A Look Back...

As we continue to build upon our historic foundation to achieve a leadership position in the world, let’s take a look back at some of the University’s firsts. The accomplishments listed in this report celebrate Purdue’s achievements of the past.

Flight Aviation

Purdue has a rich and storied history in aviation. The first University to have its own airport, Purdue invited Amelia Earhart to serve as a visiting counselor for women students in 1935. She loved her role and developed what she called her “Flying Laboratory” at the University: a Lockheed Electra twin-engined airliner. She had the seats removed and extra fuel tanks put in their place. With these changes the plane had a fuel capacity of 1,204 gallons which gave it a range of 4,500 miles.

The first official air mail delivery in the United States took place on August 17, 1859, in Lafayette. John Wise piloted the balloon Jupiter for a flight which carried 123 letters and 23 circulars to Crawfordsville. John Wise conducted experiments for Professor Wetherill to detect the presence of ozone in the upper atmosphere during this flight.

Women in Engineering

The Women in Engineering Program is the first of its kind in the nation (1969) and serves as a model for such programs at other universities. The program develops pre-college (P-12) outreach and recruiting activities, starts a number of initiatives aimed at retaining both undergraduate and graduate women, and works to create a campus environment more innovative because of its greater diversity. As a result, enrollment of women in the College of Engineering is now up to 20% in Fall 2011.

Computer Science

The first Department of Computer Sciences in the United States was established at Purdue University in October 1962. There are three natural phases in its history. In the 1960s the effort was to define courses, degree programs, and indirectly the field itself. The 1970s saw the Department’s maturation and growth into a typical university department. The 1980s started with a series of crises, some nationwide and some internal to Purdue. Student enrollment explosions, the space crunch, and establishing computing facilities eventually gave the Department a considerably different character than it had in the 1970s.

Although Purdue’s College of Technology was not formally founded until 1964, the concept of technology education at Purdue has existed since the late 1870s.

Hoover Dam

The Hoover Dam, considered one of the most massive engineering enterprises of all time, was completed in 1936 under the direction of Elwood Mead, Purdue Engineering graduate. The dam’s reservoir, Lake Mead, bears his name.

Freshman Engineering

The first program of its kind in the country (1953), it provides a plan of study that stimulates interest in engineering careers and enables freshmen to continue their course as upperclassmen at such a level as to provide the profession with the best prepared young engineers to be found anywhere.

One Small Step for Man...

In 1955 Neil Armstrong received a Bachelor of Science in Astronautical Engineering from Purdue University. He became the first man to walk on the moon on July 20, 1969, in the Apollo 11 mission.
**Pharmacy**

* The first Ph.D. in the United States in the field of Pharmacy Administration was awarded to Robert Evanson in 1953.
* The School of Pharmacy established the first school-associated externship program for pharmacy students in 1971 and was the first in the U.S. to have this experience substitute for traditional apprenticeship for pharmacy licensure.
* Dolores Cooper Shockley (Ph.D. 1955) was the first African American female to earn a Ph.D. from Purdue University and the first African American female in the U.S. to earn a Ph.D. in the field of pharmacology.
* Purdue was the first U.S. school to establish departments of Bionucleonics and Clinical Pharmacy.

In 1999, Purdue became the first Big Ten Conference school to win the women's basketball NCAA Championship. The women of Purdue made a name for the Big Ten once again when in 2010 the women's golf team became the first in the conference to win a NCAA Championship. This also marked the first time a northern-located school took home the top achievement.

**Management**

Purdue's Krannert School of Management was the first to perform systematic experimental economics research. Vernon Smith, who began his career at Purdue in 1955, conducted his first experiments here in the late 1950s and he is widely credited with turning economics into an experimental science. This research is the focus of his Nobel Prize citation in 2002 when he was awarded the prize "for having established laboratory experiments as a tool in empirical economic analysis, especially in the study of alternative market mechanisms," according to "The Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel 2002." Smith stayed at Purdue for 12 years and attained the rank of full professor. 

**Information Technology**

Purdue's newest supercomputer, Carter, is not only the fastest campus supercomputer in the United States, but it boasts other notable accomplishments as well. It is the first supercomputer to make use of high speed interconnects between its nodes, making it the first 56 Gb/sec supercomputer in the world. Furthermore, Purdue's "Starting Five of Supercomputing," the supercomputers Steele, Coates, Rossmann, Hansen, and Carter, mean that Purdue has more supercomputing capacity available to its faculty than any other university in the world.

**Libraries**

In 1989 Emily Mobley became the first African-American woman to serve as Dean of Libraries at a research university at a non-HBCU institution (Historically Black Colleges and Universities).