Historic Moments For Illinois State University

1857 Illinois State Normal University (ISNU) became the first state university in Illinois after Governor William Bissell signed a bill on February 18 to create a Normal school. Founder Jesse Fell had led the campaign to locate the University in Bloomington, Illinois; Abraham Lincoln drafted the legal documents to establish this university.

Charles Hovey was named the first principal of the University.

Forty-three students enrolled for the University's first term, which began October 5, 1857. Enoch Gastman, Jr. of Hudson was the first student enrolled. Classes were held at Major's Hall (third floor) on the corner of Front and East Streets in Bloomington, Illinois.

A model school affiliated with ISNU was opened in November, with an enrollment of seven.

1860 Old Main, the University's first official building opened its doors. Located in Normal, Illinois, on the site of the current campus, it served as the campus' major building for nearly 100 years.

The first commencement ceremonies were held for a graduating class of ten with an alumni meeting following the ceremony.

1862 Richard Edwards became the second principal in June.

1863 Alumni Association was founded.

1867 Jesse Fell was appointed to the governing board for Illinois State Normal University.

1868 Jesse Fell developed a landscaping plan which included a campus nursery. He supervised the planting of 1,847 trees. He had planted 13,000 trees on this acreage prior to the University's establishment.

1877 Edwin Hewett was named the third president and brought as a priority the establishment of a university library.

ISNU was the second oldest Normal school west of the Alleghenies. There were 10 such schools in the U.S.

1888 The “Normal Club” in Chicago was established.

The first Vidette was published.
1890  A general library was established. Ange Milner was hired as the first librarian.

John Cook became the fourth president.

1899  By this time, ISNU was recognized nationally as a leader in the Herbartian movement in teacher education, which centered on an integrated curriculum for elementary grades.

Enrollment had grown to 900 with 19 faculty.

Arnold Tompkins became the fifth president for a brief, yet revolutionary tenure in which he beautified the campus, extended the length of class sessions, and expanded the model school to four years of high school.

1900  David Felmley became the sixth president and is particularly noted for leading the University from a Normal school into a teacher's college.

1905  An alumni club in New York was begun.

1907  ISNU's 50th Anniversary was celebrated. By this time, ISNU had established a national presence and was known as the "mother of Western Normals" which resulted from the appointments of a large number of its graduates to presidencies and faculties of other Normal schools.

1908  The first bachelor's degrees were conferred on two students in education.

1912  The *Alumni Quarterly* was first published.

1916  The first Homecoming was celebrated, but did not become an annual event until 1921.

1917  North Central Council of State Normal Schools, organized in 1902 by Felmley, expands to become a national association that in 1936, joined with the American Association of Teachers Colleges.

1921  Homecoming celebration becomes an annual event.

1923  The school's nickname was changed from "Teachers" to "Redbirds" by Athletic Director Clifford "Pop" Horton and Fred Young, *Daily Pantagraph* sports editor.

1926  The University's alma mater was written by faculty members Wanda Neiswanger and Jennie Whitten.
1929 Gamma Phi Circus was founded by “Pop” Horton, and has become the oldest and largest collegiate circus in the nation.

1930 Enrollment increased to 1,500.

Harry Brown became Illinois State Normal University’s seventh president and was instrumental in implementing a new curriculum for teachers of students with special needs.

1933 Raymond Fairchild became the eighth president and established a leadership style and policies which involved faculty in the process of governance.

1935 The faculty senate and publicity office were established.

1942 The University became a training center for World War II naval aviation cadets and the residence halls were converted into naval quarters.

1943 The first special education program in the state was established to train teachers of exceptional children.

1944 Graduate studies were offered for the first time.

1945 The first master’s degree was conferred in biological sciences.

1950 Enrollment reaches nearly 2,500.

1951 A University Council was founded to allow faculty participation in policy making.

1955 By the time of his retirement in August, Felmley had established a legacy for improving faculty qualifications and increasing their number, expanding curriculum and off-campus student teaching opportunities, and changing the institution’s organization to include semesters, letter grades, and academic departments as basic units.

