The Making of
Nova Southeastern University
The concept of Nova Southeastern University began in the imagination of a few conservative businessmen in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. It grew from storefront offices on Las Olas Boulevard to what is today the eighth largest not-for-profit private university in the United States, situated on a main campus of over 300 acres, with 27,000 students and a budget of almost $600 million. This is the story of that remarkable achievement.

In the early 1960s, a group of civic-minded pioneer settlers in Broward County, Florida, frequently met for breakfast at Cope’s restaurant in downtown Fort Lauderdale. They often discussed the future of the rapidly growing city and of Broward County. They called themselves the Oatmeal Club.

Two of the original group members, Myron L. Ashmore, superintendent of Broward County Schools from 1961 to 1968, and Joe B. Rushing, founding president of the Junior College of Broward County (now Broward College), had long discussed the possibility of expanding educational opportunities in South Florida. Both men had significant experience in secondary and higher education and had pursued inventive and original concepts in learning. Rushing and Ashmore would be two of the most influential members of the original Oatmeal Club in developing a new educational concept.

In the years after World War II, Fort Lauderdale, with its beautiful beaches and warm climate, showed positive signs of rapid growth and developed an active, aggressive business community. The local businessmen who made up the Oatmeal Club understood the unlimited
future for the South Florida area and believed that Broward County would eventually need an integrated educational system. Historian Gary Mormino described the dramatic growth of Broward County from the 1950s until 2000. In the 1950s, Broward, “a huge county sprawling over 1,200 square miles,” had only 83,933 residents. Most of the local communities, such as Deerfield Beach, Pompano, and Davie, “had one foot in their rural past with the other striding toward a dynamic future.” The transformation of these agricultural and rural communities into heavily populated retirement communities and suburban developments was, according to Mormino, “stunning in its size and scope.” Broward County’s population quadrupled in the 1950s and nearly doubled again in the 1960s. By 1980, Broward County had one million residents; by 2000, the population increased to 1.6 million. During the 1990s, among counties with a population of more than 100,000, Broward was the country’s third fastest-growing county at an astonishing rate of 22.3 percent.

The county’s growth, however, proved to be somewhat of a mixed blessing. While 750 families moved to Broward County each week in the 1950s, in the 1960s Fort Lauderdale’s vital and energetic downtown area, especially Las Olas Boulevard, began to fall prey to the same problem encountered by other large cities—suburbanization. By 1963, more than 125 stores in downtown Fort Lauderdale fell vacant.1 The population flight—primarily whites—away from the urban center proved beneficial for some smaller towns, such as Davie, the ultimate location of Nova Southeastern University, as it grew rapidly in size and influence.

The Oatmeal Club, aware of the great potential for growth in South Florida, began to contemplate what kind of educational system they would want for Broward County. Robert Ellyson recalled attending a Rotary Club meeting where Stuart Synnestvedt, newly arrived in Fort Lauderdale, made a presentation on education. Synnestvedt, a successful businessman who never completed his university degree, spent much of his life contemplating the importance of education in developing future citizens. Synnestvedt talked about the importance of teaching students not only factual information, but also how to learn. He proposed a unified educational system from kindergarten to PhD—from the womb to the tomb, or the cradle to the grave. He wanted to teach children and adults how to meet the advanced challenges of a new age: “To provide a system of quality education from infancy onward for the common man and also provide a challenge and inspiration for the uncommon man.”2 The original members of
the informal Oatmeal Club—Stuart Synnestvedt, Joe Rushing, Charles Forman, Jack Hines, and Myron Ashmore—were impressed and intrigued by the concept of an integrated educational system from kindergarten to graduate school and decided then and there to pursue Synnestvedt’s dream.

The group later expanded to include L. Coleman Judd, Henry Perry Sr., Carl A. Hiaasen Sr., James (Jim) Farquhar, George English, and Hamilton Forman. The group envisioned a pioneering type of educational complex where instruction would be provided at all levels and where new ideas in education could be developed, implemented, and evaluated for the benefit of not only the local community, but also society at large. Initially his colleagues were uncertain whether Synnestvedt was “a genius or a crackpot” and knew that the dream would be difficult to achieve, but they decided to push forward anyway. There were already elementary schools and a junior college in the county; to complete the educational complex they needed to create a kindergarten, a middle school, an innovative high school, and a university. All would be part of the Broward County public school system and would be supported by public taxes.

