Metro State History: 1990 to the Present

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By 1990, Metropolitan State University had reached the milestone of 5,000 graduates. In addition to the Minneapolis and St. Paul locations, Metro State’s annual report in 1990 called for additional facilities. This resulted in the establishment of the Midway Center at Snelling Avenue and Energy Park Drive. This location housed faculty offices and additional classrooms. The School of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice was established in 1991 in collaboration with Minneapolis Community and Technical College (MCTC).

By 1992, the move to the Dayton’s Bluff campus was complete, with administrative staff moving from their location in downtown St. Paul to the Dayton’s Bluff site. 1994 marked several noteworthy events: the New Main building opened; graduate programs in nursing and business administration were added; and the number of graduates from Metro State reached 10,000.

With these accomplishments came some due rewards. In 1995, for its continuing focus on improving teaching, Metro State received the Hesburgh Award. Then, in 1997, to recognize the 25th anniversary of this “Grand Experiment,” Metro State celebrated by conducting 25 community projects. For this the institution received a Quality of Life award from the Greater Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce.

1997 was also the year that Minnesota Planning, a public policy group, called for the reorganization of Minnesota’s public higher education system, including the realignment of the state’s four-year colleges. Focusing on Metro State, the report stated, “Metropolitan State University is in transition from a nontraditional institution [...] to a more traditional four-year institution.” The report also added that “Metropolitan State University’s expansion is a response to the shortage of public four-year universities in the rapidly growing Twin Cities area.”

Proof of this could be seen in the State Legislature’s request, in 1998, for Metro State to begin admitting freshman students. The school was perceptibly progressing toward a more traditional role in the educational landscape.

1998 was the year that Nancy Black was named Minnesota Professor of the Year. It was also the year when Dr. Reatha Clark King, the former president of Metro State received the university’s first honorary degree. With President Cole’s departure in 1998, the end of the decade — and millennium — witnessed a change in leadership, with the appointing of Dr. Wilson Bradshaw as Metro State’s fifth president in 2000.

In 2002, St. Paul Mayor Randy Kelly received Metro State’s second honorary degree. This recognized his support of the new Library and Information Access Center, which, after years of being mired in legislative bureaucracy, was finally under construction on the Dayton’s Bluff campus.

The library opened in 2004, which was also the year Metro State reached 20,000 graduates. Some of these included the first graduates of the Masters of Arts in Psychology program. That same year, the HealthPartners Simulation Center for Patient Safety opened at Metro State, the first of its kind in Minnesota.

In 2008, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching awarded its Community Engagement Classification to Metro State, recognizing the institution’s consistent investment in the integration of learning.

2008 also witnessed the appointment of Dr. Sue K. Hammersmith as Metro State’s sixth president; and also plans for another move. Receiving a bond from the State Legislature, Metro State and MCTC collaborated with Hennepin Technical College (HTC) to build a new Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice Education Center. Construction began at the HTC’s Brooklyn Park campus in 2009 and was completed the following year. 2009 also saw the first nursing doctorate graduates earning Doctor of Nursing Practice degrees.

By the year 2010, of all those enrolled at Metro State, 31.9% were students of color; this was up from just 7 percent in 1990. 2010 was also when Metro State celebrated its 30,000th graduate. In 2011, the St. John’s Hall expansion was completed, replacing the last remaining structure of the old St John’s Hospital.

2011 also witnessed Metro State’s first graduates of the Advanced Dental Therapy program. These graduates received their clinical training at Normandale Community College in Bloomington through a collaborative effort with Metro State. Later that same year, a second clinic was added with the completion of Metro State’s Advanced Dental Therapy Clinic in Maplewood. Nowadays, with the two schools’ joint effort still in place, students rotate between both clinics.

In 2015, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching once again awarded Metro State with its Community Engagement Classification. Metro State was one of only five schools in the state to be reclassified for this award. Responding in a press release, Metro State Interim President, Devinder Malhotra, stated, “As we’ve grown as a public, urban university to meet the challenges and opportunities of the region, we’ve remained focused on being woven into, rather than merely built within, the Twin Cities communities we serve. I am honored and humbled by the work that our students, faculty, staff and community partners have done in partnership to merit this recognition.”

These days, Metro State is a vital, thriving aspect of the community and the Twin Cities as a whole. Student enrollment of over 11,000, more than 50 majors offered, as well as master’s and doctoral programs, are all reflections of Metro State’s growth. The school’s recent building additions are also proof.

The new multi-level parking ramp is now open, along with the new Student Center next door. According to Interim Director of Student Development and Programming, Phil Fuehrer, the center contains a suite of offices for student organizations; multiple study rooms (one with a play area for kids); a fitness room; a student lounge; and an on-site dining service, with plans for a chosen vendor by the end of March. The new Science Education Center — across the new South skyway — is also up and running; classes started in the building at the beginning of spring semester.

All of these milestones point to a bright future for Metro State, built on a rich, robust past. When asked about a fond memory of the school’s early days, Professor of Psychology, Susan Rydell, recalled speaking at Metro State’s first graduation when President David Sweet surprisingly asked her to say a few words to the graduates: “As a child growing up in New York City, ‘Non scholae sed vitae discimus’ was the motto of the school I attended,” Rydell said, as part of her speech. Reflecting on this, she explained, “This is Latin for ‘Not for school, but for life we learn.’ I never really knew what that meant until years later, after I came to Metro State.”