1956 Robert Bone became the ninth president of Illinois State. He led the changes in its mission and its name.

1957 ISNU celebrates its 100th Anniversary. The campus has grown to 25 buildings on 68 acres and a 192-acre farm with enrollment reaching toward more than 3,000 students.

1959 The process has begun to change the University’s mission to a multipurpose institution and its name to Illinois State University.
1960  Enrollment reaches to nearly 4,500.
1963  Doctoral programs were established.
1964  Illinois State University became the official name on January 1.
1966  Academic programs and departments were organized into colleges.
1967  Samuel Braden became the 10th president and served during three of the most tumultuous years for the institution. He also marked significant positive changes, leading the first 10-year academic plan, increasing the advanced courses for undergraduates by 43 percent, as well as acquiring land and building facilities to meet enrollment expectations.
1969  Illinois State given the largest budget reduction of the state’s 12 colleges and universities as a result of the state’s fiscal crisis. At the same time, enrollment has reached a record high of 14,600 students, which created additional funding dilemmas.

A new constitution and system of shared governance is approved; a student code of ethics as well as security and safety policies were formulated to address disruptive behaviors of the student body.

1970  By the end of Braden’s tenure, the University would be governed by a new Board of Regents and Will Robinson would be selected to be the first black university-level coach in the nation. Braden would successfully keep the University open during a series of student protests against the Vietnam War and civil rights when other state universities had to close as a result. But he still experienced public objection to the student unrest and he resigned.

First Distinguished Alumni awards were presented.

1971  David Berlo became the 11th president and ushered in a time of adversarial relationships coupled with limited resources, budget cutbacks, and public outcry about the expenditures for the president’s home.

Enrollment reached 18,000.

Last *Index* was published.

1972  Athletic Hall of Fame was established.
1973  Gene Budig became the 12th president and was credited with restoring administrative stability, reinstating the University’s collegiate system dismantled by Berlo, and successfully adding 21 programs, including five doctoral degrees.
1976  Enrollment reached 19,000, which was the limit set for Illinois State by the Illinois Board of Higher Education's master plan.

1977  Lloyd Watkins was named the 13th president whose tenure was plagued by state budget deficits, which left Illinois State underfunded compared to other state public universities and resulted in overcrowded classrooms and deteriorating campus physical facilities; and problems with town-gown relations, which resulted from large student parties and subsequent enforcement of local ordinances.

1980  First Alumni Achievement and Service awards were presented.

1988  Prior to Watkin's resignation in January, Illinois State would be cited as one of two Illinois public universities to be included in the book How to Get an Ivy League Education at a State University, enrollment would increase to more than 22,000, academic standards would be strengthened and curriculum expanded to include an international scope.

Thomas Wallace became the 14th president, a tenure noted for his strong advocacy of improved state funding in general and a new science building in specific, a campus entrepreneurial attitude to increase private funding, and separate governing boards.


1990  First Young Alumni Awards were presented.

1992  The wording of the University seal is changed to "Gladly we learn and teach."

1993  The state approved $29.2 million for the new science building.

1995  Wallace resigned as a result of a faculty no-confidence vote. Despite the dissension on campus, Wallace achieved the implementation of a strategic plan devised by the total campus which provided a guideline for budget and degree-offering decisions; the creation of the Center for Mathematics, Science and Technology Education, and the Katie Insurance School; and significant increases in private giving and grants. He was a vital force in passing legislation to fund the science building and to abolish the Board of Regents.

1996  The Board of Regents was eliminated as of January 1. Illinois State obtained its own Board of Trustees.

David Strand became the 15th president and steadfastly moved to improve morale of the faculty and to restore confidence in the administration of the institution.
Enrollment reached 19,409 (16,763 undergraduate and 2,646 graduate students) with over 900 faculty.

The campus is now comprised of 153 buildings (5.5 million gross square feet), 850 acres including 128 acres of turf, 62 acres of parking and 195 miles of sidewalk.

1997

The number of living alumni has reached 127,676.

The new Science Laboratory Building was dedicated on September 9. Internationally recognized speakers were part of a year-long event, “The Future of Science: A Campus Celebration.”

1998

The number of living alumni reached 130,481.

