History of Florida Polytechnic University

Florida Polytechnic University grew out of the University of South Florida. In 2008, the Florida Board of Governors authorized the conversion of the University of South Florida (USF) branch campus in Lakeland, Florida, to USF Polytechnic (Section 1004.345, Florida Statutes) and it was given a separate operating budget within the University of South Florida system.

In 2009, USF Polytechnic hired the renowned Spanish architect Santiago Calatrava to design a signature building, and over the next few years, USF Polytechnic began construction of a new campus on donated land in Lakeland, Florida. The campus consists of 171 acres along with two out-parcels of 180 acres each, totaling 531 acres. The university is located just off Interstate 4, a major highway that connects two of Florida's largest metropolitan areas. The new campus is 45 minutes from Tampa, to the west, and Orlando to the east.

In 2011, USF Polytechnic submitted a request to the Board of Governors to separate from the University of South Florida and become an independent, stand-alone university within the State University System. At its November 2011 meeting, the Board of Governors voted to grant the request and make USF Polytechnic independent, contingent upon it meeting specified criteria. The approval from the Board of Governors was subject to a three-five year process that required USF Polytechnic to continue as part of the University of South Florida System until certain benchmarks, designated by the Board of Governors, were achieved.

However, Senate Bill 1994 was introduced in 2012 that immediately created Florida Polytechnic as an independent university; it was signed into law on April 20, 2012, creating the 12th university in the State University System of Florida:

- Governor Rick Scott's Statement on Florida Polytechnic University, on April 20, 2012.
- Board of Governors Statement of Legislation Establishing Florida Polytechnic University

The law established Florida Polytechnic University as the state's only polytechnic university and required that it develop new academic programs in the fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) (Section 1004.345, Florida Statutes (2012).

Pursuant to Senate Bill 1994, all assets from the former USF Polytechnic were transferred to Florida Polytechnic University. In addition, the state-owned Florida Industrial and Phosphate Research (FIPR) Institute was transferred from the University of South Florida to Florida Polytechnic University. See Section 1004.346, Florida Statutes. The FIPR Institute engages in applied research related to phosphate mining, an industry indigenous to the Polk County area. FIPR researchers are included among Florida Polytechnic University employees. See Section 1004.346, Florida Statutes, Note 2 (2012).

Section 1004.345, Florida Statutes provided for six criteria to be met before the University could be a stand-alone university.

(1) By December 31, 2016, the Florida Polytechnic University shall meet the following criteria as established by the Board of Governors:

(a) Achieve accreditation from the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools;
(b) Initiate the development of the new programs in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics;
(c) Seek discipline-specific accreditation for programs;
(d) Attain a minimum FTE of 1,244, with a minimum 50 percent of that FTE in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics and 20 percent in programs related to those fields;
(e) Complete facilities and infrastructure, including the Science and Technology Building, Phase I of the Wellness Center, and a residence hall or halls containing no fewer than 190 beds;
(f) Have the ability to provide, either directly or where feasible through a shared services model, administration of financial aid, admissions, student support, information technology, and finance and accounting with an internal audit function.

The last of these six requirements was met in June 2017 when the Southern Association of Colleges & Schools Commission on Colleges issued their determination that Florida Polytechnic University had achieved initial accreditation. In addition, SACSCOC issued no recommendations in its decision.

Article IX, Section 7 (c), of the Florida Constitution establishes a 13-member Board of Trustees to administer each of the state universities as discussed in Part A: Institutional Characteristics. Florida Polytechnic University's first eight appointments to the Board were made in July 2012, followed by three additional appointments in November 2012. Both the faculty representative and Student Government Association's president appointments came in 2013 and 2014, respectively.

The Board of Governors convened the first meeting of the Florida Polytechnic University Board of Trustees in August 2012. During this meeting, a Chair and Vice Chair were elected. The Board of Governors also guided the transfer of assets and facilitated the transition process from the University of South Florida to Florida Polytechnic University.

Florida Polytechnic University operations initially began through a shared services agreement with the University of Florida (Shared Services Agreement 9-28-12) and in a leased office building located in downtown Lakeland. Upon considering how best to proceed with selecting the initial leadership of the University, the Board of Trustees opted to hire a President after developing the Strategic Plan and the University's Business Plan. The Board decided that this would give potential presidential candidates a clear idea of the focus, direction and purpose of the developing the University, and it also allowed the Board a foundation for determining the type of leader best suited to assume the position of founding President.

