

# A BRIEF HISTORY OF SIERRA COLLEGE

The origin of Sierra College is somewhat uncertain. Some have said that the College may have begun with the establishment of Sierra Normal College and Business Institute in 1882. It was a small, private college at the location of today's Placer High School in Auburn. Most think that Sierra College is an outgrowth of the Placer Union High School District.

In 1914, the Placer Union High School District was born, stretching from Loomis to Lake Tahoe. That same year, college-level classes were offered. The new college was named Placer Junior College. It was the fourth oldest junior college in California at the time and only one of nine statewide; the faculty numbered four.

Due to enrollment loss caused by World War I, Placer Junior College was abandoned by 1920, but the college idea never completely died. In 1936, the college was reestablished, again in Auburn, with the enthusiastic support of local voters. It is 1936 that Sierra College uses as its official date of birth.

Three wings of buildings were constructed to serve primarily Placer Junior College, but Placer High School students shared many of the facilities, instructors and organizational structure with the new college. Enrollment numbered about 100 and the college athletes went by the name "Spartans." The college grew steadily and by 1938, 200 students were enrolled.

Enrollment crested at 282 in 1939, but events quickly overtook the college in the 1940s. The 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor essentially ended enrollment by men as many went off to serve their country. Additionally, enrollment dropped significantly when Japanese-Americans were forced into internment camps. The student population dropped to 53 by 1943. The college eliminated the "Junior" from its name, becoming Placer College.

The war's end brought returning veterans, the end of internment, and the GI Bill of Rights. Enrollment in the post-war years exploded as a result. 1946 saw 467 students—about half were veterans. 856 were enrolled in 1949 and the Placer College facility was bursting at the seams. The College had reached full capacity, and efforts to find a new college location began. Area population continued to grow and the need for new facilities grew acute. In 1953, Placer College was renamed Sierra College and its athletes gained a new nickname—the "Wolverines."

In 1957, the new Sierra Junior College District successfully passed a bond measure to pay for new facilities. In 1958, a site selection committee considered thirty-five possible locations and the present Rocklin site was chosen.

By 1961, the new Rocklin campus opened and enrollment reached 1,500. In 1962, Nevada County joined Placer County in forming a huge new Sierra Junior College District, which then had more square miles—3,200—than students.

Enrollment boomed in the 1960s. By the end of the decade, Sierra College boasted 100 full-time faculty members and nine new campus buildings. Enrollment was nearly 4,000. However, as fast as new facilities could be built, they were filled. The next several decades saw significant student population growth. From 1970 to 1990, enrollment jumped from 4,000 to nearly 14,000, and, by the year 2000, the college enrolled approximately 18,000 students.

In 1996, the 105-acre Nevada County Campus was opened. Twelve locations had been considered in that county until property between Grass Valley and Nevada City was chosen.

Leased centers were opened in the Tahoe/Truckee and Roseville areas. Classes were also taught at local high schools and community centers.

In recent years, successful bond issues provided for an expansion of the Nevada County Campus and the creation of a permanent Tahoe-Truckee Campus. In 2008, the Tahoe-Truckee campus inaugurated its brand-new facilities. Located on beautiful McIver Hill next to Interstate 80, the state-of-the-art "green" campus overlooks historic Truckee. In 2008, a new Mathematics and Technology Building was constructed on the Rocklin campus.

In 2010, as the result of the passage of the voter-approved Measure G Bond in November 2004, new buildings on the Nevada County Campus opened, including a computer lab and buildings for the arts and public safety.

Sierra College continues to be in the vanguard of innovative projects. The award-winning mechatronics training program is a national leader in cutting-edge electronics and robotics.

Beyond the classroom, Sierra College operates an outstanding Natural History Museum. Specializing in evolution and paleontology, the museum is open to the public with its high-quality displays and hosts thousands of visitors annually, including attendance at the yearly Dinosaur Days event. The Sierra College Press functions as the only complete academic press operated by a community college in the United States. It often co-publishes with Heyday, an award-winning California publisher in Berkeley. The Associated Students of Sierra College (ASSC) partners with college-wide programs and student clubs to cosponsor numerous meaningful activities on campus that celebrate environment, human cultures, political awareness, gender and sexual equality, and many other important issues. Student athletes compete in numerous intercollegiate sports within the California Community College Athletic Association, the Big 8 Conference and the Northern California Football Conference. Men and women student athletes have earned eight California State Championships for Sierra.

Sierra College's outstanding academic reputation, excellent technologies and training programs, and updated facilities led to increases in student enrollment. Projections of future "for credit" enrollment top 25,000.

The Sierra Community College District includes all of Placer and Nevada Counties and part of El Dorado and Sacramento Counties. In recent years, Placer and Nevada Counties have been two of California's fastest growing areas.

The College District continues to experience dramatic growth and change. The future is bright as new technologies evolve, offering greater educational accessibility for students—both today and tomorrow.

Since its first days, the promise of Sierra College has been to provide a challenging and supportive learning environment for students having diverse goals, abilities, and needs interested in transfer, career and technical training, and lifelong learning. The College continues this mission as it adapts to meet the ever-changing needs of students.