



University of Illinois Springfield

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Did You Know?

Interesting facts about Sangamon State University and the University of Illinois Springfield, arranged chronologically.

Factoids and Sidebars

The 1970s

The Spencers were the first residents in on-campus housing. Now located in the center of campus and home to the child care center, Cox House was the original President's House.

In 1973 Black Awareness Week [March 24 - 31] featured appearances by comedian Dick Gregory and author Alex Haley, sponsored by the SSU Black Student Union.



In the spring of 1971, a state senator publicly criticized Professor Gus Stevens for wearing a hat “in the presence of ladies.” In response, Stevens organized the [campus’ first “Floppy Hat Day,”](#) at which members of the campus community, including President Spencer, wore floppy hats – the more outrageous the better. Stevens commented: “It’s not what we wear, but what’s under our hats that counts.”

Some “firsts” from the ‘70s

- ❖ First degrees awarded - December 1971 (But the first commencement ceremony wasn't held until June 1972, with speakers including US Sen. Adlai E. Stevenson.)
- ❖ Public Affairs Reporting program established by former Lt. Gov. Paul Simon - 1972 (Simon left SSU to enter Congress and was a candidate for President in 1988.)
- ❖ Illinois Issues magazine began publication and public radio station WSSR (now WUIS) signed on the air – January 1975
- ❖ Brookens Library, first permanent building on campus, dedicated - May 1976

In January 1973 The People's Place, located on S. 6th St. next to the Capital Campus, was opened to provide evening and weekend fellowship for students. It provided a venue for student entertainers, faculty-led poetry readings and folk music programs, as well as “rap sessions with local officials, church people, and social service workers.” Special programs included Monday morning “growth groups.”

In March, People's Place coordinator H. Brent DeLand reported to President Spencer on the first three months of the project. DeLand noted, "I foresee being a vital resource of human energy.... We hope to organize special interest groups such as a theology study group, artist groups, etc., as student interest in such groups materializes."

For all this, DeLand's projected annual operating budget for September 1, 1973, to August 31, 1974, was \$5,977.

In the late summer of 1973, James McCord and Richard Kleindienst, two men who figured prominently in Watergate, spoke at Sangamon State University on two consecutive evenings.

At the time, Watergate burglar McCord faced a possible 45-year prison sentence. He discussed the reasons for his involvement in the break-in and his eventual revelation of cover-up attempts, and touted his upcoming book, "Watergate Sanctions," which chronicled Watergate from his viewpoint. Former U.S. Attorney General Kleindienst had testified before the Watergate Committee just weeks earlier, telling them that he

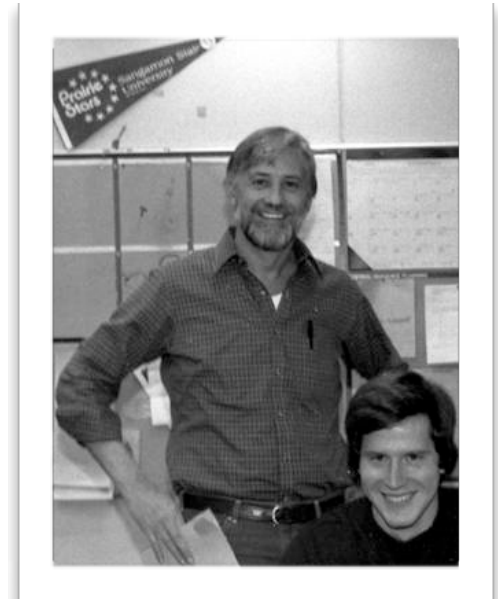
wept at hearing how many of his close friends and high administration officials were involved.

The 1980s

The campus public radio station began life as WSSR (for Sangamon State Radio). The call letters “WSSU” were being used by a station in Wisconsin and didn’t become available until 1989.

The 1990s

On January 25, 1994, the computer sciences program demonstrated two electronic mail programs being considered for use on the university’s local area network. In addition, Bill Rogers, assistant director of academic computing, gave a short demonstration on “The Internet.”



When the White House Millennium Lecture Series was presented in the spring of 1998, UIS hosted the only live broadcast link for these unique events in the entire state. The presentations were broadcast directly from the White House East Room, with President and Mrs. Clinton presiding. Three lectures were presented: one by historian Bernard Bailyn, one by physicist Stephen Hawking, and one by poets laureate Robert Pinsky, Robert Hass and Rita Dove.

UIS astronomy professor Charles Schweighauser, who had developed and hosted the campus’ free (and extremely popular) public Star Parties for decades, [designed the first telescope in the world specially made for people who use wheelchairs](#). Unveiled March 24, 1998, the telescope was the subject of an article in the July issue of the national magazine *Sky & Telescope*, as well as the December issue of *Photonics Spectra* - an international journal of optics, lasers, imaging, fiber optics, electro-optics, and optoelectronics.

