



STATE NORMAL SCHOOL OSHKOSH.

THE UNIVERSITY ARCHIVES AND AREA RESEARCH CENTER'S

UW OSHKOSH CAPSULE HISTORY



Oshkosh State Normal School: 1871-1927

Oshkosh has been the home of quality and innovative higher education for more than 144 years. The University of Wisconsin Oshkosh has attracted visionary leaders and dedicated faculty. It has gloried in its successes. It has weathered economic depression, wars and a devastating fire while evolving from a teacher-training institution to a major, comprehensive university.

Founded as a state normal school, this institution came into being as a tough-minded, practical response to the demands of an earlier era. In the years following the Civil War, immigrants streamed into the state. There was an urgent need to train qualified teachers to bring out the best in the new arrivals and their children.

To compete with its sister cities for the state's third normal school, the Oshkosh Common Council pledged \$30,000 and a six-acre site. Costs for the elegant, three-story building exceeded estimates so far that there was no money to staff or furnish the school. The Board of Regents of Normal Schools allowed it to stand empty on its Algoma Boulevard site for one year. Yet, the Oshkosh Normal School was destined to become the state's foremost institution for educating teachers, producing thousands of educators and contributing to Wisconsin leadership in education.

1871

In fall 1871, President George S. Albee headed a faculty of five normal school teachers, the model school director and three instructors. The 43 students who attended the first day of classes had been interviewed personally by Albee to ensure they met his academic and moral standards.

In the early years, tuition was free to all who declared an intent to teach in Wisconsin public schools. There was a \$1 book rental fee for each of the three terms in an academic year. The big expense at the time was room and board—up to \$4 dollars a week for board and a furnished room with "lights and fuel."



George Sumner Albee

1872

Oshkosh Normal became the first state normal school in the nation to have a kindergarten. Rose C. Swart, a powerhouse in the model school department for half a century, introduced practice teaching in 1872.



Rose C. Swart

Under President John H. Keith, one of the best-equipped gymnasiums in the nation was constructed. The school added domestic science and industrial education and, in 1912, gained the Industrial Arts Building—later named Harrington Hall.

1916

Witnesses to the fire that destroyed the main building on a snowy March night in 1916 recalled heroic attempts to save collections and equipment.

Dempsey Hall replaced the landmark building in 1918.

Enrollment slumped when the United States entered World War I, but college faculty and administration did their best to support the war effort. In fall 1918, a War Department telegram notified President Harry A. Brown of the arrival of a U.S. Army officer who would establish a Students' Army Training Corps (SATC) on campus. The Army would supply "uniforms, boots and overcoats." One of the school's temporary buildings was taken over by the SATC to be used as barracks. The campus green spaces became parade grounds, and practice trenches were dug behind the Industrial Arts Building.



Normal School fire, 1916

1918

OSHKOSH STATE
TEACHERS COLLEGE:
1927-1951

After a fierce fight in the state legislature, President Harry A. Brown helped the school and others like it become a degree-granting institution. The school was renamed Oshkosh State Teachers College. By 1930, Brown's dream of a model school building, the Rose C. Swart Training School, had become a reality.

Forrest R. Polk, a faculty member and WWI combat veteran, was named president of the college in 1931. His tenure spanned the Depression, World War II and the Korean War.

1931

The Great Depression struck hard in Winnebago County. Faculty reported that students sometimes fainted from hunger in class. Still, enrollment increased during this time. Many students from north-eastern Wisconsin, unable to afford the tuition and expenses at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, found opportunities to continue their studies closer to home for far less money.



Aviation cadets resting in their barracks.

During World War II, some 1,500 students joined the armed forces. Forty-two died in combat. The near empty college was forced to layoff staff until the school was

1943

selected for aviation cadet training. During 18 months in 1943 and 1944, more than 1,000 cadets passed through OSTC. The cadets lived in the Swart Hall "barracks" and conducted drill practice on Algoma Boulevard.

**WISCONSIN STATE
COLLEGE OSHKOSH:
1951-1964**

Under the GI Bill of Rights, veterans flocked back to school. Making rapid transitions, veterans with still-fresh combat experiences returned to a placid campus little changed since the 1930s. It was not long, however, before both the mission and landscape of the school would expand significantly. As more high school graduates became the first in their families to attend college, the teaching college model became increasingly outdated.

