



# Xavier University of Louisiana

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## History

There are **102 historically Black** colleges and **253 Catholic** colleges in the United States, yet only **one** is both **Black and Catholic**. That distinction belongs to Xavier University of Louisiana, which strives to combine the best attributes of both its faith and its culture.

Located in New Orleans, the small liberal arts college dates back to 1915, when St. Katharine Drexel and the [Sisters of the Blessed Sacrament](#) founded the coeducational secondary school from which it evolved. St. Katharine, supported by the interest of a substantial inheritance from her father, banker-financier Francis Drexel, founded and staffed many institutions throughout the U.S. in an effort to help educate Native Americans and Blacks. She was canonized by Pope John Paul II in October, 2000.

Aware of the serious lack of Catholic-oriented education available to young Blacks in the South, St. Katharine came to New Orleans and established a high school on the site previously occupied by Southern University. A Normal School, offering one of the few career fields (teaching) open to Blacks at the time, was added two years later. In 1925 Xavier University became a reality when the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences was established. The first degrees were awarded three years later. In 1927, a College of Pharmacy was opened.



Recognizing the University's need for a separate identity and room to expand, St. Katharine bought a tract of undeveloped land for a campus on the corner of Palmetto and Pine Streets in 1929. Construction of the U-shaped, gothic administration building (now a city landmark) was completed in 1933.

Through the years, as needs dictated, the campus gradually filled out, with the addition of a library-- which now houses music-- in 1937, the gymnasium (1937), St. Michael's men's dormitory (1955), the Student Center (1962), St. Joseph's (1965) and Katharine Drexel (1969) women's dormitories, the House of Studies (1967), the College of Pharmacy (1970), the Norman C. Francis Academic/Science Complex (1988), the new Library/Resource Center and College of Pharmacy addition (1993), and Peter Claver women's dormitory (1994). Xavier South, a multi-story office building, was purchased in 1990. A new residence hall (the Living/Learning Center) and the science complex addition have both been added within the last two years.

The Sisters remain a vital presence on campus today, providing much-needed staffing and some financial assistance, but today Xavier is governed by a bi-racial Board of Trustees. Xavier's president, Dr. Norman C. Francis, himself a Xavier graduate, is a nationally-recognized leader in higher education.

Even with its special mission to serve the Black, Catholic community Xavier's doors have always been open to qualified students of any race or creed. In fact today, more than 50 percent of Xavier's students are of other religious affiliations, and close to 10 percent are of other races.

Recent years have seen a growing influx of out-of-state students, yet one-half of Xavier's 3,820 students are from the New Orleans area. The balance represents some 40 states and 20 foreign countries.

Since 1986, total undergraduate enrollment has nearly doubled.

### Notable Alumni

**Alvin J. Boutte '51** The founder and CEO of Indecorp, the largest Black-owned financial institution in the U.S. Also serves as chair and CEO of the Independence Bank and the Drexel National Bank in Chicago, Ill.

**General Bernard Randolph (retired, USAF) '54** Only the third African-American to reach the rank of four-star general in any branch of the U.S. Armed Forces, serving as head of the USAF Space and Defense Systems Command. Now an executive with the defense contractor TRW Corporation.

**Dr. Charles Champion '55** A community pharmacist in Memphis, Tenn., and a specialist in the use of herbal medicines. Named as one of America's 50 most influential pharmacists by American Druggist magazine.

**Annabelle Bernard '56** The first Black to perform as a principle player with the Deutsche Oper in Berlin, Germany. Thirty-four years later she is still performing in Europe, and has been awarded the highly coveted title of Kammersaengerin by the German government. A soprano, she has performed on five continents.

**George McKenna III '61** Currently serving as superintendent of the Inglewood Unified School District in Los Angeles, Calif. While serving as principal at Washington High in Los Angeles, he turned a "bad" urban school in a educational model of excellence, the basis for the TV movie "The George McKenna Story," starring Denzel Washington.

**Dr. Marie McDemmond '68** First female president at Norfolk State University (enrollment 8,400). A 25-year veteran in higher education, she previously served as vice president for finance and chief operating officer at Florida Atlantic University.

**Dr. Louis Castenell '68** Dean of the University of Cincinnati's College of Education. Has been heralded in such national publications as The New York Times and The Washington Post for his innovative teacher education programs.

**Alexis Herman '69** First African American U.S. Secretary of Labor; former director of the White House office of Public Liaison.

**Judge Ivan L.R. Lemelle '71** Currently serving his second consecutive, eight-year term as U.S. Magistrate Judge, U.S. District Court in New Orleans.

**Dr. Regina Benjamin '79** Private physician in Bayou La Batre, Ala. Winner of the 1997 Nelson Mandela Award for Health and Human Rights. First African American woman named to the American Medical Association's Board of Trustees.

**Sherrie Brown Littlejohn '79** Vice President and chief information officer for SBC Messaging in Ramon, Calif., a telecommunications subsidiary of voice mail service provider SBC Communications.

**Rosalind Miller '88** Director of the J.B. Henderson Family Investment Center in New Iberia, La., which provides services for residents of the area's three low-income housing developments.

**Patrice Jean '93** Graduate student at Princeton University, where she was honored as an "Unsung Heroine" for her demonstrated commitment to social justice and academic excellence. Also presented Graduate Student Teaching Award for effectiveness in teaching molecular biology.