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History of the University of Nebraska–Lincoln

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln is a public research university located in Lincoln, Nebraska. It is the state's oldest and largest university and the flagship university of the University of Nebraska system.

The university was chartered by act of the state legislature in 1869 as a land-grant university under the 1862 Morrill Act, two years after Nebraska's admission to statehood. The school was given a mission to “afford to the inhabitants of the state the means of acquiring a thorough knowledge of the various branches of literature, science, and the arts.” The university received an initial land grant of about 130,000 acres and the campus construction began with the building of University Hall. By 1873, the University of Nebraska had offered its first two degrees to its first graduating class. During its first 20 years, the school struggled to find an identity as both a pragmatic, frontier establishment and an academic, intellectual institution. In the 1890s the university began to expand significantly, hiring professors from eastern schools to teach in the newly organized professional colleges while also producing groundbreaking research in agricultural sciences. From 1890 to 1895 enrollment rose from 384 to about 1,500. A law school and a graduate school were also created at this time, making UNL the first school west of the Mississippi to establish a graduate school. The “Nebraska method” of ecological study, which pioneered grassland ecology and laid the foundation for research in theoretical ecology for the rest of the 20th century, developed here during that time. By 1897, the school was 15th in the nation in total enrollment.

In 1913–14, a fierce debate arose over whether to keep the university in downtown Lincoln or to move it out of town. A statewide referendum that approved the downtown plan resolved the issue, and the school experienced a building boom, both on its new downtown property and on the farming campus. A second building boom occurred in the late 1940s, with the arrival of thousands of returning soldiers seeking education funded under the GI Bill.

In 2011 the University of Nebraska became a participant in the Committee on Institutional Cooperation, the academic consortium of the universities in the Big Ten Conference plus former conference member, the University of Chicago. This initiative forms a partnership for research, allows students to take distance courses



at other participating institutions, and also allows them “in-house” viewing privileges at other participating schools' libraries.

The university is organized into eight colleges, located on two campuses in Lincoln with over 100 classroom buildings and research facilities. About 78 percent of UNL students are from Nebraska, while the rest are from all forty-nine other states and 114 foreign countries. In 2012-2013, the university granted 3,716 bachelors, 830 masters, 173 professional, and 325 doctoral degrees. Enrollment for the fall semester 2013 was 19,376 undergraduate, 4,554 graduate, and 515 professional students.

The University of Nebraska–Lincoln does not discriminate based on gender, age, disability, race, color, religion, marital status, veteran’s status, national or ethnic origin, or sexual orientation.