

# HISTORY OF COLLEGE

---

## A Brief History of Dalton State

The Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia chartered Dalton Junior College in July 1963. At the time, the local community was required to provide a site for the campus and funding for the first campus buildings. The local chamber of commerce, headed by Truett Lomax, spearheaded a public relations campaign to raise awareness of a college's value to Dalton, including support for a gift of land for the campus and voters' support for a bond referendum that would finance the capital construction. Dalton businessmen Glenn Bevil, Tom Lambert, Tom Swift, and John Tibbs donated four adjoining parcels of land totaling 136 acres just west of the city. In May 1965, Whitfield County voters approved a \$1.8 million bond issue by a margin of 26-to-1, which was the largest such margin of victory for a college bond issue in Georgia history.

Local funds were supplemented by federal construction grants under the Higher Education Facilities Act of 1963 and the Appalachian Regional Development Act of 1965. The local community's support for Dalton State took root in the College's very beginning.

The Board of Regents appointed Dr. Arthur M. Gignilliat, from Valdosta State College, as the new College's first president in 1966. President Gignilliat and small cadre of the College's first administrative set up temporary offices in a two-story brick home on the corner of Thornton Avenue and Cuyler Street in downtown Dalton, just a few miles from where the campus would be built. Construction of the campus began that October, and the 24th institution of the University System of Georgia opened in September 1967 to 524 students. Four of the first five buildings were completed on opening day: an administration/library building (now Westcott Hall), a classroom building (now Sequoia Hall), a student center (the single-story portion of Pope Student Center), and a physical plant/maintenance building; a gymnasium (now Bandy Gymnasium) was still under construction in September, and it opened in 1968.

The College grew quickly as reputation of its quality faculty and dynamic student life programs began to spread. The men's basketball team was a consistent contender for and frequent winner of regional and state titles, and the DJC Roadrunners played in two national championship tournaments in the early 1970s. President Gignilliat retired in 1970. His successor, Dr. Derrell C. Roberts, a Civil War scholar, led the College for nearly a quarter-century until he retired in 1994. The Roberts era began with completion of a new classroom building (later named Gignilliat Memorial Hall in recognition of the College's first president and his wife, Elizabeth), and a new library building opened in 1972. The next year, the college was designated one of four University System junior college campuses to host vocational/technical programs. Soon thereafter, the vocational/technical programs had grown to such a scale that a new building was required to house them, and a technical building was completed on the north end of campus in 1979. Elsewhere on campus, between 1973 and 1975, Pope Student Center was expanded to accommodate the growing student population, and Westcott Hall and the physical plant building were enlarged. An addition to the south end of Sequoia Hall in 1989 brought much-needed new laboratories, faculty offices, and lecture rooms to the College's original classroom building.

As part of a general statewide and national trend in higher education, the Board of Regents removed the word "Junior" from the College's name in 1987, and Dalton College solidified its academic reputation as a quality destination for students seeking to earn associate degrees and technical certificates. At the beginning of the 1990s, the local community's

expectations for the College began to include growing enrollment beyond the 1,500-1,800 range and an expansion of the institutional mission to include targeted baccalaureate degrees that would meet the needs of the region's multi-billion-dollar business and industry sector. Not since the formation of the campus in the 1960s had community support been so focused on moving the College to the next level.

President Roberts's retirement in 1994 resulted in a yearlong search that brought Dr. James A. Burran to Dalton from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College in Tifton in May 1995. President Burran's first years saw a rapid acceleration of the developmental momentum that had been building since the early part of the decade. Soon after his arrival, enrollment exceeded 3,000 students for the first time, and Dalton College assumed responsibility for the Dalton School of Health Occupations that had been previously operated by the local hospital, bringing several health-related academic programs into the College's curriculum.

In September 1998, the Board of Regents authorized the first bachelor degrees for Dalton College, with the first four-year students to be admitted in fall semester 1999. Four regionally targeted baccalaureate degrees in business administration were the foundation for the College's rapidly expanding four-year-degree offerings in the coming decade. Programs in social work, early childhood teacher education, biology, mathematics, English, history, chemistry, accounting, and criminal justice followed in subsequent years. In tandem with the addition of bachelor degrees to the College's curriculum, the Board of Regents, meeting on campus in November 1998, changed the institution's name to Dalton State College, which was a final and more accurate reflection of the broader new institutional mission.

Physical growth of the campus in the Burran era was a constant reminder of the power of local community support for Dalton State and the consistent growth in student enrollment. The technical building was renovated to adapt it to changing technical programs; a 50,000-square-foot general classroom building (later named the Lorberbaum Liberal Arts Building) was completed in fall 1999; and an addition to what had become Roberts Library doubled the size of that facility. The Dalton State College Foundation had begun its first-ever, large-scale fundraising campaign that realized nearly \$2 million in private philanthropic support for the College in the late 1990s, and the Foundation began acquiring land around the campus for future growth. Most significantly, the Foundation acquired the 11-acre, 120-unit Wood Valley Apartments adjacent to the north end of campus in September 2005. Another parcel, a five-acre site just north of campus, became home to the 28,000-square-foot James E. Brown Center, partially funded with \$1 million in private gifts, which was completed in 2006 to house the College's continuing education programs and other campus offices. President Burran's tenure at Dalton State concluded with the culmination of the Dalton State Foundation's "Fulfilling the Vision" campaign that raised \$21 million toward an initial \$16.4 million goal for endowment and capital projects on the campus.

