

History of the College

Meredith College's rich history dates back to 1835, when Thomas Meredith conceived the idea of a university for women. Though such an idea was uncommon at the time, Meredith was a vocal advocate for women's education and persisted in his call for the creation of an institution to provide "a first-rate course of female education."

Decades later, the North Carolina legislature issued a charter in 1891 for the Baptist Female University, which became the Baptist University for Women in 1905, and finally Meredith College in 1909, when the institution was renamed in honor of the leader whose dedication helped make it a reality.

The College opened in downtown Raleigh on September 27, 1899. First-year enrollment reached 220 students taught by 19 faculty and staff. The first class graduated three years later when ten women – known as the Immortal Ten – received their degrees in 1902.

Over the course of 131 years, Meredith has experienced tremendous growth and many changes. In 1926, the institution moved from its original, downtown location to the current 225-acre campus in west Raleigh to accommodate its continued expansion.

Meredith restored master's degree programs in 1983, after the original graduate programs were removed when the state approved the College's revised charter in 1911. In 1988, the Graduate Studies Program at Meredith was named the John E. Weems Graduate School in honor of Meredith's sixth president. Today, the school offers advanced degrees to both women and men.

In 1997, Meredith's Board of Trustees voted to formally redefine the College's relationship with the Baptist State Convention and become independent. As a self-governing institution, Meredith College maintains its independence, identity, and integrity.

Today, Meredith graduates nearly 500 students each year who come from 33 states and 39 countries. The College's eighth president, Jo Allen, '80, is the first alumna to hold the office. Through growth and change, Meredith has maintained its vision and remained committed to its values. As a result, Meredith students and its network of 24,000 alumnae are still going strong.