Tuskegee (tuh-SKEE-gee) University is located in the rural east Alabama town of Tuskegee, the county seat of Macon County. The county was established on December 18, 1832, from land ceded by the Creek Indians, from which the city and school take their name (which means warrior in the Muskogee, Creek dialect). The school developed through the efforts of Lewis Adams, a former slave, and George W. Campbell, a former slave owner, who saw in the late 1870s a need for the education of African Americans in rural Macon County, Alabama. The founding date of the University was July 4, 1881, authorized by House Bill 165 of the Alabama Legislature. In 1892, through the efforts of Booker T. Washington, the Alabama Legislature, by Act No. 71, reconstituted and established then Tuskegee Normal Institute as a public body and corporation of the State of Alabama with full power of action and authority vested in a board of trustees. Over the past century, various social and historical changes have transformed this institution into a comprehensive, multicultural place of learning whose primary purpose is to develop leadership, knowledge and service for a global society.

From a modest beginning in a one room shanty located near Butler’s Chapel AME Zion Church, Tuskegee University rose to national prominence under the leadership of its first president, Booker T. Washington (1856-1915). Washington was a highly skilled organizer and fund-raiser who counseled U.S. presidents and was a strong advocate of African American farmers and businesses. He worked tirelessly in developing methods to aid African Americans to succeed by establishing a variety of on-campus vocational classes including carpentry, brick-making, sewing, millinery, animal husbandry and gardening. Students were also required to complete coursework toward general diplomas which included mathematics, English and history. Student enrollment was not limited to rural Macon County and the South, but was international in composition.

Washington’s vision for Tuskegee University (originally called Tuskegee Normal and changed to Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute in 1893) involved recruiting the best and brightest available within the African American community including George Washington Carver (1860-1943) as Farm Manager (1896), architect Robert R. Taylor (1868-1942) as Director of Mechanical Industries (1882), and
Monroe N. Work (1866-1945) as founder of the Department of Records and Research (1908). Carver’s experimentation with a variety of plants exemplified Tuskegee’s focus on research and development. Taylor designed and oversaw the construction, using local resources and student labor, of many of the University’s historic buildings including the University Chapel (1896) which was renowned for its “singing windows (1932).” Work’s publication of the *Negro Year Book* (1912-51) and the *Bibliography of the Negro in Africa and America* (1928) illustrated the University’s mission to publish scholarly information that would be useful to Americans in all walks of life. Furthermore, Washington developed a variety of techniques to teach, both on campus and off, by using the Jessup Agricultural Wagon (1906), an agricultural school on wheels, and *The Southern Letter* (1884)(later to become *The Rural Messenger*, 1922)) in order to educate farmers. Washington served as president until his death on November 14, 1915.

Tuskegee University’s prominence as an African American School of higher learning did not abate with the following president, Robert R. Moton (1867-1940). In fact, the University’s history is intimately linked to the accomplishments of its presidents. During his tenure (1915-1935), the University continued to grow in size and prestige. Moton actively solicited for more adequate buildings and modern equipment for teaching the trades, more comfortable housing for faculty and students, and enlarged and improved facilities for recreation, health and academic studies. The highlight of his career at Tuskegee was the expansion and enrichment of the curricula. In 1927, Moton raised the University’s academic program from High School level to full four year college status with Bachelor degrees in Agriculture, Home Economics, Mechanical Industries and Education. Furthermore, through his efforts, the University donated land for the Tuskegee Veteran’s Administration Hospital, the first and only one staffed by Black professionals.

Like his predecessor, Moton was an accomplished fund raiser and recruiter. He continued the institutional relationship with financiers such as Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932), part owner of the Sears, Roebuck, and Company, led to the establishment of a foundation specifically to fund programs for
underprivileged portions of society and the education of African Americans. Likewise, it was during Moton’s administration that the landmark and university icon, the Booker T. Washington Monument (1922), was erected through a financial gift collected from African Americans throughout the nation. Through Moton’s efforts, Tuskegee brought back William L. Dawson (1899-1990), a former student, an accomplished musician, composer and choir director to the campus. Dawson became director of the Tuskegee Institute Choir which was subsequently invited to sing at the opening dedication of New York City’s Radio City Music Hall in 1932.