A redevelopment of the campus's physical center, largely unchanged since the 1960s, was a capital campaign priority. A campus quadrangle, situated between Pope Student Center and Sequoia Hall, was anchored on its east end by a vast outdoor stage and a soaring 75-foot bell tower that symbolized the past, present, and future aspirations of the regional community for Dalton State. The bell tower was named in honor of President Emeritus Burran in 2010. The College's first endowed academic research unit, the Bandy Heritage Center for Northwest Georgia History & Culture, launched in 2009, was another notable outcome of the campaign.

Funding for additional student scholarships, faculty support, academic program enhancements, and strategic property acquisition rounded out

the campaign's goals and began to have their impacts on the campus community.

President Burran's successor came to Dalton State from Emporia State University in Kansas. Dr. John O. Schwenn was appointed the College's fourth president in March 2008. Shortly after his arrival on campus, the College began offering classes in its first-ever permanent off-site location in Ellijay at the Gilmer County Center, formerly the Gilmer County Public Library building. In summer 2009, a long awaited parking deck opened on the main campus. That fall, the College admitted its first student residents who lived in the Wood Valley Apartments, marking a transformation of the campus as a residential destination as well as an academic one.

The addition of new academic programs in response to student demand and rising enrollments brought a new feel to the campus as more four-year students arrived. Baccalaureate programs in interdisciplinary studies, respiratory therapy, nursing, and psychology were added to the curriculum, and the College began to transition toward a majority of students in its bachelor degree programs. Low-enrolled associate and certificate programs were phased out in response to budgetary constraints in the late 2000s, and the College's academic realignment into five schools – Business, Education, Health Professions, Liberal Arts, and Science, Technology & Mathematics – fulfilled a long-held expectation of a traditional four-year academic culture. Emphases on undergraduate research, international education, and a vibrant student life program strengthened the four-year college experience for students.

In November 2012, the College broke ground for its first new academic building in nearly 15 years, a \$21-million, 60,000-square-foot facility for its rapidly growing biology and chemistry programs. Peeples Hall opened to great fanfare in May 2014, and quickly brought recognition to Dalton State as a state-of-the-art center for research, both by faculty and students. Also in 2012, the College re-introduced intercollegiate athletics after a 35-year hiatus. The men's basketball team won the NAIA Division I 2014-2015 national championship.

The Schwenn administration concluded in December 2014 with his retirement from the College, and Dr. Margaret Venable, provost at Gordon State College, began as Interim President in January 2015 and was appointed President in September of 2015. In the summer of 2015, the College broke ground on a new 350-bed student housing facility that opened in the fall of 2016. The newly renovated Pope Student Center reopened just in time for the fall semester in August of 2016. When Dalton State celebrated its 50th anniversary during the 2017-18 academic year, the constant themes of growth and widespread community support were just as strong as they were a half-century before. In the spring of 2018 the college broke ground on the renovation of and addition to Gignilliat Memorial Hall. The building was completed in the spring of 2019 and houses the Wright School of Business. In the spring of 2018, the College also celebrated the milestone of achieving the Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) designation. Dalton State is the first school in Georgia to earn this designation. In the fall of 2020, the College reorganized from five to four schools by consolidating the School of Liberal Arts and the School of Science, Technology, and Mathematics into the School of Arts and Sciences. The Dalton State Men's Golf Team won the NAIA National Championship in 2021.

In June of 2023, Dr. Margaret Venable retired from the College, and Dr. John Fuchko, III was appointed as Interim President in July of 2023. Dr. Fuchko's permanent appointment was announced in October of 2023. The renovated Bandy Gymnasium reopened in the fall of 2023.

In 2024, Dalton State was ranked number one in the nation for Student Experience in The Wall Street Journal/College Pulse Best Colleges in the U.S. rankings, based on student and alumni survey data relative to campus facilities, community and social life, and diversity on campus. For the second time in college history, the Dalton State Men's Golf Team won the NAIA National Championship in 2024.

Dalton State has recently received multiple significant rankings. These include: Number 1 in Georgia and Tennessee (tie) in the U.S. News and World Report 2025 Top Public Schools in the South and Number 13 in the region among 131 public and private colleges across 12 states; Number 1 in Georgia and ranked 52 nationally among public four-year institutions for net price, according to the U.S. Department of Education's Affordability and Transparency Center, reflecting that in-state tuition and fees for full-time students in 2022-23 was \$3,283—less than half of the national average tuition and fees for public four-year institutions; Top 10% best colleges in the nation for Student Experience according to The Wall Street Journal/College Pulse 2025 Best Colleges in the U.S.; and number 2 in the nation and number 1 in the South as the college most highly recommended by their students and recent alumni in both 2022 and 2023 according to The Wall Street Journal/College Pulse 2025 Best Colleges in the U.S.