The Board of Trustees hired attorney Ava L. Parker, who began in December 2012, to serve as Chief Operating Officer and the University's interim leader until a University President was selected in Spring 2014. Ms. Parker had served on the Florida Board of Governors, spending two years as chair. She had the appropriate experience and leadership skills to implement successfully the first phase of the University's development plan. Ms. Parker hired Dr. Ghazi Darkazalli, who joined Florida Polytechnic in February 2013, as Provost and Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs.

The Board of Trustees certified the Florida Polytechnic University Foundation as a direct support organization in October 2012. The Florida Polytechnic University Foundation was formed as a non-profit, 501(c) (3) organization to support the educational purposes of Florida Polytechnic University and its innovative vision. The charter Foundation Board of Directors was composed of 11 business, community and industry leaders. The number grew to 15 members by 2014.

As the Florida Polytechnic University Board of Trustees began to develop the Strategic Plan and direction for Florida's 12th state university, it analyzed a broad range of data and information pertinent to the polytechnic university model. The Board utilized research data to support its academic program planning. Based upon analysis of this information, the Board developed a decision matrix and program strategy for selecting a mix of STEM and STEM-related offerings to address industry demand for talent, economic development needs and student interest. See Assessment of Potential Program Offerings and Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) Landscape: Trends and Models. Some of the important factors and sources for information studied are listed here:

- Forecasted industry and occupational growth;
- Enterprise Florida clusters of targeted industries and strategic areas of emphasis;
- Trends in student demand;
- Costs per student;
- Startup and operating costs for various programs;
- Offerings at other polytechnic universities and SUS sister institutions;
- Suitability for online instruction;
- Programs targeted by the Board of Governors Commission on Higher Education Access and Attainment (CHEAA);
- University of South Florida Polytechnic Business Plan. See USF Polytechnic Business Plan and Appendices.

After reviewing the commissioned studies and the data, the Board of Trustees quickly envisioned a university focused on applied research, innovation and close industry ties that could respond quickly to advancing technologies. The Board sought to position Florida Polytechnic University as a rigorous academic institution that would also serve as a powerful economic engine for the entire state.

As part of the implementation of the vision established by the Board of Trustees, University leadership developed and the Board approved a model for a focused University with a target population of 5,000 students in 10 years. The inaugural class was set for an August 2014 starting date. Six cutting-edge bachelor's degree programs comprising 19 concentrations and two master's degree programs were approved to be offered within two colleges: The College of Engineering and The College of Innovation and Technology. The inaugural class was to include freshmen, transfer students and graduate students with demonstrated academic ability to succeed in core STEM areas of study. See BOT Work Plan Presentation to Board of Governors 6-19-13.

To further support the University's mission, the Board developed and adopted a 2013-14 Florida Polytechnic University Business Plan to serve as a blueprint for opening and operating the new University. The business plan would help to ensure the mission of the University would remain the priority in policymaking and decisions. See Florida Polytechnic Business Plan.

Dr. Darkazalli led the effort to hire qualified faculty for both the College of Engineering and the College of Innovation and Technology, in addition to the faculty necessary to teach the General Education Program courses. In June 2012, Florida Polytechnic University hired its first faculty member, research chemist Dr. Rob MacCuspie (Nanotechnology). The number of full-time faculty hired for both colleges was 24 when classes started in August 2014.

An underpinning of the Florida Polytechnic University mission is the cultivation of close industry ties to ensure that education is consistently relevant to industry needs, and students are prepared and ready to enter the competitive-workforce upon graduation. In 2013, Florida Polytechnic University began reaching out to local business and industry leaders to establish partnership agreements that would mutually benefit the University, its students and faculty, its STEM-industry partners. In November 2013, Florida Polytechnic University and the Harris Corporation announced that the global communications and information technology company had signed an agreement, becoming the University's first industry partner. See Announcement- Florida Poly, Harris Corporation Announce University's First Industry Partnership. Florida Polytechnic University has since signed agreements with 83 industry partners by Fall 2014, with 63 of those partners located in Florida. The overriding goals of the partnerships are to prepare Florida Polytechnic University students to assume jobs in the high-tech industry and to close the growing technology skills gap identified in Florida and across the nation.

In addition to developing the academic mission for Florida Polytechnic University, the University also inherited a campus under construction that had to be completed by August 2014. All of the facilities and funds belonging to USF Polytechnic were transferred to Florida Polytechnic University. While the Admissions Center was the first building to open officially on campus, much of the focus and attention for the new campus was on the Innovation Science & Technology (IST) Building and its ultra-modern, energy-efficient design that reflects the innovative approach to learning that is the mission of Florida Polytechnic University. The building is uniquely distinguished by its over-arching white aluminum pergolas, control systems, and operable louver arms, which provide passive solar lighting and automatically move to track the path of the sun.

