

Early History

It can be argued that this story actually started in 1812 in France. In that year, DuPont de Nemours published his study of education in the 36-year-old United States, *National Education in the United States of America*, reprinted in 1923 by the University of Delaware Press. A section addresses placement of colleges:

“Circumstances must decide whether there should be a college for each county or for two counties or for three. That should depend on the population and the wealth, (and) somewhat on the topographical situation.”

That was exactly what was being considered in the middle 1950s when the idea of conveniently located colleges began to develop, and the 19th century de Nemours observation was printed following the acknowledgements in *The Community Junior College in Florida’s Future*, the official title of the Master Plan.

In a *Tallahassee Democrat* newspaper clipping dated November 2, 1956, State School Superintendent Tom Bailey said Florida should expand the junior college system before building “too many universities.” He said after completion of a new college in Hillsborough County “we can take a new look in a few years to determine the direction we are to move.”

Although the short article did not directly concern the college that would open in Tallahassee, Bailey told his audience future colleges would be built on a “priority” basis. When the Master Plan was approved the following year, Leon County found itself at Priority Four, the lowest level, an affront which had the effect of energizing local interest.

“We make no estimate of the time within which the total plan may be fully accomplished. That must depend upon local readiness for community college work and the financial ability of the state,” said Allen C. Grazier, chairman, Community College Council, in a foreword in the Master Plan.

A local movement, influenced by what leaders were seeing in other communities, began to take shape. It was time to start planning for Tallahassee and the surrounding area to have its own college.

“From the get-go, the community wanted a junior college,” said Mallory Horne, chairman of the Citizens Advisory Committee, a group formed around 1963 to study the need for a junior college and subsequently urged that one be established in Tallahassee.

“It was a growing momentum in the state and began to rival the universities in the Legislature because there was one (a junior college), or could be one, in almost every Senate district. Politically, the junior college movement had a bigger clout.”

Horne is the only Floridian since 1864 to serve both as Speaker of the House and Senate President. He recalled the first discussions about junior colleges came as he entered his term as Speaker in 1962 and working with Governor Farris Bryant, in whose administration (1961-65) five junior colleges opened.

“It was a lot more complicated than you might think,” Horne said. “Some junior colleges even opposed (new colleges) out of pure jealousy. Some in other parts of the state said it was too

much of a pie for them to contemplate—Tallahassee having two universities and state government *and* a junior college.”

Expansion of the system was inevitable, he said, because “you had a new mushrooming group of students who had trouble going directly into a university.”

In an explosion of growth, three new colleges opened in 1962, two more in 1964, one in 1965 and four in 1966, including Tallahassee Junior College.

While Gov. Bryant is credited with completing the system, Gov. LeRoy Collins is considered the “father” of the Florida system, a man whose memory continues as a guiding spirit. Ten colleges opened during his time as Governor, 1955-61.

“There has been no service of our state that I have followed over the years and with greater pride than that of our Florida community colleges... Nor is there any such service that I look forward to with more confidence and hope for the unfolding future,” Gov. Collins said in 1990. He died March 12, 1991.

In a ceremony in 1999, the Preparing Leaders for Public Service Program, operated through the Division of History and Social Sciences at TCC, was named for Collins.

The first known unofficial discussion to obtain a junior college in Tallahassee, the first spark to ignite interest, came during the quiet moments of a fishing trip in 1963. Just two men in a boat, Tallahasseean Louis Hill, a member of the Leon County Board of Public Instruction and later a member of the State Junior College Board, and Florida State University President Gordon Blackwell.

Hill recalls the conversation: “Gordon said, ‘Lou, why don’t you get a junior college?’ I said, ‘I thought it would compete.’ ‘No, you ought to have one,’ he said.”

Hill brought it up at the next school board meeting. “They took it and ran with it,” he said.

On January 21, 1964, an official request to conduct a survey to determine the need for a junior college was made to the SJC Board by the school superintendents of Leon, Wakulla and Gadsden counties. Authorization to conduct a survey followed quickly and by October 26 the SJC Board recommended Priority One status based upon the survey. On November 24, the Cabinet, meeting as the State Board of Education, approved Priority One status and authorized the request to organize a junior college in Leon County to serve Leon and Wakulla counties.

But what about Gadsden County? It wasn’t until March 9, 1966, about seven months before the College opened, that the Gadsden County Board of Public Instruction voted to accept the invitation of the Leon County board to participate with Leon and Wakulla “in the development and operation of the new junior college in Tallahassee.” The delay was attributed to consideration of interest in developing a Gadsden County junior college.