Tuskegee University’s accomplishments continued with its third president, Frederick D. Patterson (1901-1988). As president (1935-1953), Patterson founded the School of Veterinary Medicine at Tuskegee in 1944 (today nearly 75 percent of all Black veterinarians in America are Tuskegee graduates), the year he also founded the United Negro College Fund. The UNCF continues today as a critical source of annual income for a consortium of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tuskegee University among them.

During the 1940s, although the rest of the world was embroiled in war, the University (as of 1937 called Tuskegee Institute) continued to lead the way in working toward the betterment of African Americans nationwide. The Infantile Paralysis Center opened on January 15, 1941, as another unit of Tuskegee University’s John A. Andrew Memorial Hospital. The Center provided treatment facilities and services for African-American patients (especially for polio) from the southeastern states as well as care for Alabama patients with other orthopedic conditions. Further accomplishments came with the University’s participation in the Civilian Pilot Training Program (which began at Tuskegee in 1939) that eventually led to the formation of the 99Th Fighter Squadron of Tuskegee Airmen in June of 1941.

The fourth president, Dr. Luther H. Foster (1913-1994), led Tuskegee through the turbulent years of the Civil Rights Movement as well as overseeing the organization of the College of Arts and Sciences, the elimination of several vocational programs, and the development of engineering programs. Under
Foster’s leadership (1953-1981), the University maintained an attitude of open dialogue, allowing a variety of controversial speakers such as Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael, Julian Bond and Alex Haley, to visit.

Furthermore, faculty and staff were not discouraged to be involved in the Civil Rights Movement. Dr. Charles Gomillion (1900-1995), professor of Sociology and Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, filed a lawsuit, leading to the groundbreaking Supreme Court case *Gomillion vs. Lightfoot*, 1960, concerning Tuskegee's Black citizens which had been illegally gerrymandered out of their right to vote. Tuskegee’s student population was equally actively involved in organizations such the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

Under the leadership of Tuskegee’s fifth president (1981-2010), Benjamin F. Payton (1932- ), the General Daniel "Chappie" James Center for Aerospace Science and Health Education was constructed in 1987, which included the largest athletic arena in the SIAC. Payton oversaw the renovation of several buildings on campus such as the Kellogg Conference Center (1994) that was completed as a renovation and expansion of historic Dorothy Hall. By 2008, the Tuskegee University National Center for Bioethics in Research and Health Care and the Tuskegee Airmen National Historic Site were completed. During his final four years of guidance, the University added the Andrew F. Brimmer Hall for the College of Business and Information Science and rebuilt Margaret Murray Washington Hall.

Payton’s commitment to education was exemplified when, in 1985, Tuskegee attained University status and began offering its first doctoral programs in integrative biosciences, materials science and engineering. The College of Business and Information Sciences was established and professionally accredited, and the College of Engineering, Architecture and Physical Sciences expanded to include the only Aerospace Engineering department at an HBCU.

Tuskegee’s rich heritage likewise includes many athletics firsts. Mozell Ellerbe (1913-1983) was the first man from an HBCU to win at a national track meet. He won the 100 yard dash at the Penn Relays,
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on April 27, 1940. Lula Ballard won the Women’s National Tennis Association singles championship in 1925. Alice Coachman (1921-), a member of the U. S. Olympics Team, was the first African American woman to win a gold medal in the Olympics, high jump, setting an Olympic and American record (5’6 1/8”), August 7, 1948. She was the only American woman to win a gold medal at the 1948 games in London, England. In 1956, Nell Jackson (1929-1988) was the U. S. Olympics women’s head coach and was the first African American to be named head coach of a U. S. Olympics team.

Tuskegee University’s enrollment currently averages over three thousand students, representing most states and several foreign countries. The academic programs are organized into five colleges: 1. College of Agricultural, Environmental and Natural Science; 2. College of Business and Information Science; 3. College of Engineering, Architecture and Physical Sciences; 4. College of Liberal Arts and Education; and 5. The College of Veterinary Medicine, Nursing and Allied Health. The University is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS).

The University is rooted in a history of successfully educating African American men and women to understand themselves against a background of a rich academic heritage and the promise of their individual and collective future. Tuskegee University’s mission has been to prepare them for effective professional and leadership roles in society and to become productive citizens in the national and world community.