

On September 18, 1901, 100 students were on hand for the first day of class at Southwestern Louisiana Industrial Institute. They were greeted by Dr. Edwin Lewis Stephens, the school's first president, who had led the transformation of a former sugar cane field into a campus. Two years later, 18 students were the first to graduate from SLII.

Over the next couple of decades, SLII raised admission standards, added faculty, and strengthened the curriculum. In 1921, SLII dropped "Industrial" from its name and awarded its first bachelor's degrees. By the 1930s, the campus had grown to 422 acres and the College enrolled 1,525 students.

Southwestern Louisiana Institute's existence was threatened in the 1940s when enrollment dropped drastically due to World War II. But SLI was chosen as the site for the V-5, V-7 and V-12 military training programs, which drew young officers from across the country and kept the school open.

After the war ended, SLI administrators grappled with a new problem – overcrowding – caused, in large part, by the number of military veterans who took advantage of federal financial assistance to earn academic degrees.

The campus and its academic programs grew during the prosperous 1950s. SLI began to offer master's degrees and became the first all-white, state-supported public college in the South to enroll a black student.

In 1960, SLI was granted university status and changed its name to the University of Southwestern Louisiana. In the 1960s, it adopted the nickname "Ragin' Cajuns®" for its athletic teams. Creation of the Computing Center in 1960 brought national attention, since computer science was in its infancy. USL also began offering doctoral degrees in the Sixties.

In the 1970s, Louisiana—particularly Lafayette—enjoyed an Oil Boom. But when that boom disintegrated in the 1980s, university administrators grappled with repeated budget cuts as state revenue dwindled. USL led efforts to diversify Acadiana's economy and a major fund drive raised \$10 million in private gifts that were endowed to provide a steady funding source for scholarships

and faculty salary supplements. During the same period, the University focused its energies on its roles in research, scholarship, and graduate education.

By 1997, enrollment had grown to a record 17,018. A community college system was created in Louisiana in 1997, enabling the university to implement selective admissions two years later.

In 1999, USL changed its name to the University of Louisiana at Lafayette as it began its 100th birthday celebration.

Today the university takes its place among the limited number of Carnegie Research Universities designated as having high research activity. With a student body of more than 16,000, it is the second largest public university in Louisiana.

It offers bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees and graduates about 1,200 students each fall and spring semester.