In 1961, the Oatmeal Club incorporated the not-for-profit South Florida Education Center, Inc. (SFEC), with Joe Rushing as president. With the cooperation of the Broward County Board of Public Instruction, the SFEC formed the Nova Educational Complex, which included the Junior College of Broward County, Nova Elementary School, and, on April 5, 1964, Nova High School, an experimental high school that had won national recognition. They chose the name Nova because it is derived from the Latin word novus, meaning new, since they believed that their concept was new and different.

The most unique aspect to this educational experiment was that the idea came full-blown from the local community. The founders did not initially consult with state officials or national experts on education; rather, they discussed the matter and decided to go ahead on their own. It seems almost incredible that these local businessmen, who had no experience in education except for their own schooling, would come up with such an original and challenging concept. A.D. Griffin recalled, “We all pitched in. We had a good group.” Hamilton Forman recalled, “Nova University started one night on [my wife’s] dining room table when group member and businessman Jack Hines pounded on the table and said, ‘We’ve just got to have a university.’”

Two of the most influential participants in the Nova plan were Charles and Hamilton Forman, members of one of Broward County’s
pioneer families. In 1910, Hamilton Forman Sr. and his wife, Blanche, left Illinois, lured by the promise of riches to be made in Florida. They built a shack out of hard pine with no electricity or indoor plumbing in what is now Davie, Florida, and in 1917 started the county’s first dairy farm. The family braved droughts, mosquitoes, and the horrendous 1926 hurricane but survived and prospered. Charles Forman remembered his mother hoisting a rifle to her shoulder to shoot alligators that came too close to the chicken coops. Charles and his brother learned their can-do individualism from their parents, and by the 1960s the Forman family was one of the most politically powerful families in the county. As Hamilton Forman later acknowledged, the farsighted members of the Oatmeal Club wanted to develop the educational system to benefit the community, but as businessmen, they also hoped that the success of their vision would benefit them as well.5

Other key participants in the early planning stages included Tinsley Ellis, an attorney who supervised the incorporation of the university, and James Hartley, the main architect of the Nova University campus. Both men were born to early settlers who relocated to Hollywood and Fort Lauderdale in 1925. Jim Farquhar, a landscape architect, settled in Broward in 1945 and, realizing that no one was producing sod for the huge future home-building industry, bought 500 acres of land and began a prosperous business as a self-described sod farmer. Farquhar described the tiny town of Davie, which was in the boondocks far from downtown Fort Lauderdale, as “cowboy country.” Hamilton Forman referred to it as a nice “one-horse town.” There was one service station, and the owner spent as much time working with saddles and bridles as he did repairing automobiles. Citizens rode their horses freely around town, and one could often find a horse tied to the hitching post at the local hardware store.6

Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, governor of Florida from 1905 to 1909, started the exodus to southern Florida by sponsoring a giant project that drained the Everglades of saltwater and reclaimed millions of acres of valuable land. Governor Broward, after whom the county was named, authorized the selling of large tracts of land for $2 an acre. That money was used to drain and channel the water that frequently covered the land.7

Like the Formans, other pioneer families arrived in Davie around 1909. The Griffins came from Kentucky, the Formans from Illinois, others from Michigan. Several were workers returning from the Panama Canal Zone. Since the southern Florida terrain resembled that of Panama, the town’s original name was Zona. There were no roads,
and the early families were widely scattered, but the pioneer spirit prevailed as the settlers relied on their own survival skills. In 1925, forty-eight residents decided to incorporate the community and drew up an official code for the town of Davie. However, the citizens were unwilling to pay any taxes, so the municipality was dissolved and the town of Davie was not officially chartered until 1960.

By 1980, the town’s population was 80,000, but that number was about to explode. With the ocean to the east and the urban population growing along the I-95 corridor, the logical way for Fort Lauderdale to expand was westward toward the Everglades. At one point, western Fort Lauderdale was considered to be west of Highway 441. There had always been a divide between the urban downtown of Fort Lauderdale and its western neighbors. As late as the 1970s, there were people on the east side who considered Davie to be in the hinterlands and never traveled west of Highway 441. Most county citizens were not even aware that there was much going on in such an unsophisticated area, much less the development of a new university. By the 1990s, as the population inexorably grew, the west side was now considered to be west of the Florida Turnpike and Davie was strategically situated right in the middle of Broward County. Davie citizens dreaded the loss of their rural lifestyle with the coming of new roads, more cars, and more people, but by 2000 the town had become a thriving community.

