

# 90 Years of Education — A Timeline

By Centralia College | Posted: Friday, December 25, 2015 7:12 pm

**1925** – Founded by Centralia superintendent of schools, C.L. Littel, Centralia Junior College opens its doors on Sept. 14 on the third floor of Centralia High School. There are 15 students and six teachers. No tuition is charged.

**1927** – The first graduating class of five students all transfer to the University of Washington.

**1929** – Enrollment reaches 133 students. There are a dozen part-time teachers dividing their duties between the high school and college. Courses offered include: business administration, journalism, fisheries, fine arts, science, pharmacy, engineering, psychology, zoology, physiology, evolution and eugenics, sociology, ethics, political science, argumentation, calculus, analytical geometry, liberal arts, German, French and Spanish. Tuition rises to \$110 a year.

**1932** – Katharine Kemp joins the faculty, teaching English, business English, psychology, German, French and Spanish. She will also serve as dean of women for the next 37 years, ruling over Centralia College students and teachers with “her wit, wisdom, regal bearing ... and charm.”

**1933** – As a result of the Great Depression, enrollment drops to 57. Banks close, leaving the college and staff without access to money to pay the bills. In an act reminiscent of the climactic scene from “It’s a Wonderful Life,” Dean Margaret Corbet visits each staff member and asks, “What is the least amount of money you can live on this month?” Thanks to the sacrifices of the staff as well as the committed business leaders in Centralia who act as guarantors and loan the college money from their own limited funds, the school has enough to scrape by.

**1936** – Paul Ferguson steps in as the fourth college president. He will serve the college for the next dozen years. The 62 guarantors who loaned the college money see it all repaid. The faculty members also receive their back pay.

**1940** – The first night class, a carpentry course, is held. Soon evening courses in blueprint reading, shop math and first aid will be offered. An evening square dance class is taught by Superintendent Bloom. In 1940, the average salary is \$1,900, and a house costs about \$6,550, a car \$800, and gas only 18 cents per gallon.

**1941** – The state adopts legislation making junior colleges part of the public school system, providing funds of \$75 per student. Centralia College passes its savings to students, reducing tuition from \$45 to \$30 per quarter. Because the college still shares space with Centralia High School, all the teachers teach both high school and college

courses, often sharing rooms and equipment. The teachers do not have offices or classrooms of their own. In spite of the challenges, "there was a great amount of cooperation between the high school and the college," remembers Minnie Lingreen, history teacher.

**1942** – With America's launch into World War II, the college offers courses such as a civilian pilot training program, training courses for radio technicians, and the ground school training program for Navy pilots, specifically to aid in the U.S. war effort. The college also urges students to enlist in the military reserves and continue their education until called into active service. Students and faculty members buy war stamps and bonds, give blood, and staff an observation post in the middle of Noble Field to watch for potential enemy planes. Rufus Kiser arrives to teach botany and zoology and will soon establish a forestry program.

**1945** – Enrollment plummets to 29 students. "In the '30s we had students and no money. In the '40s we had money and no students," said Kemp. When Corbet and Kemp meet with State Superintendent of Public Instruction Pearl Wanamaker, she tells them, "Whatever you do, keep the doors open!"

**1947** – In the post war era, soldiers return to school with help from the GI bill. Enrollment surges to 229. The college erects two temporary government surplus buildings, adding to the space already shared with the high school. One, dubbed Blazer Hall, serves as a recreation hall/student union building and the other a science building with chemistry lab.

**1949** – A 7.1 earthquake damages the college buildings, but classes continue. After 25 years as dean, Margaret Corbet retires. Dean Willys Folsom takes the reins.

**1950** – Centralia College moves out of the high school building and into Kemp Hall, a newly erected 50,000-square-foot brick and tile building on West Locust Street. The \$200,000 facility features six classrooms, two science labs, offices, a faculty lounge, publications room, and a lab lecture room. Other buildings — two churches and the war surplus buildings — housed the music department, library and student center.

**1953** –The first college library, located in the little white-frame church at the northeast end of campus, opens with 1,256 books.

**1954** – In response to the need for practical nurse training programs following World War II, the college launches its own nursing program, directed by Betty Lou Crampton.

**1955** – The college offers a variety of community programs, including classes in fly tying, folk dancing, public speaking, home carpentry, upholstery repair, intermediate square dance and fishing. An English class in the evening helps immigrants prepare for citizenship.

**1957** – The district remodels the old Lincoln Elementary, renaming it Corbet Hall in honor of Margaret Corbet, first college dean. The building serves the athletic, business and secretarial science departments and provides offices for school district administrators.

**1958** – Students purchase and paint buses to transport those from the Olympia area to and from Centralia. A new \$218,000 science-engineering building, Ehret Hall, is erected on the west end of campus. Football is dropped due to financial concerns. George Gablehouse begins his career as basketball and baseball coach, emphasizing the importance of teamwork: “Everyone has to belong to a team. You can’t be an individual. If you are an individual, the team suffers.”

