

# HISTORY OF WESTERN

In the late 19th century, Gunnison was a progressive cattle and mining town establishing itself as a cultural leader on Colorado's Western Slope. Placed on the leading edge of the American frontier, Gunnison sought to establish educational programs for the citizens of the area. A bill was introduced in 1885 to establish a college; in 1901, that bill was approved by the state legislature.

This was the beginning of the Colorado State Normal School, the predecessor to what is now Western Colorado University.

The cornerstone of North Hall (now known as Taylor Hall) was placed in October 1910, becoming the first building on the Normal School's campus. The following year, the two-year teaching college welcomed its first class of 13 students, establishing the first college on the Western Slope.

In 1923, the Normal School became a four-year institution; it was renamed Western State College. Western State College was a liberal arts school designed to produce teachers for the Western Slope. In 1923, under the direction of Biology professor John C. Johnson, Ph.D., students constructed a large "W" on Tenderfoot Mountain just south of campus with rocks extending 450 feet up the mountain.

Continuing Western's impact, Johnson bought land at Gothic, a once thriving silver-mining camp 35 miles north of Gunnison, and founded the famed Rocky Mountain Biological Laboratory in 1928. Today, the lab conducts pioneering research on climate change, attracting students and professors from all over the world.

Western continued to grow through the 20th century. In the late 1940s, Mountaineer Bowl was carved out of solid rock on the side of Smelter Hill—creating the highest collegiate football stadium in the nation at 7,771 feet of elevation.

Following World War II, Western entered a new period of expansion, with a student enrollment of 3,200 in the late 1970s.

From that point onward, Western became nationally renowned. The college became known as one of the top outdoor education schools in the nation. Western athletic director Paul Wright became known as "the father of intercollegiate skiing" when he convinced the NCAA to adopt it as an official sport in 1953. Ski coach Sven Wiik became known as the "father of Nordic skiing in the U.S.," serving as the U.S. Olympic coach and turning out more than 20 Olympic skiers. In that same regard, the men's and women's cross country teams have won 12 NCAA titles and produced four Olympians.

Academically, Western has renowned programs in Environment & Sustainability, Biology, Geology, Energy Management, Exercise & Sport Science, Business and Recreation & Outdoor Education. Western also gained a graduate school, and graduate enrollment has tripled since 2010. Western achieved university status in 2012.

Western has also benefitted from many generous donations, which provided funding for several state-of-the-art facilities including the Mountaineer Field House, Borick Business Building, University Center and residence halls.

In September 2018, alumnus Paul M. Rady donated a historic \$80 million to establish the Paul M. Rady School of Computer Science & Engineering. This gift was part of a larger effort to establish a groundbreaking partnership between Western and the University of Colorado Boulder to

provide students in Gunnison with access to a high-quality Computer Science education and Mechanical Engineering education within the attentive and personal environment of a smaller university.

In 2019, Western State Colorado University's name was legally simplified to Western Colorado University—courtesy of Colorado House Bill 19-1178. In conjunction with the name simplification, which became official July 1 after Colorado Gov. Jared Polis signed the bill May 31, Western updated its seal.

According to former Western archivist Ethel Rice, the seal was initially designed to represent the qualities of competence, conscience and creativity. The sun rising over the mountains represents the Rocky Mountains, and the sun symbolizes the light of knowledge. The urn represents the ever-increasing flow of knowledge. The harp represents the fine arts. The microscope represents science. And to the right of the microscope is a quill and scroll, which represent the arts and humanities.

Around the shield are three calendar years. The founding of the United States as a nation: 1776. The founding of Colorado as a state: 1876. And the founding of Colorado State Normal School: 1901.

At the bottom of the seal in Latin: "Potestas Ad Ministrandum." Translations vary. According to Rice, a liberal translation means, "From Ability to Performance." Other Western officials have suggested that the Latin phrase translates to "Power of Service," a likely nod to the school's origins as a teachers college.

Today, Western Colorado University is an institution that is dedicated to promoting intellectual maturity and personal growth in its students. Western graduates citizens prepared to assume constructive roles in local, national and global communities.