

HISTORY OF THE UNIVERSITY

On April 3, 1798, eight men declared their intention to establish the Jefferson Seminary in Louisville and called upon their fellow citizens to join them in pledging funds for land, buildings, and teachers. Occurring a few weeks after the Kentucky legislature had chartered this academy and several others in the new state, this event marked the beginning of an advanced level of education for the young people of a frontier settlement barely two decades old. Near the end of the eighteenth century these early Louisvillians took the first steps on a journey that would link them with succeeding generations to the modern University of Louisville.

Jefferson Seminary struggled. It did not open until the fall of 1813, and in 1829 it closed. The Louisville Medical Institute (LMI), chartered in 1833, opened in 1837, and the Louisville Collegiate Institute (LCI) was chartered the same year. In 1840 LCI was renamed Louisville College and in 1844 it inherited the portion of the estate of Jefferson Seminary designated for the use of higher education in Louisville. LMI attracted large enrollments and prospered financially, but the college had difficulty remaining open. Proponents of grass roots democracy wanted to divert a portion of the medical school's resources to the college. They won a partial victory in 1846, when the Kentucky legislature created the University of Louisville proper, combining the medical school, the college and a newly created law school. Although there was now a common board of trustees, each division retained financial autonomy, and the college did not survive.

During the 19th century most of the professors in UofL's medical and law schools were drawn from the ranks of local physicians and attorneys who considered teaching a part-time vocation. By the 1880s and 1890s, however, the university felt pressure from educational reformers who not only believed schools should employ full-time instructors but who also advocated well-enforced national standards for academic training. In 1907 this trend contributed to the revival of the liberal arts college, which had been all but forgotten during the second half of the century. A much more vibrant university added new programs – the Graduate School (1915), School of Dentistry (1918), Speed Scientific School (1925), University College (1928-1982), Louisville Municipal College for Negroes (1931-1951), School of Music (1932) and Kent School of Social Work (1936) – conformity to accreditation guidelines became increasingly important. Expanded academic programs and the adherence to higher educational standards led to the appointment of full-time administrators before America's entry into World War I.

World War II and the postwar era brought major changes to UofL. Shortly after the war, a movement began to close the all-black Louisville Municipal College and desegregate the university on all levels. This was accomplished in 1950 and 1951. In 1953 the School of Business was created. Perhaps the most dramatic development of the postwar period was the movement of tax-paying citizens from the city to the suburbs. Because UofL was municipally funded, this caused a damaging drain on the school's revenue. As early as 1965, a governor's task force suggested the possibility of the university's joining the state system of higher education, which it did in 1970.

Since the late 1960s the university has added several new academic units, including the School of Education (1968), the School of Justice Administration (1969), the School of Nursing (1979), and the College of Urban and Public Affairs (1983). In 1992 the latter school was eliminated and its functions distributed to other units. In the same year the School of Justice Administration moved to the College of Arts and Sciences, and the Kent School of Social work joined the Division of Allied Health to form the new College of Health and Social Services. In 1996 the

functions of the College of Health and Social Services were realigned resulting in a separate Kent School of Social Work and a School of Allied Health Sciences. By 1999 Allied Health had given way to the School of Public Health and Information Sciences. In 2001 the School of Education became the College of Education and Human Development, and in 2003 the Speed Scientific School was renamed the J.B. Speed School of Engineering.

All of these schools have won their share of national acclaim. So too have UofL's athletic programs, with multiple NCAA Division I men's basketball championships; competitive football and baseball programs; and top-flight women's basketball and volleyball teams, among others. During "The Year of the Cardinal," in 2013, the Louisville Cardinals became the first university ever to win a BCS Bowl game, place both men's and women's basketball teams in the NCAA Final Four and reach the College World Series.

One of the nation's first city-owned, public universities, UofL has a long history of dedication to the needs of the Louisville urban area. In 2007, the university reaffirmed that mission through implementation of its Signature Partnership initiative, which formalizes its commitment to improving the lives of residents of some of Louisville's most disadvantaged neighborhoods. In 2019, the university's presence in West Louisville was expanded to include a newly remodeled building in the Portland neighborhood, dedicated to additional space for the College of Arts & Sciences' Fine Art and Anthropology programs.

The university continues to grow and innovate to meet the changing needs of the commonwealth. New academic programs and innovative forms of instruction further UofL's place in helping meet the needs of students and of the 21st-century economy. Expanded and improved campus facilities include new housing options, the Student Rec Center, updates to the Floyd Street corridor, expansion and remodeling of the Student Activity Center, expanded and updated facilities on the Health Sciences Campus and the Belknap Academic Building – over 150,000 square feet of new space including new state-of-the-art classrooms and laboratories, group study areas, gathering spaces, and a Student Success Center – which opened in fall 2018.

After celebrating its 225th anniversary in 2023, UofL remains uniquely positioned to create a thriving future for Louisville, for Kentucky and for the world.

For more information, see Dwayne D. Cox and William J. Morison, The University of Louisville (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000). Content provided by University Archives & Record Center and the Office of Communications and Marketing.