

Pittsburg State University A Brief History

At the turn of the twentieth century the city of Pittsburg, Kansas, and the region nearby southeast Kansas was at a critical economic crossroads. Coal mining, brick manufacturing, and numerous heavy industries had supplanted agriculture as the dominant economic engines for the region. Tens of thousands of first and second generation immigrants poured into the region to take advantage of the diverse employment opportunities. The effects of these changes had critical implications for area schools and would give birth to an institution that has become Pittsburg State University.

On March 6, 1903, Governor Willis J. Bailey signed a Kansas Senate bill that authorized the establishment in Pittsburg of a school that would prepare teachers of the manual and domestic arts. Public secondary schools in Kansas faced a growing demand for practical course work that prepared youth not for college, but for the changing job market, and qualified teachers were not readily available. Early groundwork for industrial and technical education began in the fall of 1897 when Russell S. Russ became superintendent of schools in Pittsburg. Russ introduced woodworking into the Pittsburg high school curriculum two years later – the first manual training course offered in the state. Courses in metalwork, cooking, and sewing soon followed. Russ believed these “hands-on” courses could reduce the number of students who dropped out of high school before their graduation and fill an important role in the developing Southeast Kansas culture and economy. Russ envisioned the establishment of a school dedicated to preparing teachers in these new curriculum areas and he convinced State Senator Ebenezer F. Porter and other local politicians to make such a school a reality.

When this new school opened on September 8, 1903, with fifty-four enrolled students it was called the Kansas State Manual Training Normal School Auxiliary – a descriptive name for an institution with a distinguished future. Since 1903 the university has forged proud traditions in academics, in athletics, and in service to Kansas, the region, the nation, and the world. Following a protracted process to achieve administrative independence from the older State Normal School located in Emporia, the first baccalaureate degrees at Pittsburg were granted in 1913 and the word Auxiliary was dropped from the School’s name. The initial accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools occurred in 1915. Ever increasing enrollments and stronger academic credentials resulted in several additional name changes through the years.

Becoming Kansas State Teachers College of Pittsburg in 1923, the institution already had a substantial campus with six of the state’s most modern academic buildings, an array of diverse academic programs, and outstanding educational and administrative leadership. Under the guidance of William Aaron Brandenburg who served as president from 1913 to 1940, the College added fourteen buildings to the campus while strengthening the faculty credentials, expanding the curriculum and growing the enrollment. The Kansas Board of Regents authorized the conferral of the Master of Science degree in 1929. By 1940 graduate degrees were offered in Biological Sciences, Chemistry, Commerce, Education, English, Industrial Education, Mathematics, Psychology and Philosophy, and Social Sciences.

The next change in the name to Kansas State College of Pittsburg came in 1959. It signified institutional growth over nearly six decades. The expansion of the arts and sciences

curriculum along with professional programs in business, education and industrial arts denoted the college's growth beyond the teacher's college status to a general liberal arts and sciences curriculum. The first significant administrative reorganization in the college's history occurred in 1966 with the appointment of an executive vice president and an academic vice president. These positions provided the administrative leadership necessary to expand the academic departments from fourteen to twenty-two departments. Three schools emerged from the reorganization - the School of Arts and Sciences; the School of Education; and the School of Technology, with each school being overseen by a Dean. Other administrative changes during this period included the addition of a Graduate Dean, a business manager, a director of institutional research, and a director of research and development. A fourth School of Business was established in 1977.

By 1968 Kansas State College of Pittsburg achieved professional accreditation in Teacher Education, Chemistry, and Music in addition to the College accreditation by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The contribution by campus administrators to leadership in national organizations was further evidence of the College's institutional maturity. President George Budd, for example, became President of the Association of State Colleges and Universities in 1969. Executive Vice President and Graduate Dean, Alvin Proctor, became chairman of the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States in 1968. One year earlier, William Spence, dean of the School of Technology became president of the National Association of Industrial Educators and faculty member Homer Johnson was elected national president of Phi Delta Kappa.

In April 1977 the final name change to Pittsburg State University was achieved. The University celebrated the diamond anniversary of its establishment in 1978 while taking stock of its numerous accomplishments and its bright prospects for the future. In 1983 when Donald W. Wilson became the sixth president of Pittsburg State University, he instituted an annual planning process that continues to the present time and he identified the assessment of student academic learning as a University priority. Enhancements to the strategic planning process and the development of a campus assessment culture have continued to the present time.

Among the numerous outstanding accomplishments of the Pittsburg State University family in the modern era are an enrollment exceeding 7,000 students, the development of numerous academic and athletic all-American students, four national championships in football, the construction of the Kansas Technology Center at a cost of \$29 million and obtaining the funding for a \$30 million Fine and Performing Arts Center. The University has established a strong alumni association, founded in 1905, and, since 1985, a superior foundation that develops private support in the Pittsburg community and across the nation. Now well into its second century, the future of Pittsburg State University is bright and the Pitt State family is committed to ensuring it will continue to be a place where people succeed.