As early as 1962, Gadsden officials knew they faced an uphill battle in getting state approval for a junior college in their county. In a letter to Gadsden Superintendent M. D. Walker that year, Dr. James L. Wattenbarger, executive director, State Junior College Board, and director, Division of Community Junior Colleges, outlined the exacting steps required to obtain approval. The state was rapidly building a junior college system within easy commuting distance of 99 percent of the population, and, by that standard, it was clear larger metropolitan areas would stand a better chance for approval. Dr. Wattenbarger added that the Board had placed

Gadsden County in an area “which also includes Leon County,” not what promoters of a Gadsden college wanted to hear.

At the September 15, 1964, meeting of the Junior College Board, Leon County was prepared to submit its preferred site west of Tallahassee, but Mitchell Drew, chairman of the Gadsden group seeking a college, argued that Leon County already had two universities, Lively Vocational-Technical School, the W.T. Edwards Hospital and was the center of state government. Board Chairman Fred Kent of Jacksonville said that would not be a consideration and postponed further action until the counties agreed on a single location.

Dr. Wattenbarger wrote Superintendent Walker on November 2 to report the awarding by the State Junior College Board of Priority One status to Leon-Wakulla, adding “The Board requested that I let you know they are hopeful that Gadsden County will be in a position to participate in the support of this junior college.”

The issue continued to simmer in a November 9 meeting of the Gadsden County Junior College Advisory Committee after Gadsden declined to join Wakulla and Leon. “It is our feeling that the students of Gadsden County justly deserve to have the benefits of a junior college available to them as they are available to students of other counties,” said an unidentified spokesman quoted in the *Gadsden County Times*. “Our withdrawal... does not mean that we do not want our children to have access to a junior college.” The article concluded by saying the door to later joining Leon and Wakulla “will remain open to our local school board.”

The survey authorized in early 1964 was published in June and substantiated the need for a community college to serve the three counties. Answered by 375 Leon, 47 Wakulla and 150 Gadsden seniors, it showed, respectively, 214, 37 and 81 would change their plans and attend a public junior college if one were located in their community or nearby. Forty-one of the respondents said they were planning to attend an out-of-state college, a fact often cited to indicate need for another local college option.

The survey was conducted by Nelle Wright Tavenner, the Director of Instruction for Leon County Schools.

“A combined junior college-area vocational technical school facility will be sought for Leon County, School Supt. Amos Godby said yesterday.” The January 8, 1964, article in the *Tallahassee Democrat* stated seeking a junior college would not hinder efforts to expand the existing Lively Vocational-Technical School.

Concurrent with the survey of high school seniors, the Leon County School Board in March authorized the purchase of 115 acres (\$172,500 at \$1,500 per acre) “for the location of the area vocational training center and a junior college.” It was a 3-2 vote, suggesting that the new college and vocational school came close to being located someplace else.

President Blackwell’s support was cited in a November 24, 1964, memo from the State Junior College Board to the State Board of Education recommending Priority One status for Leon County for a college also serving Wakulla County. The memo also cited other findings of a local survey—that in 1963, 175 students from the two counties attended junior colleges in other parts of that state, that rising university admission standards closed the door for about 600 local students, that about the same number indicated they would attend if a new college opened, and that the current potential enrollment was at least 1,200.

"I have read that the State University is not accepting any more Freshman students so am hoping the Jr. college will fill in this Fall," Mrs. I. Maute of Eau Gallie, Fla., wrote February 20, 1965, in what is the first known inquiry from a potential student. Dr. Wattenbarger wrote back with good news for Mrs. Maute (if she could wait a year) that, if the Legislature gave final approval, the new college would open in the fall of 1966 "with an estimated enrollment of 605 students." He wasn't far off in his prediction.

On July 1, 1965, Senate Bill 93, authorizing establishment of a junior college in Leon County took effect, appropriating \$30,000 to the Board of Public Instruction of Leon County for costs of organizing the college and \$301,208 for the first year of operation.

On July 6, 1965, the Leon County Board of Public Instruction requested approval from State Board of Education to proceed with organization and establishment of a college, followed two days later by the same request from Wakulla County.

On July 19, 1965, Dr. Wattenbarger requested approval to organize a junior college in Leon County to serve Leon and Wakulla counties. A few days later, at the call of Leon County Schools Superintendent Freeman Ashmore, members of the Advisory Committee met for the first time. They elected Leo Foster, Tallahassee attorney, as chairman, and A.L. Porter, former Wakulla County judge, as vice chairman. Members attending were Julian Alford, Ruth Chapman, M.M. Ashcroft and J. Edwin White of Tallahassee; Dr. W.D. North, Sr., of Panacea; and John Pigott of Medart. They named a subcommittee to review applications already received for president and to suggest qualifications for the job.