Victoria Wagner in her book, *The History of Davie and Its Dilemma*, tried to capture the essence of the Davie spirit. She concluded that to prosper, the early settlers had to work hard under the most discouraging conditions, such as the severe hurricane of 1926. To survive, they had to help each other, especially in times of distress. The commitment to cooperation, enterprise, and commerce enabled them to succeed. This same entrepreneurial spirit and commitment to succeed exhibited by the citizens of Davie can be applied to the history of Nova University. The founders, especially the Formans and the Griffins, carried on with the same passion, zeal, and can-do attitude in the founding of Nova University.

The South Florida Education Center began its planning very slowly. They primarily wanted to provide the “missing link” in their grandiose plan, a postgraduate university concentrating on science and technology. The need for a technological university in Florida had been a major concern for some time, but the state had failed to establish one. The SFEC was acutely aware that an institution of the caliber of Massachusetts Institute of Technology or California Institute of
Technology was necessary to provide highly trained students for the area's emerging industrial and government entities. A technological research institution was especially needed in South Florida because previous state legislatures had been dominated by legislators from the northern part of the state. These rural legislators had generally ignored the needs of South Florida; consequently, the two major universities at the time, Florida State University and the University of Florida, were located in northern Florida. With the exception of the recently established Florida Atlantic University, there was no other state university in South Florida. The SFEC, however, did not want a state supported university; it wanted a privately endowed institution that would be free of government control and free to set its own policies for research and instruction.9

Joe Rushing, the first president of the Junior College of Broward County, in a report to the SFEC, asked that flexibility be the key word in a proposal to educate broad segments of the population from early childhood to adulthood. He wanted the junior college to develop a broad curriculum in general education and to operate year-round. Rushing proposed a top-level administrative position to deal with the complex relationships between the high school, the junior college, and the proposed university.10

In February 1962, the SFEC got its project off the ground by raising money to purchase reference books and periodicals for the library of the proposed university. Initially the group proposed three courses of graduate study, later expanded to seven courses. One of the early courses suggested was tutelage in the use of computers. The SFEC thought it could approach the IBM Corporation to furnish top people to teach the course. SFEC's recommendation to offer a computer course was quite novel at the time, as computers were in their infancy and very few universities taught such courses. This idea gave some hint of the innovative approach that would be demonstrated from the very beginning of the planning.11

At this juncture, these businessmen, who had no real concept of what a university curriculum should be, were proposing whatever ideas popped into their minds. They finally realized that they needed outside expertise and turned to Palmer Craig, who was in charge of curriculum development for the Broward County schools. Next, the SFEC provided a prospectus for potential new courses to the two state universities, Florida State University and the University of Florida, for the purpose of obtaining their opinion of the type of courses they planned to offer and with the hope of obtaining top-flight instructors
to teach the courses. The SFEC also requested information about the mathematics courses required at the University of Florida for its master’s degree so it would have some basis for organizing its own math curriculum.

For classrooms, Joe Rushing offered space in the junior college, and Ashmore promised additional classrooms at Fort Lauderdale High School. The SFEC continued to work on purchasing appropriate books and periodicals although it had no idea which books would be appropriate for the proposed technical reference library. The SFEC, shoring up the organization, approved a set of bylaws and began the long-term process of trying to raise donations for the new university. The SFEC set up a committee to expand its membership and chose Stuart Synnestvedt to conduct a public relations campaign for the planned educational complex.12

Although the university was still in the very early planning stages and had little support from the county or the city, the SFEC optimistically pushed ahead. The Fort Lauderdale News supplied editorial support by urging local businesspeople and industries to donate money for the educational center. The News declared that the proposed project was “of vital importance to our future progress.” There was an urgent and compelling need for an educational institution in the county that would provide qualified personnel for the burgeoning electronic and space-age companies.13 The Miami Herald thought the idea of a technological university represented farsighted, constructive thinking and would catch the imagination of educators throughout the United States. The paper pointed out that the local citizens organizing the center were pragmatic and rich in talent.14

Despite having no money, no approval from the state universities, no charter, and no land on which to build the university, the members of the SFEC were convinced of the ultimate success of their vision. The founders therefore outlined a plan for obtaining an architect’s drawings for the university, worked on the design of a university to be built and run by the corporation, and selected a committee to develop a more specific and suitable curriculum.15 The SFEC continued to emphasize that the university had to be innovative and would be designed to invent, implement, evaluate, and disseminate new educational practices. The planned institution would concentrate on providing a type of manpower and knowledge that was not being produced in a systematic way in any other institution.