To appeal to a growing population of college students, teacher colleges statewide were given the privilege to offer liberal arts programs. The new curricula would enable the schools to train students for a variety of occupations beyond teaching. A change in name to Wisconsin State Colleges reflected the shift in the schools' direction.



Good times return to Oshkosh after the war.

**Wisconsin State
University Oshkosh:
1964-1971**

Under the leadership of Roger E. Guiles, the school's mission and course offerings broadened even more as the school entered the state university system. The College of Business Administration and the College of Nursing were added, and the School of Education became the College of Education and Human Services. In 1963, Oshkosh began a graduate school, transforming the one-time normal school into a fully-developed university.

Radical and explosive politics were late in coming to Oshkosh. It was not until the late 1960s that the University began to experience the unrest and dissent that touched colleges and universities nationwide.

The Vietnam War was only one of a great many issues that stirred the student body. In a nationally known event, African American dissent over course offerings, housing discrimination and other issues cumulated in November 1968 with a protest and office takeover known as "Black Thursday." Over the next three years, the University responded with increased funding and support for a multicultural center and courses in African American history, literature and political science.



'Black Thursday' protesters being loaded into a truck.

1968

In its centennial year, 1971, President Guiles guided the university into the merged University of Wisconsin System. With 11,500 students and 35 buildings, UW Oshkosh was the largest of the "comprehensive universities."

1971

UNIVERSITY OF
WISCONSIN OSHKOSH:
1971-PRESENT

Chancellor Robert Birnbaum arrived in 1974. A new calendar was instituted with 14-week semesters and three-week interim sessions that offered blocks of time for faculty research. Soon after, an innovative and much-envied Faculty Development Program began, giving impetus to hundreds of faculty research projects.

1978

Birnbaum was chancellor just four years, yet the innovations of the 1970s laid the groundwork for successes in the next decade when the University gained recognition as a regional university of merit. The University's eighth leader, Chancellor Edward M. Penson, served from 1978 to 1989. "Excellence" became the byword in teaching, scholarship and quality of students. The University evolved from open admissions to the institution of choice for many students.

1990

John E. Kerrigan was named chancellor in 1990. Faced with the twin challenges of budget cuts and rising costs, Kerrigan helped to institute programs to benefit faculty and students. Endowed professorships, based on a \$750,000 fund donated by area businesses and individuals, encouraged the scholarly work of faculty members. Entering students of exceptional merit were attracted by academic and leadership scholarships. By mid-decade, 100 of these \$1,000 grants were being awarded annually.

1998

Investment in emerging technologies has enabled the campus to remain current and relevant to its students. Over the years, UW Oshkosh has adjusted its mission and created new programs, institutes and degrees that keep its curriculum and services salient to the marketplace of ideas and jobs. Despite 14 years of challenging economic climates, Chancellor Richard Wells, during his tenure from 1998-2014, looked inward to reinvest in aging facilities. New structures such as Sage Hall, Horizon Village and the Alumni Welcome and Conference Center as well as renovated structures like the Student Services building, Lincoln and Clow Hall joined sustainability with modern work environments and are all evidence of the University's growth and ability to create facilities that match and improve the outstanding work being performed inside of them.



Faculty member and students collaborating in Sage Hall.

At the same time, the University engaged the community by working with regional businesses to provide university solutions to local industrial and commercial problems, while strengthening scholarship and internship opportunities for its students. Similarly, regional organizations dedicated to improving the social, cultural, natural and educational environments of the region have benefitted from a faculty, staff and student body dedicated to engagement. Wells also led the campus toward a commitment toward sustainability and environmental consciousness and action that garners international attention and respect. The University's innovative general education program holds sustainability as well as civic engagement and intercultural knowledge as its core ideas.

2015

Arriving in 2014, Chancellor Leavitt joined a University holding true to the *Wisconsin Idea*, the belief that the University should meet the needs of the people of Wisconsin. Leavitt's direction in navigating the University through challenges and opportunities will bring value to Wisconsinites in terms of community-building, human capital and brainpower, markets and market opportunity, knowledge and expertise, and regional quality of life.