

West Virginia University

West Virginia University was founded February 7, 1867, by an act of the West Virginia Legislature. The school was created as a federal land-grant institution under the Morrill Act, which Congress passed in 1862 to support agricultural colleges in each of the states through grants of public lands located mostly in the West and Midwest. Originally the university was called the Agricultural College of West Virginia.

As lawmakers debated the location of the new institution Sen. William Price of Monongalia County swayed the decision toward [Morgantown](#) when he offered the sites, buildings, and assets of the Monongalia Academy, which also encompassed the Woodburn Female Seminary. This property furnished the site for the university's historic downtown campus.

Land-grant colleges established under the Morrill Act were required to emphasize agriculture and the "mechanic arts," but other fields of study were not excluded. The legislature directed that the new institution's Board of Visitors establish "such departments in literature, science, art, and agriculture, as they may deem expedient, and as the funds under their control may warrant."

The college opened its doors in September 1867, with three instructional departments: collegiate, scientific, and agricultural. Its first class totaled 124, six at the collegiate level and 118 in preparatory work. Tuition for a term of 13 weeks was \$8 for the college level, \$5 for preparatory school. Room and board was \$3.50 a week.

The institution's first president, the [Reverend Alexander Martin](#), stated at his inaugural in June 1867, that the true concern would be "to educate men, as men, and not as machines." The president looked forward to a time when the infant school should be to West Virginia "what Yale is to Connecticut, Harvard to Massachusetts, Charlottesville to her parent state, Ann Arbor to Michigan, or Oxford to old England — her brightest ornament and crowning glory."

To that end, Martin pushed [Governor Arthur Ingraham Boreman](#) to remove the word "agricultural" from the school's title to remove the suggestion that it was a farmers' school. Thus, its name officially was changed to West Virginia University in 1868.

The legislature provided no financial support the first year. It did, however, authorize the use of \$5,000 from assets received from the Monongalia Academy to acquire land contiguous to the Woodburn Seminary grounds. The seminary burned in 1873, robbing 30 students of their lodging but providing the site of Woodburn Hall. Originally called "New Hall," Woodburn was completed in 1876 at a cost of \$41,500. Wings were added in 1900 and 1911. Today, Woodburn Circle includes the university's three oldest buildings: Martin Hall, completed in 1870, Woodburn Hall, and Chitwood Hall (originally Science Hall) completed in 1893. Woodburn Circle is on the [National Register of Historic Places](#) and is the signature landmark of WVU. The university has a total of 18 buildings on the National Register.

The school faced many challenges in its early years, including interference by the legislature. Faculty turnover was high due to inadequate compensation. The university lacked statewide support, particularly among southern West Virginia legislators who believed it was too far removed to be of benefit to the rest of the state. Nevertheless, WVU showed signs of leadership and innovation.

In November 1887, the first issue of the *Athenaeum*, a student literary publication, circulated. It became the *Daily Athenaeum* newspaper in 1933.

In September 1889, WVU admitted the first 10 women as degree candidates, although women had been sitting in on



classes occasionally for several years. In 1891, Harriet Lyon became the first woman to receive a degree from WVU, graduating at the head of her class. The College of Law, in existence since 1878, was one of the first law schools in the nation to admit female students, graduating its first woman, Agnes Westbrook Morrison of Wheeling, in 1895. Morrison was admitted to the bar in 1896 and became one of a relatively few women at the time to practice law. Women were permitted to enter all departments and schools except the military by 1897.

The football team received its start in 1891 when two enthusiastic students raised \$160 to buy uniforms and a rule book and recruited players. Four years later, the school fielded its first outstanding team, led by [Fielding “Hurry Up” Yost](#) from Fairview, Marion County. WVU hired its first full-time coach in 1896.

As these changes occurred, WVU was becoming more diverse academically. President Jerome Hall Raymond (1897–1901) hired the first female faculty and added art, music, and domestic science programs to attract more women. He also hired the university’s first trained librarian and the first graduate students to assist faculty, and he merged individual department libraries into one main library. A summer session was established.

In 1895, Montgomery Preparatory School was established in Montgomery as a branch of WVU. It later became [West Virginia Institute of Technology](#), an independent institution, and in the 1990s re-affiliated with WVU. Keyser was the university’s second preparatory education site, later becoming [Potomac State College](#) of WVU. A two-year school of medicine initially operated as an affiliate of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Baltimore, until it became an independent two-year program in 1912.

In 1904, West Virginia University reached an impressive intellectual milestone when student Charles Frederick Tucker Brooke was selected to be in the first group of Rhodes Scholars, who were chosen from around the world to train at Oxford University. More than a century later, WVU ranks among the top institutions nationally for prestigious scholarships, including 25 Rhodes Scholars, 21 Truman Scholars, and 33 Goldwater Scholars.

By 1912, WVU’s library had 46,500 books, and its agricultural roots had spread via 15 agricultural extension schools, five home economics schools, and 110 farmer institutes; 6,500 youth were enlisted in agriculture clubs throughout the state. Oglebay Hall was completed in 1918 for the College of Agriculture. In 1921, the Engineering Experimental Station was established, as was the state 4-H camp at Jackson’s Mill, the nation’s first.