To accomplish its objective, the SFEC obviously needed land for the campus. Without a designated physical location for the university,
it seemed pointless to get too far ahead with the planning. During World War II, the Forman family donated what became known as Forman Field to the U.S. Navy for pilots to practice landings and takeoffs. Once the war ended, the federal government declared the naval base to be surplus property and planned to sell it.

Hamilton and Charles Forman thought that 220 of the 550 acres on the Forman Field property would be perfect for their proposed university. After consulting with the Broward County Board of Public Instruction, Hamilton Forman went to Washington, DC, to lobby for the land. To bolster their case, Ashmore asked Thomas D. Bailey, the state superintendent of public instruction, to write a letter to the Government Services Administration (GSA) on behalf of the state board of education requesting that the remaining acreage of Forman Field be held for educational purposes. 16

At this juncture, Jim Farquhar, who would be a key figure in the development of the university, became fully committed to the dream. “I guess I’m a visionary,” he declared many years later, “and to be a visionary you have to be a little stupid.” Farquhar knew that many detractors thought the idea had no chance, but he accepted the SFEC presidency with the primary goal of obtaining property for the educational complex. 17 Farquhar’s willingness to commit his time and money was a monumental event in the history of Nova University. Without his gift of 100 acres of land adjacent to Forman Field—valued in excess of $500,000—the SFEC would not have had the funds to put up the first buildings. It is hard to imagine that the university would have ever come to fruition without his leadership and guidance. On several occasions, just when the undertaking was about to fail, he came to the rescue. He was later recognized as “Mr. Nova” for his efforts.

Farquhar agreed with the Formans about the viability of the naval air station. He encouraged Hamilton Forman to use his influence in Washington to get the land. 18 Hamilton Forman again went to Washington, DC, to meet with Senators George Smathers and Spessard Holland and Congressman Paul Rogers to do some groundwork on the proposal for the educational complex. Forman reported that both senators and Congressman Rogers were “quite enthusiastic” about the idea and that Florida governor Cecil Farris Bryant was eager to back the proposal. Forman also met with Abraham Ribicoff, the secretary of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW). Ribicoff promised that HEW would try to work with the SFEC.
Figure 1.1 James “Mr. Nova” Farquhar, chairman of the board of trustees for both the South Florida Education Center (SFEC) and Nova University of Advanced Technology. (By permission of Nova Southeastern University Archives, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.)
During his visit to Washington, DC, Hamilton Forman tried to enlist the help of Senator George Smathers to persuade the federal government to give the Forman Field land to Broward County. The secretaries of HEW and the GSA balked and kept defeating the proposal. They opposed the deal primarily because if the land were to be used for educational purposes, the best the Broward County School Board could offer, since they lacked the funds to do more, was to build a portable elementary school. The government did not want the land to be used for an educational center of such limited scope.

Also, the GSA and HEW were aware that the Nova University idea was merely in its formative stage, and since Nova was to be a private entity, the government was unwilling to turn over public land for such an institution. The GSA stated that it would not negotiate with any public agency for the sale of the land and announced it would offer the land at a public sale to the highest bidder. Senator George Smathers asked the SFEC to get the State Board of Education to submit a request to GSA to refrain from any immediate disposition of the property and to ask that this property be preserved for higher-education purposes. Thomas Bailey did make such a request, but the GSA was unmoved.

Senator Smathers, a close friend of President John F. Kennedy, went into action. Hamilton Forman reported that when Senator Smathers was discussing the Forman property disposition with an HEW representative, the bureaucrat refused to accommodate any request from Smathers. Eventually, Smathers lost his temper and yelled at the HEW representative, “Now, you either sit down and be cooperative and help us, or, if you don’t want to do that, then sit down and shut your mouth, or, if you don’t want to do that, then get the hell out of this office.” The bureaucrat angrily removed himself from the room, but soon meekly returned with a much-changed attitude. In the end, the deal was consummated.19 The Broward County Board of Public Instruction obtained a 325-acre grant for the elementary, middle, and high schools. One hundred acres were designated for an agricultural experiment station operated by the University of Florida, and eventually 125 acres of the 325 acres were specifically designated for Nova University.

In the pursuit of land, Nova’s future depended on the skills and influence of Senator Smathers and the Forman brothers. Without them, it would have been exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to obtain the land from the federal government. Hamilton Forman noted that his brother Charles worked diligently with the Oatmeal Club; he
(Hamilton) did not know much about education or what they wanted to do. Hamilton recalled, “My expertise in this thing was in getting permits and seeing that the right things happened from a political standpoint. . . . I knew what they were planning to do was going to be great and wonderful for the people . . . , but that was not my forte. I was kind of a shadowy figure behind the scenes.” In other words, Charles was the planner and Hamilton was the fixer.