The meeting was held in the Leon County Materials Center Annex, then located at 925 Miccosukee Road, on the campus of Kate Sullivan Elementary School.

Looking back, the editors of the 1971-72 TCC Institutional Self-Study paid tribute to these early leaders: "Largely responsible for its establishment was a small group of school administrators and local citizens interested in providing additional higher educational opportunities for the young people of this area and for the community."

This small group also included Leon County School Board members W.T. Moore, Jr. (chairman), T.B. Revell, Frank Hartsfield, Louis Hill, J. D. Johnson and Allen Stiles, Jr., and Superintendents Amos P. Godby (1945-64) Freeman Ashmore (1965-73).

Those Self-Study editors could also have looked back a few more years with great appreciation for the contributions of Dr. Wattenbarger, whose Ph.D. dissertation became the Master Plan of 1957.

Because this was new territory for everyone planning the new college, it was a time for defining responsibilities. Dr. Wattenbarger and Dr. Lee Henderson, assistant division director, attended that first Advisory Committee meeting and told members that, while the Leon County School Board was legally responsible for operating the college, the State Junior College Board would look to the Advisory Committee for recommendations in the areas of personnel, curriculum, budget and buildings.

On July 20, 1965, the Florida Cabinet approved establishment of "the Leon-Wakulla Junior College."

A name is selected

One of the earliest decisions regarding the College was the choice of a name, a matter of careful consideration and some debate. "Leon-Wakulla Junior College" was the unofficial working name and it was time to decide what to really call it.

The official name, Tallahassee Junior College, was finally selected over other proposals, including Ochlockonee Junior College and Meridian Junior College.

Ochlockonee, had, in fact, been selected November 15 on a 4-0 vote of the Leon County School Board. An article in the *Tallahassee Democrat*, "Just pronounce it 'O-Clock-Nee,'" reported the vote "but not without some hearty laughs." Superintendent Ashmore reported the Advisory Committee suggested Tallahassee Junior College, Leon-Wakulla Junior College and Thomas D. Bailey Junior College. He said some in Wakulla County who called didn't want the name "Tallahassee," asking how he'd feel about naming it Crawfordville Junior College. In place of the three names, Ashmore said his staff "had been batting around several" names, including Lafayette, Apalachee and Ochlockonee, a Miccosukee name meaning "yellow water." That led to discussion of how to spell and pronounce Ochlockonee. Ashmore went to a chalkboard and wrote out O-c-h-l-o-c-k-n-e-e, without the silent o after k, the spelling said to be preferred by Georgians, not the usual Florida spelling.

The next day, Dr. Wattenbarger received numerous comments and telephone calls "objecting strenuously" to the name. In a memo to Ashmore, he said "I don't know what reactions you may have received, but, on the basis of the experience I have had, it appears that we will have to 'sell' the name in order to get it accepted." No record was found of whether either man had an attachment to the name or it was an effort to make Wakulla citizens happy by selecting a name with meaning to both counties. (The Ochlockonee River forms the Leon-Wakulla border.) At the December meeting, action was deferred "until Superintendent Ashmore receives official notice that the name of Ochlockonee is not acceptable."

Many opinions about a possible name floated around during this time and some took the trouble to make suggestions. One was Samuel E. Russell, assistant director, Technical Institute at Florida A&M University, who suggested Sabal Palm, St. Marks or Florida Highlands Junior College.

Early in 1966, the name Tallahassee Junior College was selected.

A president is chosen

Dr. Fred W. Turner, director of instructional services and the number two official in the Department of Education, was selected in September 1965 to be the first President.

"The Leon County School Board feels that we are very fortunate in securing the services of Dr. Turner for this most important position," Superintendent Ashmore wrote.

"I've never seen a man who works better with people—people of all kinds. And he gets the job done—easily, quietly, no fanfare. He just gets it done," State School Superintendent Tom Bailey was quoted in the *Tallahassee Democrat* when Dr. Turner's selection was announced.

Dr. Turner was an easy choice for Advisory Committee member John Pigott. "We felt with his experience in education (he also was a high school teacher and principal), that he would be the ideal choice for president at TJC."

“He was exceptionally thoughtful, a true ambassador for the College,” Pigott recalled. “He always made sure that the Department of Education had money for Tallahassee Junior College. I really enjoyed working with him. The pick of Fred was ideal.”