Intended as the University's primary academic building, the structure was designed to be multi-functional. It houses classrooms, laboratories, the University's digital library, the Academic Success

Center, a large Commons area, and administrative offices. Specialized teaching labs include the Supercomputing and Student Data Center Media Lab, Entrepreneurship Lab, Visualization and Technology Collaboration (VTC) lab, and the Rapid Application Development Makerspace Lab with 3D printers. The certificate of occupancy for the 160,000-square-foot building was granted to the University in July 2014. The faculty and designated administrative staff, requiring direct contact with students, moved into the IST Building immediately after the certificate of occupancy was transferred to prepare for the upcoming fall semester. The IST Building serves as a major focal point of the campus and has a total classroom capacity for approximately 3,000 students.

In addition to the IST Building, two additional buildings were constructed to support the inaugural class. A residence hall, which accommodates up to 241 students, was developed and constructed through a public-private partnership. The building is owned by Vestcor, a private firm that also manages the facility. The University entered into a long-term land lease with Vestcor for the newly constructed residence hall. The University worked closely with Vestcor during the construction and selection of services for the residents. The University also participated in the hiring of the Resident Assistants and ensures that all University's policies and procedures are implemented and followed within the residence hall. The building opened at full capacity in August 2014, prior to the start of classes. See Vestcor Ground Lease Agreement, Vestcor Ground Lease Memorandum Agreement and Vestcor Operating Agreement.

The Wellness Center was completed prior to the start of classes. It houses Student Services, the Bursar's Office, Mail & Copy Center, Dining Services, Starbucks, Parking Services, the Barnes & Noble's bookstore, fitness center and health clinic. The health clinic is staffed with a full-time nurse practitioner and houses the Office of Health Services. There is also the Office of Counseling Services, which provides health counseling, and the Office of Disability Services, which coordinates accommodations for students with mental, physical and developmental disabilities.

After developing the Business and Strategic Plan, the Board of Trustees began the search for the first Florida Polytechnic University President. Working with a national consulting firm, the Presidential Search Committee, a subcommittee of the Board of Trustees, which included the full Board, the Foundation Board Chair and a representative from the Board of Governors, advanced two finalists from a field of about 40 candidates. The two finalists were introduced to the University and local community via a town forum held on the evening before their formal interviews and final selection by the Board of Trustees.

On April 24, 2014, Dr. Randy K. Avent was selected by the Florida Polytechnic University Board of Trustees to be Florida Polytechnic University's first President. The University President, as Chief Executive Officer, reports directly to the Board of Trustees. The Board of Trustees, which established the powers and duties of the president by Resolution 2014-01, approved his contract on May 15, 2014. See Board of Trustees Minutes - May 15, 2014.

Dr. Avent was confirmed by the Board of Governors and assumed the position of President on July 7, 2014. See Board of Governors Minutes - June 2014.

Florida Polytechnic University officially welcomed its inaugural class of 554 students on August 25, 2014 when classes began for the Fall 2014, semester. The students included 394 freshmen, 134 transfer students and 26 graduate students. Ninety-seven percent of students were Florida residents.

The following administrative services were operational when the University opened for the Fall 2014 Term: Construction & Facilities, Campus Police, Business Services, Information Technology, Library, Industry Partnerships, Communications & Marketing, Finance & Planning, General Counsel, Programs and Curriculum, External Relations, Advancement, Government Relations, Ombudsperson, Institutional Research & Effectiveness, Registrar, Enrollment Services, Financial Aid, Student Affairs, and Human Resources. A total of 183 staff members were in place when classes began on August 25, 2014 (full- and part-time employees).

The following administrative services continue to be operational at the time of this updated submission of the initial application in spring of 2015: Contracts and Grants, Environmental Health and Safety, Construction & Facilities, Campus Police, Business Services, Information Technology, Library, Industry Partnerships, Communications & Marketing, Finance & Planning, General Counsel, External Relations, Advancement, Government Relations, Ombudsperson, Institutional Research & Effectiveness, Registrar, Enrollment Services, Financial Aid, Student Affairs, and Human Resources. Full time and part time employees' numbers continues to increase at a rapid rate. To date, there are a total of approximately 220 (full time and part time employees).

In fall 2014, students elected the first set of officers for the Student Government Association, in accordance with Section 1004.26[26], Florida Statutes. Officers elected were: President, Vice President, Treasurer and Secretary. More than 50 percent of the students voted in the paper balloting election. By way of regulation, the Board of Trustees had authorized the establishment of the Student Government Association. It further recognized the Student Government Association as the official representative of, and governing organization for, the student body.