

Historical Sketch

The idea of a university for Texas is as old as the state itself. The Declaration of Texas Independence includes in its indictment of the government of Mexico the charge that it “has failed to establish any public system of education, although possessed of almost boundless resources (the public domain), and although it is an axiom in political science that, unless a people are educated and enlightened, it is idle to expect the continuance of civil liberty or the capacity of self-government.” In accordance with the doctrine thus proclaimed, the first Constitution of the Republic declares it to be the duty of Congress “to provide, as soon as circumstances will permit... a general system of education.”

Attempts to establish a University of Texas were made by the Congress of the Republic and then by the state legislature in 1837, 1839, 1858, and 1866, but the times were unpropitious and the idea failed to become a reality. The Constitution of 1876 again called for the organization and maintenance of “a university of the first class to be located by a vote of the people of this state, and styled ‘The University of Texas,’ for the promotion of literature, and the arts and sciences, including an agricultural and mechanical department.” This constitution also established an endowment of one million acres of land in west Texas, which was increased in 1883 to two million acres. In 1881, the legislature again called for the organization and location of the University and for the appointment of a Board of Regents to be entrusted with its establishment and government. Among the provisions of the act were the limitation of the matriculation fee to \$30, the admission of men and women on equal terms without charge for tuition, and the injunction that no religious qualifications should be required for admission to any office or privilege connected with the University and that no sectarian instruction should be given therein.

By popular election in September 1881, the Main University was located at Austin and the Medical Branch, at Galveston. The academic and law departments were organized, and on September 15, 1883, the University was formally opened in the incomplete west wing of the old Main Building.

As the University grew, work in other fields was added to that offered by the academic and law departments. The College of Engineering was added in 1894; in 1906, the School of Education; in 1909, the Division of Extension; in 1910, the Graduate School; in 1922, the School of Business Administration; in 1924, the College of Physical Activities; in 1938, the College of Fine Arts; in 1948, the Graduate School of Library Science; in 1950, the Graduate School of Social Work; in 1951, the School of Architecture; in 1965, the School of Communication; in 1970, the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs; in 1976, the School of Nursing; and in 2016, the Dell Medical School. The current organization of the University is described in [Organization of the University's Academic Units](#).

Until 1895, the chair of the faculty was the chief executive officer of the University. Professor J. W. Mallet was chair for the opening year, 1883–1884; then Professor Leslie Waggener until the summer of 1894; then Professor Thomas S. Miller for 1894–1895. In 1895, the office of president was created, and has been filled as follows:

Leslie Waggener, MA, LLD (ad interim)	1895–1896
George Tayloe Winston, MA, LLD	1896–1899
William Lambdin Prather, BL, LLD	1899–1905
David Franklin Houston, MA, LLD	1905–1908
Sidney Edward Mezes, PhD, LLD	1908–1914

William James Battle, PhD, DCL, LLD (ad interim)	1914–1916
Robert Ernest Vinson, DD, LLD	1916–1923
William Seneca Sutton, MA, LLD (ad interim)	1923–1924
Walter Marshall William Splawn, PhD, LLD	1924–1927
Harry Yandell Benedict, PhD, LLD	1927–1937
John William Calhoun, MA, LLD (ad interim)	1937–1939
Homer Price Rainey, PhD, LLD	1939–1944
Theophilus Shickel Painter, PhD, DSc, LLD, MNAS (Acting President)	1944–1946
Theophilus Shickel Painter, PhD, DSc, LLD, MNAS	1946–1952
James Clay Dolley, PhD (Acting President)	1952
Logan Wilson, PhD, LLD	1953–1960
Harry Hunt Ransom, PhD, LittD, LLD, LHD	1960–1961
Harry Hunt Ransom, PhD, LittD, LLD, LHD (Acting President)	1961
Joseph Royall Smiley, PhD	1961–1963 ¹
Norman Hackerman, PhD	1967–1970
Bryce Jordan, PhD (ad interim)	1970–1971
Stephen H. Spurr, MF, PhD, DSc	1971–1974
Lorene Lane Rogers, PhD, DSc, FAIC (ad interim)	1974–1975
Lorene Lane Rogers, PhD, DSc, FAIC	1975–1979
Peter Tyrrell Flawn, PhD	1979–1985
William H. Cunningham, PhD	1985–1992
William S. Livingston, PhD (Acting President)	1992–1993
Robert M. Berdahl, PhD	1993–1997
Peter Tyrrell Flawn, PhD (ad interim)	1997–1998
Larry R. Faulkner, PhD	1998–2006
William Powers Jr., JD	2006–2015
Gregory L. Fenves, PhD	2015–2020
Jay C. Hartzell, PhD	2020–2025
James E. Davis, JD (ad interim)	2025–

¹. From 1963 until 1967 there was no office of president.