

HISTORY

On March 21, 1906, the Kentucky General Assembly approved legislation to establish two teacher training institutions, or “normal schools,” in the state. A locating commission chose Bowling Green as the site of one, and the Western Kentucky State Normal School was established. The new state-supported school took over the building and student body of the privately owned Southern Normal School. The owner of the Southern Normal School, Henry Hardin Cherry, had been actively involved in the campaign to establish teacher training schools and became the institution’s first president. Classes began on January 22, 1907.

On February 4, 1911, the school moved to its present site on “The Hill,” approximately 125 feet above downtown Bowling Green and formerly the site of the Pleasant J. Potter College. Over the next decade, the curriculum focused on teacher training and certification. In 1922, the state renamed the institution Western Kentucky State Normal School and Teachers College and authorized it to grant four-year degrees. The first such degrees were awarded in 1924.

The campus expanded in 1927 when it merged with Ogden College, a private school for young men located on the east side of The Hill. The name was shortened to Western Kentucky State Teachers College in 1930, and the following year the first graduate degree was offered.

In the 1950s and 1960s, both the curriculum and campus underwent major reorganization and expansion. In 1963, the institution merged with the Bowling Green College of Commerce. Along with The Graduate School, the Bowling Green College of Commerce became a separate college within the academic structure. In 1965, the Board of Regents approved the formation of three more colleges: the Potter College of Liberal Arts, the College of Education, and the Ogden College of Science and Technology. On June 16, 1966, Western Kentucky State College became Western Kentucky University.

More colleges and reorganization followed throughout the years as WKU continued to grow. The College of Health and Human Services was established in 2002. In 2011, the university’s first doctoral degrees, the Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership, were awarded through the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences. In 2011 and 2013 two additional professional practice doctoral degrees, the Doctor of Nursing Practice and the Doctor of Physical Therapy, were established, and in 2015 the Doctor of Psychology was added.

WKU’s five academic colleges are:

- College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
- College of Health and Human Services
- Gordon Ford College of Business
- Ogden College of Science & Engineering
- Potter College of Arts & Letters

In addition, the Dixie and Peter Mahurin Honors College at WKU offers high-achieving students the environment of a small, highly selective college within the framework of the larger university.