

Ask Geoff University Archivist



In the new feature “Ask Geoff,” University Archivist/Campus Records Officer Geoffrey P. Williams responds to questions alumni, students and friends pose about the University at Albany.

A Colby College and University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign graduate, Williams joined the UAlbany staff in 1987. He organizes and maintains official University records, including the Alumni Memorabilia Collection, conducts tours of the UAlbany campuses and addresses alumni gatherings.

Q How many names has the University at Albany had, and what were they?

A This is a bit tricky because our current name, University at Albany, is unofficial. Here are our names, in chronological order:

- ◆ NEW YORK STATE NORMAL SCHOOL, 1844–1890
- ◆ NEW YORK STATE NORMAL COLLEGE, 1890–1914
- ◆ NEW YORK STATE COLLEGE FOR TEACHERS, 1914–1959
- ◆ STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AT ALBANY, 1959–1961
- ◆ STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE AT ALBANY, 1961–62
- ◆ STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK AT ALBANY, 1962–1987
- ◆ UNIVERSITY AT ALBANY, STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK, 1987–PRESENT

Graduates of the classes from the late 1950s and early '60s are particularly interested in the name changes during that period. A member of the Class of 1963 could have been admitted to the New York State College for Teachers, been a freshman and a sophomore when the school was the State University of New York College of Education, been a junior when it was the State

University of New York College at Albany, and graduated from the State University of New York at Albany!

Q What is a normal school?

A I get this question from every graduate when I mention that our first two names were the New York State Normal School and the New York State Normal College at Albany. The term comes from the French *école normale*, a training school for teachers where 19th-century graduates were expected to uphold and teach norms, or rules, of education. Uniformity of teaching was desperately needed in New York in the 1800s because there were no standards for the education or hiring of teachers. Albany was the fourth state normal school in the United States and our first principal, David Page, designed the curriculum that combined the study of subject matter with instruction in the norms of teaching.



The State Street building

Q Was the downtown campus the school's first location?

A It's a common misconception that the downtown, or Western Avenue, campus was our first location. In fact, it was our fourth or fifth location, depending on whether you count temporary locations. The first, from 1844–49, was at 115–121 State Street, just below the New York State Capitol. The second, from 1849–85, was two blocks farther away, on the corner of Lodge and Howard streets. From 1885–1906, the school was located at 82–96 Willett Street, on



The Willett Street building

Washington Park. After a fire destroyed the Willett Street site in January 1906, the school was relocated to Trinity Methodist Church on the corner of Lark and Lancaster streets, where it remained until 1909. In September of that year, the New York State Normal College moved to the Western Avenue campus, which then had three buildings: Science, Administration and Auditorium. The structures were renamed Husted, Draper and Hawley halls in 1927.

To see pictures of the various locations and buildings, visit <http://library.albany.edu/speccoll/campusbuildings/index.htm>.

To submit a question for “Ask Geoff,” E-mail gwilliams@uamail.albany.edu.