

A Brief History of Columbia College Chicago

Columbia College Chicago was founded in 1890 as the Columbia School of Oratory by Mary A. Blood and Ida Morey Riley, both graduates of the Monroe Conservatory of Oratory (now Emerson College), in Boston, Massachusetts. Mary Blood became the College's first president, serving in this capacity until her death in 1927. The women established a co-educational school that "should stand for high ideals, for the teaching of expression by methods truly educational, for the gospel of good cheer, and for the building of sterling Christian good character" in the Stevens' Art Gallery Building, 24 E. Adams Street.

After the death of Ida Riley in 1901, the school changed its name to the Columbia College of Expression in 1905 and its location, Steinway Hall, 17 Van Buren Street, as the institution added coursework in teaching to the curriculum. In 1917, the institution moved to 3358 S. Michigan Avenue. In 1928, the college was incorporated into the Pestalozzi-Froebel Teachers College, a family-run school centered on training its students for teaching kindergarten and moved to 120 E. Pearson Street. In 1936, a renewed version of Columbia emerged, focusing on the growing field of radio broadcasting, at 410 S. Michigan Avenue.

In 1944, the College left its partnership with the Pestalozzi-Froebel school and changed its name to Columbia College with Norman Alexandroff as its president. During the 1950s, the College broadened its educational base to include television and other mass communication areas and moved to 207 S. Wabash. Prosperity was short lived, however, and by 1961, Columbia was a dying institution with fewer than 200 students, a part-time faculty of 25, and no endowments, subsidies or visibility.

In 1961, Mirron (Mike) Alexandroff, son of Norman Alexandroff, who worked at the school since 1947, became president, and created a liberal arts college with a "hands-on minds-on" approach to arts and media education with a progressive social agenda. He established an open-admissions policy so that any qualified high school graduate could attend college and be taught by some of the most influential and creative professionals in Chicago. For the next thirty years, Alexandroff worked to build Columbia College into an urban institution that has helped change the face of higher education. In 1964, the college moved into rented warehouse space at 540 N. Lake Shore Drive and by 1969, the college's enrollment had reached 700.

With this renewed focus on building its academic program, the institution was awarded full accreditation in 1974 from the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. In 1975, when Columbia's enrollment exceeded 2,000, the College purchased the Fairbanks Morse Building at 600 S. Michigan (currently the Alexandroff Campus Center). Classes were first held in the renovated South Michigan building in 1977. In 1984, the College received full accreditation for its graduate programs.

From 1992 until 2000, Dr. John B. Duff served as the College's president. During his tenure, Columbia College changed its name to Columbia College Chicago. Also, under his tenure, the school continued to expand its educational programs and added to its physical campus by purchasing available buildings in the

South Loop area. This played a significant part in Columbia's presence in the South Loop and downtown Chicago. Today, Columbia's campus occupies almost two dozen buildings and utilizes over 2.5 million square feet.

In 2000, Dr. Warrick L. Carter became president of Columbia College Chicago. During his tenure, more buildings have been acquired for College use. Under his leadership, Columbia continues its mission of providing a strong arts and media education. Through the vast diversity of students and graduates, the school brings a rich vision and a multiplicity of voices to American culture, encouraging students to "author the culture of their times".

Building on its heritage of creativity, innovation, and strength, Columbia College Chicago continues to challenge its nearly 13,000 students to realize their abilities according to the school's motto, "esse quam videri"—to be rather than to seem.

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