By the spring of 1962, very little of significance had been achieved except that the first course of instruction would be electrical engineering. The SFEC had little success in raising funds from individual donors. It worked on trying to hire qualified instructors with PhDs and agreed that more specific and pertinent information about its plans should be disseminated to the public, since very few people knew what the SFEC was doing.

One member realized that the group was not accomplishing much. The SFEC was floundering around trying to raise money, hire faculty, and work on a curriculum without an overall, specific plan. He recommended that it was time for the organization to determine the exact goals of the university, select a strong, dynamic president, and set up an advisory board of nationally known people. The SFEC board acted quickly on these astute recommendations and chose a name for its new university: the Florida Institute of Technology, later changed to Nova University of Advanced Technology.

Throughout the early history of Nova University, the most vexing problem was the inability to raise the necessary funds to move the project forward. Abraham (A.L.) Mailman, who would later become a generous donor and staunch supporter of Nova, suggested that the most effective way to obtain funds quickly was to offer donors membership into the “Founders Club” with a contribution of $1,000. A good idea, but many of the SFEC board members did not meet their obligations. In search of students and faculty, Stuart Synnestvedt reported a positive response when he went to the University of Miami and found two highly qualified potential teachers and some fifteen possible students. The SFEC finally realized it was not qualified to devise an appropriate curriculum and decided it needed expert advice. It asked that university-level consultants be brought in immediately.

While concentrating on the university’s development, the SFEC went ahead with plans for an all-encompassing, comprehensive educational center by breaking ground for Nova High School on October 23, 1962. A large crowd attended the dedication of the completed school on April 5, 1964. That same month, Nova High School
achieved national recognition when *National School Magazine* chose it as school of the month. The high school billed itself as a space-age school—its primary purpose was to utilize scientific learning methods in a scientific age. The key words were flexibility, self-motivation, and understanding. Nova High School’s curriculum taught students the “how” and “why” as well as the “what.”

By 1965, one elementary school, the Nova Blanche Forman Elementary School, and the University of Florida (UF) Agricultural Experimental Station had come on line; the junior college had been expanded; and a kindergarten was in the planning stage. The second elementary school, Nova Eisenhower, was unveiled in 1967. It was not until 1977 that Nova Middle School opened its doors to seventh- and eighth-grade students. Sixth-grade students shifted to the middle school the following year. By 1967, all of these facilities were tax-funded.

On November 13, 1962, the South Florida Education Center, Inc. (SFEC), became incorporated as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. One of the earliest tasks of the newly incorporated organization was to send letters to top educators nationwide requesting recommendations for the best-qualified person to serve as president and to plan and develop the new graduate university. The SFEC received an important boost when Stuart Synnestvedt reported on his meeting with the distinguished scientist James Killian, president of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Killian expressed a great interest in the SFEC’s objectives and asked to visit the center in Fort Lauderdale. It was just the kind of national attention the SFEC needed.

Killian arrived in March 1965 and spent a day and a half conferring with the trustees. The purpose of his visit was to offer aid in strengthening the university’s concept, philosophy, and objectives. The support and approbation of a distinguished scientist like Killian’s in those crucial first years confirmed the founders’ belief that Nova University would become an outstanding center of technological education and research.

As late as 1963, the SFEC still had not secured formal accession of the land it needed. The board of trustees contacted Anthony J. Celebrezze, then secretary of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare (HEW), in hopes of immediately acquiring from the GSA the 125 acres at Forman Field that had been designated as the official site for the proposed university. The SFEC printed a brochure for use in soliciting funds for the down payment on the Forman Field acre-
The SFEC then set up a corporate account with Merrill Lynch to deposit donations to the Land Acquisition Fund. Charles Forman chastised the members of the board of trustees for not contributing enough money for the center and complained that there had been significant difficulty in collecting the $1,000 pledges from members of the Founder’s Club.

After much wrangling and many starts and stops, the federal government finally and officially decided that 125 acres of Forman Field was surplus land and agreed to sell it to the Broward County Board of Public Instruction for $375,000, which in turn would donate the land to the SFEC. If the SFEC failed to make the payments, then the land would revert to the school board. A document dated July 29, 1963, shows that the SFEC made the initial down payment of $75,000, payable to the GSA. The remaining portion of the sale price, $300,000, would be paid in forty consecutive quarter-annual payments of $7,500 each. Interest on the unpaid balance was at the rate of 5 percent per annum, to be paid with each principal installment.

