

NEWS

FSU College of Medicine will mark its 20th anniversary in virtual celebration

“It’s remarkable to look at its legacy ... and see how far it has come as an institution,” the school’s dean said.

Byron Dobson Tallahassee Democrat

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Florida State University’s College of Medicine is being recognized by INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine as a recipient of the 2020 Health Professions Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award.

The College of Medicine, in Tallahassee, is but one of 46 health-professions programs in the country being honored, and this year marks the fourth consecutive year it has landed the coveted award.

This latest award and other accolades are certain to get a mention Friday evening as the college celebrates its 20th anniversary with a virtual celebration. It begins at 7 p.m.

“This medical school was created with a goal of helping to meet health care needs in communities that have traditionally struggled to provide adequate access to care,” College of Medicine Dean John P. Fogarty said in a news release.

“As we are celebrating our 20th anniversary, this award affirms that we are true to our mission and we are succeeding in producing the physicians Florida – as well as the rest of the U.S. – needs most. That includes our record of producing numerous alumni who now practice in rural parts of the state, especially in Northwest Florida.”

A history of training

The college – located on the western edge of campus - was established in 2000 by the Florida Legislature, and accepted its first class of 30 students in 2001. It was the first new medical school in the nation in more than 20 years.

It has since graduated more than 1,500 physicians, physician assistants and doctoral students who now work throughout the state and across the country.

The actual training of future physicians started years before the university's own medical school was given birth.

In 1970, the university enrolled the first students in its Program in Medical Sciences, commonly known as PIMS. The program was a collaboration with the University of Florida's College of Medicine.

Under that arrangement, students took their first year of courses at FSU and transferred to the University of Florida to complete their studies.

It proved to truly be a collaborative arrangement among Tallahassee's academic expertise, as faculty at Florida A&M University – which was a partner in the PIMS program – taught pharmacology classes, according to the college.

PIMS was funded by a National Institutes of Health grant and was designed to meet the need for more physicians in rural Northwest Florida. That vision is central to the college's mission today of training healthcare professionals who will serve elder, rural, minority and underserved populations.

Honoring a legend

Friday night's event will honor Professor Emerita Myra Hurt, the college's acting dean when it was created, along with members of the college's Hall of Fame Class of 2020.

In September, FSU President John Thrasher honored Hurt with the James D. Westcott Distinguished Service Medal, its highest honor.

The honor also was bestowed posthumously upon former FSU President Sandy D'Alemberte, credited with helping to secure funding and ushering in the accreditation for the new College of Medicine.

At the time of her retirement in January, she was serving as the College of Medicine's Senior Associate Dean for Interdisciplinary Medical Sciences.

Hurt is credited with helping to create the FSU College of Medicine, bridging communication with legislators to help found the college in 2000. She served as acting dean during the school's formative stages.

Also credited with the establishment of the college is Thrasher, who as speaker of the Florida House of Representatives at the time was key in getting funding approved to establish the college. The building housing the college is named in his honor.

Thrasher says the college has been successful in carrying out the mission upon which it was established.

“FSU believes that students with a desire to serve their communities will make the best doctors,” Thrasher said in a release. “The FSU College of Medicine took a new approach to how people are admitted to medical school and how they are trained. We now have 20 years of evidence that our approach works — that it makes a difference in people’s lives.”

In October, the 120 members of the College of Medicine’s Physician Class of 2024 earned their traditional white coats as part of the tradition for first-year medical students.

The demographic profile of the class shows 68 women and 52 men, with 26 Hispanic students, 12 Black students and 27 representing Florida Panhandle counties.

“The College of Medicine has developed tremendously in the 20 years since its founding,” Fogarty said. “It’s remarkable to look at its legacy — the many practicing health-care providers and successful research projects that have come from the school — and see how far it has come as an institution.”

Friday night's event can be watched at <https://med.fsu.edu/VirtualEvents>.

Key developments

2000 – Gov. Jeb Bush signs legislation creating the FSU College of Medicine.

2003 – The college opens regional campuses in Orlando, Pensacola and Tallahassee, where third- and fourth-year students will complete required clinical rotations in community hospitals and medical practices in a model that is different from most other U.S. medical schools and where community physicians do the teaching in a one-on-one, apprenticeship-style approach.

2005 – Twenty-seven students from the inaugural class graduate in a ceremony held in the courtyard at the central campus.

2008 – J. Ocie Harris retires as dean after having led the college through its early years and the opening of six regional campuses across Florida. He is replaced by current Dean John P.

Fogarty.

2010 – The College of Medicine reaches full enrollment (480).

2017 – The college opens a new Physician Assistant program to help with the goal of increasing access to medical care.

2020 – More than 500 College of Medicine alumni now practicing in Florida from among the 1,483 total M.D. graduates (about 45 percent of the graduates remain in residency or fellowship training).

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