UIS offered its first complete online degree programs in 1999. The master's degree program in management information systems was available completely online that spring, and the bachelor's program in liberal studies followed suit that summer. That fall, UIS offered more technology-based courses, both broadcast television (7) and online (21), than ever before.

After 20 years at Sangamon State, first as a charter student and later as program administrative assistant in Academic Affairs, Becky Veach left SSU and moved to Chicago in July 1990. On her last day at SSU, Veach shared some thoughts about her experiences on campus:

“In the past 20 years, some basic things haven't changed – the sense of informality, for one. There was a conscious effort in that first year to make everything very egalitarian and that hasn't changed much.

“That first year we had the sense that anything was possible and everything we did was so important. We were doing everything for the very first time. We were literally setting the agenda for the future of the university. I remember one of the things that we really worried about was how to deal with anti-war protesters. The movement was very big then, and we supported it, but at the same time we weren't certain how we should handle things if, say, they seized the administration building. Of course that never materialized, we never attracted those wild-eye radicals. I'm sure people in Springfield were convinced we were all wild-eye radicals out here. Actually it was a pretty tame place, but it was fun, and always interesting.”

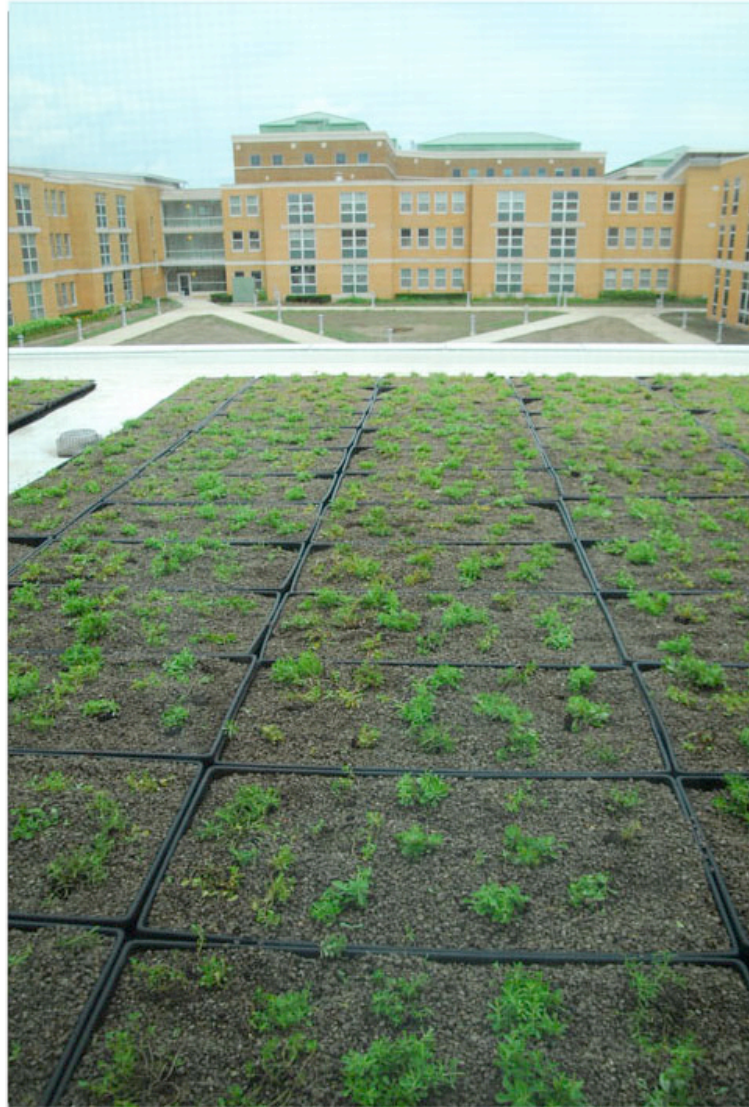


First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton's daylong visit to Springfield on April 25, 1996, concluded with brief remarks in Sangamon Auditorium. Given only two days notice that Mrs. Clinton would be speaking at UIS, the campus kicked into high gear, working with her advance team to make sure everything went smoothly. The following day the White House called again, this time to say thanks. "Her day in Springfield was one of the best she has had in years," said White House staff member Greg Hicks, who had accompanied the First Lady on her trip.

Still flushed with success after gaining approval for Capital Scholars, UIS joined the rest of the world in drafting [Y2K contingency plans](#) to address whatever chaos might befall as the new millennium dawned.

The 2000s

UIS alumna Dana Perino became White House Press Secretary to President George W. Bush in 2007; she had served as Deputy White House Press Secretary since 2006. Perino graduated from UIS in 1995 with a master's degree in Public Affairs Reporting.



When Founders Hall was still in the planning phase, the campus was also stepping up its efforts to become environmentally friendly. Accordingly, in September 2007 the BOT was asked for and approved an increase in construction costs of more than \$250,000 to cover the [installation of a green \(grass\) roof](#), one of the first in the area. The higher cost was expected to be offset by significant energy savings over time.