**1959** – Centralia Junior College drops the ‘junior’ and officially becomes Centralia College.

**1963** – With enrollment now over 1,000, a new \$700,000 library and student center is constructed with seating for 252 and shelf room for 34,000 books. “We were getting new buildings, more students. You could live on the salary and might raise a family. So things were good,” recalls drama instructor Phillip Wickstrom. Students showcase artistic talent during the first May MAD Week — five days filled with music, art and drama exhibitions.

**1966** – Centralia College names its first college president, Nels Hanson. Until that point, the college was under the direct leadership of the school district superintendent. With the approval of the controversial Community College Act of 1967, control of the community college officially switches from the local school district to governance by Community College District 12.

**1968** – Centralia College launches a three-year farm management program, helping farmers better manage their agricultural enterprises.

**1969** –The college purchases the old Centralia High School building, the gymnasium, a home economics building and shop, and Noble Field from the school district, doubling the size of the college campus to 12 acres. The old high school, grandstands and old Lincoln Grade School are demolished to make room for more parking and new buildings, including Corbet Hall.

**1970s** – Several guest speakers from differing viewpoints are invited to address contemporary and often controversial issues of the day such as peaceful dissent, war, politics, abortion, “The Jesus People,” civil rights, the feminist movement, unidentified flying objects, women’s jobs and other radical issues.

**1970s** – A small group of hippies begins a “free university” on campus in which they have no registrations, no regulations and teach their own classes — primarily about anti-administration. Although the campus tolerates it for a while, the free university

doesn't last long.

**1975** – The college begins providing services for offenders through the Garret Heyns Educational Center at the Washington State Corrections Center in Shelton.

**1981** – The college starts providing distance courses. The first telenet class uses microphones, speakers and the telephone system to teach communications students in Randle and Morton.

**1982** – The new 30,000 square-foot vocational-technical building on King Street is erected, housing the diesel technology, welding and industrial machine maintenance programs.

**1983** – The East County Center opens in Morton around the same time that the local timber industry tanks, providing retraining for several loggers, millworkers and others who are displaced. In just one year, enrollment doubles from 16 to 37 students.

**1986** – Hank Kirk, newly appointed president of Centralia College, works to rebuild the institution and its reputation. During his tenure, he oversees construction of the library, computer center and Washington Hall. He highlights the school's rich history by repeating the distinctive tagline: "Centralia College is the oldest and continuously operating two-year public college in the state of Washington."

**1988** – After some controversy, Centralia College and the Olympia campus (now called South Puget Sound Community College) split and become two separate colleges in separate districts.

**1990** – A pedestrian mall is created on campus. The new 27,500-square-foot library building, designed to serve as library, counseling and career center, bookstore, registration and financial aid office, and Learning Assistance Resource Center is completed. The building is later renamed Kirk Library in 2002 to honor former President Kirk after his retirement.

**1992** – Centralia College begins offering the Running Start program, giving high school students a chance to take college-level classes.

**1993** – The Cornelia Van Prooyen Child Development Center is dedicated, serving 105 children and 170 parents daily, providing parenting classes and daycare for the children of college students.

**1997** – The Centralia College Clocktower Diversity Project is installed, honoring Northwest individuals and groups who have made significant contributions to the history, community or culture of the Northwest or have distinguished themselves in their chosen fields.

**2002** – James Walton takes the reins as Centralia College president. Walton introduces the weekly Lyceum and moves commencement outdoors. City University partners with Centralia College to bring its bachelor of arts degree in education program to Lewis County.

**2003** – “The Twelve Labors of Hercules,” the controversial Spafford murals that were removed from the State Capitol, are installed and displayed inside the new Corbet Theatre.

**2004** – Centralia College is chosen as home of the Pacific Northwest Center of Excellence for Clean Energy, providing training in energy programs for community and four-year colleges throughout the Pacific Northwest. A two-year associate of technical arts degree is created.

**2005** – The college begins hosting the Seattle to Portland Midpoint, offering STP cyclists food, entertainment, amenities and overnight accommodations.

**2008** – The gymnasium, built in 1935 and the oldest building on campus, gets a facelift and a new name. The expanded Health and Wellness Center now includes classrooms and training facilities. The gymnasium is renovated and dedicated as the Michael D. Smith & Family gym. The court is later dedicated in 2013 as Watterson Court.

**2009** – The nursing program obtains full accreditation for the registered nurse program. The new science building (later named Walton Science Center in 2014 after retiring President James Walton) is constructed, replacing three of the campus’s oldest buildings — Ehret Hall, Batie Science Center and Lingreen Hall. The impressive L-shaped building houses the science and nursing programs, biology and chemistry labs, botany greenhouse, the bachelor’s degree program, and faculty and administrative offices.

**2012** – The Kiser Natural Outdoor Learning Lab (KNOLL) is created across from the science center. The park-like learning lab contains samples of native plants and rocks from different parts of the state. A new veteran’s monument is unveiled at the flag plaza where commemorative services are held on Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

**2014** – Robert Frost begins his term as Centralia College president. He is later fired at the end of 2015.

**2015** – Construction on the new TransAlta Student Commons begins. The building, which will serve as a student center for the campus, will feature a multi-purpose room, a planetarium, bookstore, food services, a student-run café, student government offices, a multicultural center, welcome desk and conference rooms.

**2015** — Robert Frost terminated as college president.