same year Dr. Thomas G. Carpenter was appointed President of the University of North Florida.

Continued planning led to the development of programs, the selection of the administrative staff, and the appointment of department chairpersons and faculty. The faculty reported for duty during the summer of 1972. On October 2, 1972, classes began for the University's initial study body of some 2,000 individuals.

Accreditation/Recognition

The University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the baccalaureate degree programs of the College of Business Administration are accredited by the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business. The Florida Department of Education has approved the teacher education programs and recognizes credits and degrees earned at UNF as applicable toward teacher certification.

Milestones in our History: Conception and Planning, 1969-1972

By Eileen D. Brady

The UNF Story

The conception of the University is largely due to the vision and perseverance of Florida State Senator John E. Mathews, Jr. His UNF involvement dates back to 1963, when he introduced the first of three bills to authorize a four-year higher education institution in Duval County. This bill was killed in a legislative committee that same year. Two years later, in April 1965, after calling the Jacksonville area "the most educationally starved community of its size in the nation," Mathews reintroduced a higher education bill authorizing a feasibility study for a Duval County "senior" college. This bill passed and the study, with a positive recommendation for an upper and graduate level Duval County institution emphasizing business administration, education, and the traditional arts and sciences, was published by the Board of Regents in May 1967. Mathews then immediately filed a \$2,600,000 appropriations bill to construct the university and a second bill for funding for the planning of facilities and initial staffing. Governor Claude Kirk vetoed the planning bill four times but in 1968 allowed a \$225,850 bill to pass.

The next phase in UNF's development was the selection of a permanent location. In April 1968, then Mayor Hans Tanzler named Jacksonville businessman Gert Schmidt chairman of the Site Selection Committee. Schmidt was a logical choice as he was well-versed in higher education issues as a member of the Florida Board of Control and its successor, the Board of Regents (BOR). He stressed the need for a Duval County university due to its "huge population, geographical location, industrial complex and economic potential." Other members of the Site Selection Committee were Hugh Abernathy, Charles Brooks, Kenneth Craig, Justin Montgomery, Jack Quaritius and John Trell.

From the outset, the site selection process proved to be difficult and contentious, given the BOR requirement of a minimum of 1,000 suitable acres for future growth. Although there were influential and vocal supporters for two urban Jacksonville sites (the Hospital Complex in Springfield and McCoy's Creek), the prohibitive costs of purchasing urban land versus the vast quantities of undeveloped acreage available in the suburbs proved to be the key and deciding element. Four rural sites (1 Westside, 3 Southside) were selected for further consideration by the Committee on November 17, 1968.

Three months later, on February 3, 1969, after negotiations with the area's landowners involving both the donation and sale of land, a combined Skinner family and Alexander Brest-George Hodges parcel (former Swallows Hopkins tract) was approved by the Board of Regents. Landowners included Alexander Brest, George Hodges Sr. and Associates, Mary Virginia Skinner Jones, A. Chester Skinner, Jr. and C. Brightman Skinner.

The City of Jacksonville still needed to gain title to the land and officially turn it over to the State. The downtown advocates, particularly African-American community leaders, were critical of the choice, their objection being that it was too far from downtown and inaccessible to urban residents. A final and controversial vote by the City Council decided in favor of the rural Deerwood setting and, on September 4, 1969, the BOR accepted the 1,000 acre site in south Jacksonville from the City of Jacksonville for the permanent campus.

The University gets a name and it's founding President...

On July 11, 1969, the BOR announced that the new institution would be called the University of North Florida and appointed Dr. Thomas G. Carpenter as its first President. Previous to his UNF appointment, Dr. Carpenter's career included tenure

at three other state universities (UF, FAU, UWF), rising through the ranks from graduate assistant at UF to President of UNF. Fortuitously for UNF, as the former Academic Vice President and Business Manager for the newly opened (1967) University of West Florida in Pensacola, he had already experienced the rigors and difficulties of building an institution from the ground up.

Thirty years later, at the University's 30th anniversary celebration in October 2002, Dr. Carpenter recalled his daunting instructions from that period: "We had no blueprint. We were told that we have found you some property out there. Go find some people to hire. Develop some programs and go at it."

Rising to the challenge, Dr. Carpenter energetically took charge and pursued his plans for the newborn university. As the founding UNF administrator, he personally directed the physical development and initial administrative organization of the University and assembled a team of faculty, administrators, and support staff. With Dr. Carpenter and Dr. Roy L. Lassiter, the newly appointed Vice President of Academic Affairs, providing the inspiration and leadership, they worked feverishly to meet the Fall 1972 opening date.