Campus celebrates a year-long event, “Living Ethics: A Campus Reflection on Values and Community.”

1999

Work was begun on the transition of Mennonite College of Nursing to become part of the University.

Victor John Boschini, Jr. became the 16th president of the University.

Mennonite College of Nursing officially joins Illinois State University as the school’s sixth college.

2000

$115 million worth of construction projects take place on campus including the Performing Arts Center and the Milner Library Plaza.

Ground was broken for the In Exchange Project–the School Street Renovation.

Illinois State entered the “quiet phase” of the capital campaign.

2001

“Educating Illinois” was announced to the campus community as a campus wide enhancement plan.

The first online elections for student government occurred.

Renovations for Milner Library reached the half-way point.

Classes were canceled for one hour on September 14 in a Student Government organized campus rally in response to the nation’s attacks on September 11. Over 10,000 people attended the rally on the Quad.

2002
Construction on the Center for Performing Arts and the Milner Library renovation was completed. Work was begun on the new College of Business building.

The University kicked off the public phase of its first capital fundraising campaign—Redefining Normal.

The University faced budget cuts from the state and was forced to reduce the number of summer classes offered to students and raise tuition by 16 percent.

2003
Renovation of Wilkins Hall began.

2004
Al Bowman is named as the University’s 17th president.

The In Exchange project is completed and dedicated.

Phase one of the Schroeder Hall renovation is completed; phase two begins.

2005
The University’s first Comprehensive Campaign exceeds the $88 million goal by raising $96 million.

The new College of Business building opens for classes.

The total number of living alumni reaches 160,000.

2006
The Illinois State University Foundation received a $5.9 million grant to create the Genevieve Green Gardens at Ewing Cultural Center.

The “Spread the Red” marketing campaign began through Athletics Department leadership.

The year’s freshman class was the most academically talented in Illinois State’s history, with an average ACT score of 23.9 and a GPA of 3.4.

2007
The University celebrates its sesquicentennial with a variety of special programs, events, and an anniversary alumni directory.

The College of Business was selected as one of the nation’s best choices for earning an MBA by Princeton Review’s report—Best 282 Business Schools.

The basketball court in Redbird Arena was named in honor of Doug Collins, the baseball field is named in honor of Duffy Bass, and the golf course is named in honor of D.A. Weibring.

The Illinois State alumni magazine online availability begins.
Trustees approve construction of the Student Fitness and Kinesiology Recreation center and baseball stadium expansion.

2009

Genevieve Green Gardens at Ewing Cultural Center is dedicated.

The Board of Trustees approved the demolition of central campus residence halls—Dunn, Barton and Walker. Groundbreaking for the Student Fitness and Kinesiology Recreation center occurred during Homecoming.

The Alumni Center is dedicated and sees over 20,000 visitors in its first year.

Illinois State is ranked as one of the 100 best values in public colleges in the country according to Kiplinger’s Personal Finance magazine for the fifth straight year.

Registrar debuts online transcript application.

TV-10 celebrates 35th reunion.

Stevenson-Turner’s $25.8 million infrastructure enhancement begins in the summer.

The total living alumni reaches 180,000.

Gamma Phi Circus celebrates 80 years and is the oldest collegiate circus in the nation.

Illinois State becomes the first public university in Illinois with a Service-Learning minor.

2010

Illinois State University has retained its third-tier ranking with a graduation rate of 70% according to the U.S. News and World Report.

Opening of the new state-of-the-art Student Fitness Center and renovated historic McCormick Hall.

The Board of Trustees approved the renaming of the College of Business building to the State Farm Hall of Business. This is in recognition of State Farm Foundation’s commitment to Illinois State University.

The Board of Trustees approved a $5.5 million project to remodel Hovey Hall. The will include a renovation of the exterior front entrance and the relocation of the Financial Aid Office to Hovey.

Illinois State was named a “Tree Campus USA” for the third straight year in honor of its dedication to campus forestry management and environmental stewardship.
Cardinal Court, which was built in the 1950’s, was approved by the Board of Trustees for decommission and demolition. Construction of a new facility is scheduled to be completed by August 2012 and will cost $59 million.

