

# Encyclopedia of African American Education

Florida Agricultural and  
Mechanical University (FAMU)

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Print Pub. Date: 2010

Online Pub. Date: December 15, 2009

Print ISBN: 9781412940504

Online ISBN: 9781412971966

DOI: 10.4135/9781412971966

Print pages: 261-263

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10.4135/9781412971966.n97

### *Southern University and A&M College*

Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU) is a coeducational, liberal arts institution located in Tallahassee, Florida. FAMU, founded in 1887, is the nation's largest historically Black university and graduates more African Americans than any other institution. The institution is a member of the State University System of Florida and holds the distinction of being the only historically Black state-supported institution in that state.

FAMU is the third-oldest historically Black institution of higher education in Florida. For more than a century, the university's mission has primarily been to meet the educational needs of African Americans and other minorities. Approximately 90% of the school's population is African American. The institution, however, seeks students from all racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds without concern for age, gender, sexual orientation, or disability. FAMU currently enrolls approximately 12,000 students and has over 600 faculty members. The majority of students, roughly 88%, are at the undergraduate level while 12% are graduate and professional students. The faculty-to-student ratio on the campus is approximately 10 to 1.

FAMU is a land grant institution and as such, places a high degree of importance on instruction, research, and service to promote excellence and to develop the value of life for those that it serves. The school's motto, excellence with caring, suggests the value it places on the spirit of giving back to one's community among its students, faculty, [p. 261 ↓ ] and staff. This entry chronicles the history and contemporary circumstances of FAMU.

## Historical Background

FAMU was founded on October 3, 1887, as the State Normal College for Colored Students to train teachers. FAMU's first president was Thomas DeSaille Turner (1887–1901), an attorney from Pensacola, Florida. At the time, the school had only 15 students and two instructors. In 1891, it was designated as Florida's land grant college for African Americans, and the name was changed to the State Normal and Industrial College for

Colored Students after receiving a \$7,500 grant through the Second Morrill Act. The Second Morrill Act provided federal funds to colleges and universities that promoted education in agriculture and the mechanical arts.

Following the name change, the college was moved from Copeland Street (now the site of Florida State University) to its present location on what the school now touts as “the highest of seven hills” in Florida's capital city of Tallahassee, a location that led to FAMU's nickname of “The Hill.”

With enrollment having grown to 317 students, the school's name was changed in 1909 to Florida Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes, and 1 year later, it granted its first bachelor's degrees. The fledgling institution was nearly forced to close its doors after a devastating fire that completely destroyed the main building on the campus, Duval Hall, which housed the university's administrative offices, cafeteria, and library. Philanthropist Andrew Carnegie donated \$10,000 to the school to build a new library, which gave the school the unique distinction of having the only Carnegie library on the campus of an African American land grant college.

Although strapped with limited resources, the college began to flourish under the leadership of President Nathan B. Young (1901–1923), with a significant expansion of undergraduate programs, including bachelor of science degrees in education, science, home economics, agriculture, and mechanical arts. The school would undergo an additional name change when, in 1953, it achieved university status and became Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University.

FAMU is made up of 13 schools and colleges, including Colleges of Arts and Sciences, Education, Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Sciences, Engineering (jointly with Florida State University), Allied Health Sciences, Architecture, Business and Industry, Journalism and Graphic Communications, Nursing, General Studies, Graduate Studies and Research, Law, and an Environmental Sciences Institute. FAMU is noted for having eight fully-funded endowed eminent scholars' chairs in the Schools of Journalism and Graphic Communications, Business and Industry, and Pharmacy; College of Education; and the College of Arts and Sciences. The university offers approximately 62 bachelor's degrees in 103 majors, 36 master's degrees with 56 majors, two professional degrees,

and 11 doctoral programs. In September 2006, FAMU was named the number one college in the country for African Americans by *Black Enterprise Magazine*.

The university is consistently cited among the nation's leading institutions for awarding baccalaureate degrees to African Americans. It routinely receives approximately 6,000 applications per year from high school graduates and accepts an average of 70% of those applicants for admission. Of that number, the school graduates about 45%. In addition, FAMU is considered a national leader in the enrollment of National Merit Achievement Scholars, top high school students who are hand-picked by the National Merit Foundation and highly recruited by colleges and universities nationally. FAMU was tied with Harvard in the recruitment of these scholars in the fall of 2000 and was number one in the nation in enrolling these students in 1992, 1995, and 1997. The institution, with its 6-year doctoral program, graduates 90% of all African American pharmacists in Florida. Its renowned School of Business and Industry is well-known among Fortune 500 companies, many of which regularly target the school's graduates when recruiting future executives.

FAMU's sports program is also well-known and highly regarded. The FAMU Rattlers have made their mark in college sports, winning numerous titles in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. The football team was a powerhouse in the middle of the 20th century. From 1938 to 1961, it won the Black College National Championship eight times, including six under the famous head coach Alonzo Smith "Jake" Gaither in 1950, 1952, 1954, 1957, 1959, and 1961. When Gaither retired in 1969, [p. 262 ↓ ] after 25 years of coaching, his FAMU teams had achieved a phenomenal record of 203 wins and just 36 losses with 22 Southern Intercollegiate Athletic Conference championships. Thirty-six players from Gaither's teams were All-Americans, and 42 went on to play in the National Football League. He was inducted into the College Football Hall of Fame in 1975.

The storied sports program includes basketball, baseball, track and field, and others, which produced standout players and coaches for many years and at least two Olympic athletes and one gold medal winner, track and field stand-out Robert "Bob" Hayes. FAMU's tennis program produced its own star, Althea Gibson, who turned professional in the late 1950s, and who won several big tournaments, such as the French Open, Wimbledon, and the United States Open. Gibson went on to break other barriers for

African American women in sports, winning fame in women's pro golf in the 1960s and early 1970s.

As much an attraction on the field as the institution's football team, FAMU's Marching 100 band also has a long and proud tradition. The school's first band was formed in 1892 under band director P. A. Van Weller, who served until 1898. His era was followed by other notable directors such as Nathaniel C. Adderley, Leander A. Kirksey, Dr. William P. Foster, and current band director, Dr. Julian E. White. Although the band has retained its original name, the "Marching 100," it has grown to more than 360 members today. The group's skill and precision have been polished over the past century to legendary perfection. FAMU's Marching 100 is largely responsible for having set the standard for high school and collegiate marching bands around the country. In 1985, the band was the recipient of the prestigious John Philip Sousa Foundation's Sudler Trophy, which is given to one university marching band each year for having demonstrated high performance standards for an extended period of time. FAMU is the only historically Black college and university (HBCU) to have received the trophy since it was first awarded in 1982.

Although FAMU is known for its academic and sports programs, it has also become known in recent years for being home to the Black Archives Research Center and Museum, which is housed in the school's historic Carnegie library. Opened in 1977, the attraction features a collection of historical artifacts focusing on the experiences of people of African descent around the world. The Black Archives Research Center and Museum has become a popular tourist destination. On May 9, 1996, FAMU was officially listed in the United States Register of Historic Places.

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10.4135/9781412971966.n97

*See also*

Further Readings

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