Avant brothers provide first office space

Before there were students or classrooms, there was a need to plan, to organize and to anticipate. This initial work before the college opened was done in space donated by George and David Avant, an office building bearing their family name on Park Avenue in downtown Tallahassee. Their November 9, 1965, letter to the Leon County School Board offering the space reflected the growing excitement for the new college.

“As life long residents of Tallahassee, we are proud to note the start of activities which will bring into being a Junior College for this area of the state. This educational facility will mean much to our community and will fill an urgent existing need. As a token of our delight and appreciation for the birth of this educational institution, we would like to offer you rent-free office space in the Avant Building...”

The School Board accepted the generous offer, and the building was used until September 1966. Thanks to the Avant brothers, the College received a significant financial boost even before it opened.

The first gift and first book for a future library was *Pictorial History of Florida*, presented by officials of Florida Savings and Loan Association. The gift came in late 1965 just after the School Board had named the yet-to-open new college Ochlockonee Junior College, a name that was quickly replaced by Tallahassee Junior College.

Hiring begins

The first person Dr. Turner hired was Helen Harvey, who would be his Executive Secretary and would continue in the same capacity for the two presidents who followed.

The second person he hired, in June of 1966, was Dorothy Binger, who established an accounting system and served as Director of Business Affairs for the first year.

“Space at the Avant Building was limited and was needed for work with the students; thus the first “business office” for the College operated from the basement of my home using a card table and a hand-crank adding machine,” Binger recalled.

The hiring process must have been a joy for Dr. Turner, and, for many, a timely opportunity.

“How would you like to work at a junior college,” Dr. Turner asked Dr. Archie B. Johnston, a computer consultant at the Department of Education in 1966. The recently retired Army officer had completed his master’s and doctorate in junior college administration, which Dr. Turner knew.

“Great, but we don’t have a junior college,” Dr. Johnston replied.

“Okay. Let’s start one,” Dr. Turner said.

Dr. Johnston came on board in the second year, just before the College moved to the new Appleyard Drive campus. He began as Dean of the College and later became Director of Institutional Research.

“Our educational process seems to be making some headway since the 4 percent of our students who did not indicate their sex in 1966 have now decided one way or another and all replied male or female to the latest survey,” Dr. Johnston said with characteristic humor in his Report No. 1 on Student Characteristics.

He then moved to his research, which revealed an important attribute of these early students, one that may have differentiated them somewhat from many of their university counterparts. Dr. Johnston’s research on students in 1967-68, TJC’s second year, showed 27 percent reporting no financial help from their parents and another 27 percent receiving from 1 to 25 percent help. These were independent students pretty much on their own, in other words, leading to one of Dr. Johnston’s conclusions: “We must devote our energies to the education of a serious-minded student who has a sincere desire to educationally lift his generation above that of his parents, and we are pledged to provide the opportunity and try to develop every potential for good.”

An even more significant research finding would follow. Citing several statistical comparisons, Dr. Johnston concluded his Report No. 9, “Performance of Tallahassee Junior College Students at the Florida State University,” released in August 1969, with this: “There is little doubt that our preparation is at least equivalent to that made available to FSU’s native student and we are proving our dedication to teaching.”

Throughout this history, one will find a frequently recurring theme of instructional quality and dedication of faculty paying off in terms of student success.

PHOTOGRAPHS PRIOR TO OPENING

1 Image of cover: The “blueprint” for the Florida system of community colleges was published in 1957.

2 House Speaker Mallory Horne, later Senate President, chaired the Citizens Advisory Committee that studied need for a new college in Tallahassee.

3 Governor Collins

4 Lou Hill got the ball rolling for what would become Tallahassee Community College.

4A On July 19, 1965, Dr. James L. Wattenbarger, executive director, State Junior College Board, requested approval in July 1965 to organize a junior college in Leon County.

5 Image of headline: (Cabinet Approves College)

6 Dr. Fred W. Turner, first President

7 The Avant Building at the corner of Park and Duvall in downtown Tallahassee was the site for the first administrative office for the soon-to-open Tallahassee Junior College.

7A President Fred W. Turner, center, receives first gift to the College, Pictorial History of Florida, from William B. Langley, left, and Thomas D. Bailey, president and executive vice president, respectively, of Florida Savings and Loan Association. Bailey was the former State School Superintendent. Dr. Turner was identified in the newspaper caption as president of Ochlockonee Junior College. The gift was presented in late 1965 when the yet-to-open college briefly bore that name.