Athletic Department has made it possible to purchase via the GoRedbirds.com website a single game online ticket with a barcode which can be printed at home.

Red and White Fund was established to help students in areas of greatest need, as defined by the Director of Financial Aid.

Illinois State is the first public higher education institution in the State of Illinois to offer Civic Engagement & Responsibility as a minor.

In the State of the University address, President Bowman announced a $25 million renovation for Hancock Stadium to be completed by the fall of 2013.

The Board of Trustees approved an Enrollment Competitiveness Program for fall 2012 which will remove the out-of-state tuition differential for selected, high-achieving and talented out-of-state students.

The Veterans Study Center was dedicated on September 14, 2012. The Center offers an environment of support and assistance to student-veterans.

After fifty years, south campus which included Hamilton, Atkin, Colby and Whitten residence halls and Feeney Dining Center was decommissioned in August 2012.

Cardinal Court, Illinois State’s new campus housing designed as apartment-style living, opens in the same location the housed the old Cardinal Court from 1957 to 2010.

Julia Visor Academic Center was opened to provide services and programs to assist students in their pursuit of academic excellence at Illinois State University.

Illinois State University won the first Political Engagement Project Program of Excellence Award sponsored by the New York Times and the National American Democracy Project.

Illinois State University’s College of Business received a 9th ranking for the “best administered MBA program” by The Best 296 Business Schools: 2013 Edition published by the Princeton Review.

Illinois State’s enrollment for fall 2012 rose to 21,080, with an average GPA of 3.43 and average ACT of near 24 for incoming freshmen.
Dr. Al Bowman, 17th President, announces his retirement effective May 15.

Dr. Timothy J. Flanagan is selected as Illinois State University’s 18th President beginning on August 15.

Illinois State climbed in *U. S. News and World Report*’s 2013 rankings of the top public universities in the nation, to #81, based on academic quality and excellence.

Illinois State students are successful completing their degrees on time, placing the University’s high graduation rate (71.5%) among the top 10% of all U. S. universities.

Dr. Larry Dietz is named Illinois State University’s 19th President, following the resignation of Dr. Timothy Flanagan.

Illinois State enrolled record-breaking first time in college class

Reggie Ride bike-share program launched.

*Washington Monthly*’s ranked Illinois State in the top 50 universities (47th) for Best Bang for the Buck.

The Emergency Operation Center opens as location for all partners to convene during large incidents and crises.

All residence halls are converted to electronic door access systems.

University Galleries is relocated to Uptown Station in Uptown Normal.
2015

Illinois State climbed in *U. S. News and World Report*'s 2015 rankings of the top public universities in the nation, to #79, based on academic quality and excellence.


Illinois State holds largest LGBTQ college conference in nation with record-breaking numbers. The 22nd annual Midwest Bisexual Lesbian Gay Transgender Ally College Conference was orchestrated entirely by ISU students advised by campus staff.

The University secured over $36.8 million in total fundraising productivity, the best fundraising year in ISU history.

For second year, Illinois State enrolled record-breaking first time in college class of over 3,600 students.

Illinois State received full reaccreditation from the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges in Schools. This will be in place until 2023-2025.

The University continues strong graduation rate at 73.4 percent, the highest in recent history. It ranks in the top ten percent of all U.S. universities.

A new Foods Lab opened in Turner Hall for the College of Applied Sciences and Technology

University Marketing and Communication launched *Redbird Scholar*, a new magazine focused on research, scholarship, and creative expression.

*The Chronicle of Higher Education* named Illinois State a Great College to Work For.

The Illinois State traditions website launched and the traditions book was released.

2016

The University secured over $21 million in total fundraising productivity, the second-best fundraising year in ISU history.

Total living alumni reaches over 205,000.

For third consecutive year, record-breaking enrollment numbers are obtained.

Illinois State climbed in *U. S. News and World Report*'s 2017 rankings of the top public universities in the nation, to #78, based on academic quality and excellence.

College of Business ranked 75th among *Bloomberg Businessweek*’s Best Undergraduate Business Schools.

The demolition of south campus which included Hamilton, Atkin, Colby and Whitten residence halls and Feeney Dining Center took place during the summer/fall of 2016.