History of the University

Authorized by the Texas Legislature in 1899, Southwest Texas State Normal School opened its doors in 1903. During the first century, the Legislature retained the regional designation in the name, but as its mission changed it became first Normal College, then successively Teachers College, College and University. These changes reflected the change from a teacher-preparation institution to a regional university. In 2003 the Legislature dropped the regional designation and the institution became Texas State University-San Marcos, and in 2013 the place name itself was eliminated as the Legislature viewed Texas State University as an emerging research university within the State.

Texas State’s original mission was to prepare Texas public school teachers, especially those of the south central area. It became renowned for carrying out this mission, but today it does far more. Texas State currently offers programs in the College of Applied Arts, Emmett and Miriam McCoy College of Business Administration, College of Education, College of Fine Arts and Communication, College of Health Professions, Honors College, College of Liberal Arts, College of Science and Engineering, and University College. The University College oversees undergraduate advising as well as the freshman year experience. The Graduate College provides opportunities for continued intellectual growth through advanced and specialized education that develops leaders in the professions and in research.

As Texas State’s student population has grown — from 303 in 1903 to more than 35,000 in 2013 — the campus, too, has expanded and today Texas State is the sixth largest public university in the state. Overlooking the campus and serving as a landmark since 1903 is Old Main, a red-gabled Victorian building restored to its original grandeur.

In 1979, after adding a number of classroom buildings and residence halls, Texas State purchased the former San Marcos Baptist Academy adjacent to the original campus. In 1981, South Texas entrepreneur Harry M. Freeman donated a 3,500-acre ranch to Texas State to be held in perpetual trust as the Harold M. Freeman Educational Foundation. The working ranch is used as a laboratory for students in agriculture, animal science, biology and a variety of other academic disciplines. In 1990, the university opened the Albert B. Alkek Library. The building, conveniently located in the center of campus, is named for the noted Texas rancher, oil man and educational philanthropist who died in 1995.

Texas State acquired one of the most unique ecosystems in the world in 1994 when it purchased the former Aquarena Springs resort and theme park. The purchase allowed Texas State to serve as steward of the headwaters of the San Marcos River, preserving and protecting the area for future generations of Texans. Now called the Aquarena Center, the 90-acre property is the site of a wide variety of educational and research pursuits. Aquarena Center is home to several endangered species of plants and animals that exist nowhere else in the world.

In 1998, as the lead institution, Texas State joined forces with other area universities to establish the Round Rock Higher Education Center, now known as the Texas State University Round Rock Campus (RRC). The RRC, located on 101 acres in northeast Round Rock, offers upper-division and graduate educational opportunities in Williamson County and Austin.

Texas State is located in San Marcos, a Hill Country community about halfway between Austin and San Antonio. Its location on the banks of the San Marcos River provides recreational and leisure activities for students throughout the year.