

HISTORY OF THE COLLEGE

For more than 160 years, the College has offered an affordable, quality education to individuals of all backgrounds. Based in the heart of Brooklyn, the College has a proud heritage of preparing students to take their places as leaders in their fields and to become contributing members of society. With a mission founded on the ideals and teachings of St. Francis of Assisi, the College plays a vital role in the community and in the lives of its students and alumni.

In the early nineteenth century, the Franciscan Brothers in Ireland began schools for underprivileged people. Following that spirit, a group of Franciscan Brothers first came to Brooklyn in 1858, opening St. Francis Academy several months later in 1859 with a mission to educate the large number of immigrants arriving in America and to help them assimilate and succeed in New York City. From its beginning, St. Francis Academy was committed to providing a comprehensive education to those with limited means. To achieve this goal, St. Francis Academy offered affordable tuition, a rigorous curriculum, and personal academic support, distinct characteristics that endure today. The school, which was opened to educate boys and was the first private school in the Diocese of Brooklyn, started in a building on Baltic Street and grew quickly.

In 1884, just 25 years later, the trustees of St. Francis Academy received permission from the state legislature to “establish a Literary College” under its current name, giving it the power to confer diplomas, honors, and degrees. In June 1885, St. Francis College conferred its first Bachelor of Arts degree, and seven years later the first Bachelor of Science degree was granted.

The College continued its meteoric growth and built a new facility on Butler Street in 1926. In 1957, the New York Board of Regents granted an absolute Charter to the Trustees of the College, rendering the College officially independent of the Diocese of Brooklyn and making it eligible to receive federal funds.

In 1960, St. Francis embarked on an expansion program. It moved to Remsen Street, where it purchased two office buildings from Brooklyn Union Gas Company, allowing it to double its enrollment. Shortly thereafter, it became a co-educational institution and additional property was purchased on both Remsen and Joralemon Streets. The campus included new facilities that were accessible by New York City’s mass transit system, which also contributed to a doubling in enrollment.

The addition of the Anthony J. Genovesi Center in 2003 offered student’s additional opportunities to participate in and watch athletic events while the \$40 million Frank and Mary Macchiarola Academic Center, housed a library, numerous smart classrooms, HDTV studio, and black box theater.

The demographics of Brooklyn have changed over the years, but the College’s mission has not. Today the College has more than 2,500 students and 20,000 alumni. They come primarily from Brooklyn and the other boroughs of New York City. An increasing number of students come to the College with international backgrounds, representing 74 countries, 40 languages, and now constituting 17% of the student population. Approximately 60% of the College’s students are from underrepresented populations and over 50% of the College’s approximately 2,500 students are first generation, a number that has remained consistent for at least eight years.

Many distinguished public servants, scientists, lawyers, business professionals, and teachers call St. Francis College alma mater, as do

many of the priests and nuns within the Dioceses of Brooklyn-Queens and Rockville Centre.

Based on its success in enrolling and graduating large proportions of economically disadvantaged students, U.S. News & World Report ranked St. Francis College fourth in its category on its list of colleges that are Top Performers on Social Mobility. Approximately 99% of St. Francis students receive some form of financial aid; including institutional scholarships and grants, federal and state grants, and federal student loans, making St. Francis one of the most affordable private colleges in New York City.

For many years, the College’s Remsen Street campus in Brooklyn Heights has been our home and served our community well. Fortunately, our community keeps growing. Beginning in September 2022 the College will better deliver the next generation of academic opportunities and extracurricular programming, while meeting demands on infrastructure and technology, at its new home at 179 Livingston Street (the “Wheeler Building”) in Downtown Brooklyn. The new campus is located within minutes from the Remsen Street site and is conveniently situated between the Hoyt Street and Jay Street stations. The College’s new home is accessible via public transit for commuter students and unlocks access to opportunities in New York City and the world beyond. The campus has been designed specifically for St. Francis College to meet our community’s needs and features a dedicated lobby entrance and elevators for students, staff, and visitors, and ample space for student gatherings – including a new shared roof deck overlooking Downtown Brooklyn.

The College’s relocation to The Wheeler building is the foundation of the 162-year-old private Franciscan institution’s transformative new initiative, SFC Forward | Strategic Vision for 2023, which it launched in 2022 to, among other things, expand academic offerings and online learning opportunities (“SFC Forward”).