By 1938, WVU had 3,500 students and 150 faculty. That year, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled a state’s colleges must admit African-American students to graduate courses that were not available at a state’s black institutions. In 1941, WVU granted a graduate degree to its first known African-American student, Kenneth Jones. Victorine Louistall became the first known African-American female to earn a graduate degree in 1945. She returned to WVU in 1966 to teach library science, becoming the first known black faculty member.

Enrollment soared with the end of World War II and the enactment of the GI Bill, in which veterans were granted federal funding for educational expenses. More than 6,000 students enrolled in the fall of 1946, causing a housing crisis. Five student veterans even lived in President Irvin Stewart’s house. By 1948, enrollment was 8,069.

Stewart’s tenure as president (1946–58) was an era of expansion, particularly in the medical sciences. The university acquired two farms in Morgantown that later developed into the Evansdale Campus and the Medical Center complex. Stewart originated a new approach to financing major construction by designating student fees for construction revenue bonds.

The years 1946 to 1960 were a golden era for WVU basketball, with such All-American legends as Leland Byrd, Mark Workman, [“Hot Rod” Hundley](#), and [Jerry West](#). West led the Mountaineers in the national championship game in 1959. The team lost by just one point, 71-70, to California. Football, too, was thriving with such stand-outs as Bob Orders, Bruce Bosley, [Sam Huff](#), and Chuck Howley.

The School of Medicine took center stage in 1962 when Dr. Herbert Warden and his team performed the first open-

heart surgery in West Virginia. The 1960s and 1970s also brought technological innovations, including WVU's first computer, an IBM. Work began on the federally funded [Personal Rapid Transit System](#), an experimental, computer-operated, mass transit system. Twenty years after its completion, the PRT was named the best "people mover" in North America, and it still serves the university today.

Athletics again took center stage as the 1970s wore into the 1980s. The Coliseum basketball arena was completed in 1971. Governor Rockefeller made the final decision to build a new 50,000-seat football stadium, which opened in 1980. It was expanded to 63,175 seats in 1986. Other new facilities included the Shell building, which houses an indoor track, the Natatorium for water sports, and the Evansdale Library.

WVU Hospitals separated from the university to become a nonprofit corporation in 1984. The Hospitals include Ruby Memorial Hospital, which was designated the state's first level one trauma center in 1989. WVU Hospitals also include Children's Hospital, Chestnut Ridge Hospital, the Mary Babb Randolph Cancer Center, and the Jon Michael Moore Trauma Center.

During the last decade of the 20th century, West Virginia University significantly expanded its emphasis on research and was designated a research university by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. The university also established a non-profit corporate affiliate – WVU Research Corporation — to manage intellectual properties and the growing WVU research enterprise, including patents, copyrights, and trademarks. Sponsored contracts and research grants total about \$180 million annually. WVU is a recognized leader in biometrics research, energy and alternative fuels research, forensics and investigative science, and the health sciences. In 2010, the university dedicated a Robotic Center as part of a cooperative effort with the NASA Goddard Space Flight Center to support space exploration missions.

West Virginia University also is home to the National Research Center for Coal and Energy, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2008. The center focuses on energy and environment research; the university has one of the largest simulated underground coal mines in the world to facilitate training in mine rescue and mining.

In the health sciences, Mountaineer Doctor Television links WVU physicians with patients in rural areas, and the Health Sciences Center took the name of West Virginia's senior U.S. senator, [Robert C. Byrd](#). Senator [Jay Rockefeller](#) and his family provided significant funding in 1999 to establish the Blanchette Rockefeller Neurosciences Institute, the world's only major institute focusing on human memory.

In the new millennium, WVU remains true to its mission as a land-grant institution with [extension service](#) programs in all 55 counties. WVU Jackson's Mill in Lewis County serves thousands of youth and adults annually, and it is the home of the West Virginia Fire Academy, a training center for volunteers and professional firefighters from the state and across the nation.

West Virginia University has 13 academic colleges on the Morgantown campus; three regional campuses in [Parkersburg](#), Montgomery, and Keyser; six extended learning regional centers; a Robert C. Byrd Health Sciences Center in Charleston; and more than 190 degree programs. WVU confers more than 6,000 degrees annually and has enrollment totaling more than 30,000 statewide. It has library facilities at five locations; the downtown library holds the largest historical archives relating to West Virginia in existence – the West Virginia and Regional History Collection.

The university's longest-serving president, David C. Hardesty Jr., one of the school's Rhodes Scholars, stepped down in 2007 after 12 years of emphasis on infrastructure development and student support services. Controversy followed when the succeeding president, Mike Garrison, and two top administrators resigned less than a year into Garrison's term. An independent investigation determined WVU administrators had improperly granted an MBA degree to Heather Bresch, the daughter of Governor [Joe Manchin](#) and an executive at [Mylan](#), a pharmaceutical company whose then-chairman Milan Puskar was a major donor of the university and supporter of Manchin. C. Peter McGrath, a leading academic and president at several universities, was named interim president until James P. Clements, a former provost of Towson University, was selected WVU's 23rd president in 2009.

[West Virginia University website](#)

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Citations

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3. Howe, Barbara J. "A People's University." *West Virginia University Alumni Magazine*, (Winter 2000).