While the site selection was being finalized and development later underway at the Southside site, the skeleton University staff established in 1969 a home first in one large room on the sixth floor of the Florida National Bank Building in downtown Jacksonville. In August 1970, after the recruitment and the continuing addition of faculty, administrators and staff, the University moved to its second (and last) interim location, the former Florida Chamber of Commerce building on the Arlington Expressway.

The Groundbreaking Ceremony for the new campus was held on September 18, 1971. President Carpenter welcomed some 600 guests, among them keynote speaker Governor Reubin Askew, state and local dignitaries, faculty and staff, and the general public, including prospective students. In his remarks, Dr. Carpenter emphasized the symbolic nature of the event, "This day - this occasion - has been a long time coming. The hope for such an institution was born in Jacksonville many years ago. It began taking form and substance some six years ago through authorization by the Florida Legislature and two years ago when a staff of men and women began to merge ideas, experiences and talent to prepare for that day - one year from now - when students arrive and the dream will have been realized. The start of construction is significant because it provides physical evidence that our school actually does exist and is developing... but the bricks and mortar, the paving, the landscaping, the acres of land are not the real university. They simply mark its headquarters. The real university is people - it is ideas - and ideals - it is a living entity dedicated to the betterment of society. It is a creation by the people of this state to serve the people. It is an investment in the future with a compound rate of return."

At the time of the Groundbreaking, St. John's Bluff Road was yet unpaved. The majority of guests were bused in from the Florida Junior College South campus on Beach Blvd. to the site of the celebration (now building 4). Given the current Butler Blvd. bustle, the new St. Johns Shopping Center, and booming development on the periphery of the campus, it is hard to imagine the isolated and wild palmetto forest that was then the future UNF campus. Archival photographs of the site in the late summer of 1971 show the area at the beginning of the core campus clearing. In a 1981 interview, Dr. Carpenter recalled the inaccessibility of the tract, with only one dirt logging road favored by poachers and hunters. He relates that after one attempt to visit the campus was thwarted by punctured tires, he relied initially on topographical charts and maps to plan the campus. Coincidentally, on a visit Vice President Lassiter broke the axle of his pickup truck on the same road, and on a later trip to the site, land donor Alexander Brest bogged down in the mud with three flat tires on his Rolls-Royce.

Finally, in August 1972, with the construction crew still fully engaged in the completion of the building project, the UNF staff began the move to the new campus. The excitement and anticipation of the first day of classes in early October motivated all concerned. Coming from more urban academic settings, they were unprepared to meet their new neighbors. Betty Crippen Stosberg, UNF's first Registrar, recently recalled, "While working late one night, as I was leaving the building around 1 a.m., a security guard walked on one side of me and one of the members of the staff walked

on the other. I was too tired at that point to question the procedure. However, the next morning, I asked why. The answer was: a small black bear had been seen on the campus, a rattlesnake had been killed in the parking lot, and a wild cat had gotten into the building." The small alligators that took up residence in the new man-made lakes were yet to arrive after classes began.

"On paper," President Carpenter told his charter faculty at its first meeting on September 26, 1972, "we look like a traditional university, but I hope we won't be." He proved to be remarkably prescient because, from the beginning, there was a sense in the local community that UNF was not your traditional university. Physically, the rural campus site was nestled deep in a beautiful woodlands setting with landscaping by the first Director of Physical Facilities, Hilton Meadows (landscape designer of UWF as well). Architecturally, the initial buildings were designed after a two-story village street concept favored by Dr. Carpenter. Not an ivy-covered building in sight or planned. Academically, the upper division status of the institution and the absence of dormitories and alternative campus housing drew mainly older part-time students, with the average age of the students (31) being higher than that of faculty members (29). In a 1981 interview, charter faculty member Dr. Dale Clifford recalled the high standards of the faculty and, "the backlog of students who were willing to work themselves silly for a college education."

Over the years, with the demographic changes of the clientele it serves, UNF evolved into a more traditional university, but many charter faculty and staff feel the University has kept the special sense of distinctiveness upon which it was founded.

Sources used: Schafer, Daniel. From Scratchpads and Dreams: a History of the University of North Florida. Miscellaneous newspaper clippings. Board of Regents reports and Site Selection documents. Oral history interviews in University Archives.

The Archives is the repository for historical resources relating to the University. Our materials include programs, newspaper clippings, memoranda and announcements, photographs, realia, and other visual / printed items. We welcome donations of additional items, particularly photographs, to enhance our collection. We also encourage individuals to contact us to share UNF memories and reminiscences. You may reach us by phone: (904) 620-1533 or e-mail alderman@unf.edu.