

**Questions about University High School**  
**Robert Dean, Ph.D, Director**  
**Illinois State University Laboratory Schools**

- **When and where did University High School originate?**

When Illinois State Normal University was first established in 1857, President Charles Hovey and other leaders at the University established the Laboratory Schools to give practical classroom experience to students preparing to be teachers. President Hovey was also the first principal of the Schools.

On November 2, 1857, the Model School opened in Major's Hall in downtown Bloomington with Mary Brooks as its first teacher. The class of seven elementary students paid 50 cents per week tuition.

In 1862, high school classes began under the direction of Charles Childs in the Model School located in Old Main.

- **Why was University High School built within the University and not just a regular public school?**

In the early years, there was no distinction between the two and, technically, there was no U-High as people think of it today. In fact, when the University was established, there were no other K-12 schools in Normal for compulsory education, in which students were required to attend school, had not yet arrived on the scene. Given this historical context, the only option available for K-12 students was attending the "Normal School," or model school, established as part of the teacher education program at Illinois State Normal University (ISNU). Another public school was established for elementary students a few years later in 1867, although high school students continued to attend U-High until 1895. In 1906, the Illinois Supreme Court dissolved the relationship between the University and the local school board, ending the arrangement in which teachers from the University taught the local high school students.

- **How many locations has University High School had?**

Three that I know of: Old Main, Moulton (previously named the Thomas Metcalf Training School), and University High School.

- **When was the current location for University High School chosen, and why?**

I suspect in the early 1960s, since the school opened in 1965. At that time, the land on which U-High is located would have been the closest vacant property to the main campus. Given the teacher education mission of the schools, I'm sure that the planners wanted to ensure convenient access for University students.

- **Was the process of becoming a Pioneer different in the past? How and why has it changed?**

Prior to the time the Laboratory Schools became funded as an “other funded public school” (before 1980), U-High was more selective in its admissions process (origin of the popular myth that the schools enroll mostly children of University faculty). Before the schools received state funding, tuition was common, which also served as a selection factor. Since the early 1980s, U-High has made deliberate efforts to enroll a more diversified student population, which has proven to be a challenge. A diverse student population supports the teacher education mission of the schools. Today, only one-fifth of the students enrolled in the Laboratory Schools have parents who are employed at Illinois State University.

- **Are there any other important figures, or “pioneers” who contributed to the creation, restoration, or overall picture of what University High School is?**

Jesse Fell was influential in locating the University in Normal rather than competing locations, primarily Peoria.

Abraham Lincoln was the attorney who drew up the paperwork that established the University.

The Model School was President Edward’s particular pride. He insisted that students have instructors who were considered the best known. By the fall of 1862, total enrollment in the Model School was 153 students.

Thomas Metcalf, a long time colleague and friend of President Richard Edwards, assumed supervision of the Model School in 1874. He was instrumental in changing the focus to “Training Schools.”

John Wroan, an alumnus of U-High (Class of ’45), was the general contractor for University High School.

Countless wonderful students, teachers, and administrators who chose to be part of the Laboratory School experience.

- **Has the “typical school day” changed throughout the years? If so, how?**

The greatest change occurred when U-High became a separate school at the time the current building opened in 1965. Prior to this, high school students were more fully integrated into the life of the University, i.e., they took many of their classes with University students throughout the campus. Even in the 1960s and ‘70s, the teachers who taught in the Laboratory Schools also taught classes at the University. There was no separate group of employees known as faculty associates.

The University itself experienced significant change as well. In the mid-1950s, the student enrollment was around 3,000; in the mid-1960s, it was close to 7,000; and at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century, it was approximately 20,000. What was possible in a small university environment was not possible in a large, comprehensive institution.

In more recent times (referring to the 17 years I have been at Illinois State), I have not observed any changes comparable to the ones that occurred when the current building was opened. Students continue to have many freedoms, including an open campus, and students continue to have many educational opportunities as a result of the connection to the University. Standards have remained high and U-High students continue to be successful in many areas, e.g., academics, the arts, and athletics.

- **What sorts of problems has University High School encountered over the years?**

In 1895, the high school was closed by Governor Altgeld because of financial considerations and because the Governor felt the school was not fulfilling its greater mission. It reopened in 1909.

In 1972, a report was issued by the Board of Higher Education which led to the closing of other laboratory schools at state universities in Illinois. Metcalf and U-High were mandated to be reduced to the minimum size necessary to function as laboratory schools.

In the late 1970s, an attempt was made to close the Laboratory Schools for the same reasons that were used by Governor Altgeld in 1895, but the effort failed.

- **Why is University High School important?**

There is no substitute for practical experience in the preparation of teachers. As accountability pressures for increased student achievement continue to increase, K-12 schools will be less inclined to engage in activities that are considered outside the core mission of educating students. Thus, the Laboratory Schools will continue to be a major player in the preparation of tomorrow's teachers.

The provision of a quality education for K-12 students yields direct benefits to society. Nearly all the graduates of University High School (95 percent) enroll in a post secondary institution of one kind or another, including such prestigious institutions as Stanford, Julliard, MIT, and Harvard. These students become major contributors to society as they assume many important positions in the country's workforce.

- **What is the future for University High School?**

U-High's future lies in its past as the school will continue to thrive as long as it remains true to its mission. The Laboratory Schools – Thomas Metcalf School and University High School – have a four-fold mission: 1) teaching, 2) teacher education, 3) research, and 4) service. Although all four parts of the mission are important, excellence in teaching and the preparation of future teachers have been the dominant themes from the time the University first opened in 1857 until today.

- **Do you think the current Illinois State University budget cut will affect University High School in any way in the near future?**

Budget cuts at the University level have impacted the Laboratory Schools, but because our funding comes primarily from other sources (General State Aid and contracts with external agencies), the Laboratory Schools are impacted more by budget reductions enacted by the Illinois State Board of Education in response to funding legislation. Given that the economy is not recovering at the pace that many state officials expected, it is possible that we will not receive the amount of funding we expect for this school year. If that should happen, budget adjustments will be required.

- **What are some of the important historical dates related to University High School?**

1862 – High school classes began.

1865 – First graduating class from the high school.

1909 – The green and gold colors were chosen at an all-school assembly.

1911 – Class Night occurred for the first time.

1912 – Passing the lamp of knowledge became a tradition.

1918-1979 – Students from Illinois Soldiers and Sailors Children's School (ISSCS) attended University High School.

1929 – The U-High Crest, with its shield, cog wheel, and lamp of knowledge was adopted in a school-wide vote.

1932 – The first issue of *The Clarionette* rolled off the press.

1933 – Normal High School became University High School.

1947 – Claris Parker Jefferson wrote the words for the U-High Alma Mater.

1949 – The Pioneer mascot was officially adopted (my interpretation, there are others).

1958 – University High's first home, Old Main, was torn down.

1965 – For the first time, University High School had its own building.