It took the SFEC a long time to collect the $75,000 down payment. Tinsley Ellis said, “It was the hardest money we ever raised,” because so many people were skeptical about the entire concept and thought it would never get off the ground. Ellis recalled that they were still $5,000 short of the $75,000 when A.L. Mailman stepped up and provided the needed sum—yet another example of a civic-minded citizen saving the university at a critical time. With the down payment now in hand, the SFEC issued a $75,000 check to the Broward County Board of Public Instruction.

A.L. Mailman became one of the most important contributors to the new university and later had one of the earliest buildings on campus, the Mailman-Hollywood Building, named after him. A highly successful industrialist, banker, and property developer, Mailman moved to Hollywood, Florida, in 1950 and created the city of Miramar to provide affordable homes for working people and to serve as a bedroom community for Fort Lauderdale and Miami. A.L. and his brother Joseph established the Mailman Foundation and used their assets for philanthropy in South Florida, giving substantial donations to the Mailman Center for Child Development at the University of Miami and the A.L. Mailman Family Center at Nova University. After A.L. Mailman’s death in 1980, a new foundation, the A.L. Mailman Family Foundation, was established.

Hamilton Forman recalled that, at the time, even members of the SFEC feared they were “crazy” in trying to create a university for
$75,000 when they had trouble raising even that limited sum. How could an intelligent group of businessmen expect to start a university with almost no money? Forman recalled, “Nobody could believe that we were going to start a university for $75,000, with no buildings, no money, no alumni, no heritage, no nothing.” Forman believed the SFEC succeeded in creating an independent, non-tax-supported university with a piece of land and capitalization of $75,000 because everyone in the group believed in the dream and was invested in the outcome because they all contributed land, money, and time.30 Robert Ellyson said, “We were businessmen, but we were all dreamers. Synnestvedt pressed the right button with us, and we all said, ‘You know, this might be doable. Let’s give it a shot.’”31

Even at this early stage of the planning, several members realized that a PhD university, although badly needed in South Florida, would probably not work since there was little public support for a graduate university that would have only a limited number of students.32 Beginning with a graduate university was just not a practical operation since there would be very little income from tuition with so few students. The SFEC would have been better advised to begin a university at the junior year, with the Junior College of Broward County providing the educational experience for the first two years.

With the land acquired, the trustees knew that the next and most important step was to hire a president. They needed to raise an additional $150,000 for the first three years of the new president’s salary, and they recognized the necessity of hiring professional fund-raisers since they had such great difficulty raising just $75,000.

Stuart Synnestvedt reported that some of the top educators and scientific personnel in the country had promised their help in finding the right person for the job. After contacting the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the U.S. Commissioner of Education, the National Science Foundation, and others for advice, the board of trustees recommended hiring Henry M. Brickell, an educational consultant at Columbia University, as the new president.33 As it turned out, Brickell was not hired, but the SFEC recognized the urgency of hiring a president as soon as possible.

The original SFEC Board of Trustees, as described by Tinsley Ellis, included Jim Farquhar as chairman; W. Howard Allen, head of the First National Bank of Fort Lauderdale; Robert O. Barber, CEO of Unisys Corporation, an optical company; Robert C. Ellyson, a certified public accountant who was very active in the SFEC’s early finances; Henry Kinney, one of the editors of the *Miami Herald*;
Henry D. Perry, a dairyman who later formed a bank; John J. Hines, an industrialist; William C. Mather, a Hollywood attorney; L.C. Judd, a prominent real estate developer; W. Tinsley Ellis, the attorney who drew up the articles of incorporation and one of the four original Oatmeal Club members; Robert Ferris; Charles Forman, who was on the local school board and also served on the Florida Board of Control, the agency that oversaw the state university system; Myron Ashmore, superintendent of schools; and Stuart Synnestvedt.34

In early 1964, the trustees’ search for a president focused on Warren J. Winstead, then the director of the U.S. Army’s 510,000-student education program for servicemen and their dependents in Europe. Winstead had been highly recommended by Edward Meade, a program officer at the Ford Foundation. Although Winstead was not a scientist and had never worked in higher education, Meade thought his administrative experience with the U.S. Army might make him a good fit. In February 1964, Stuart Synnestvedt learned that Winstead would be in the United States sometime between April 15 and May 1 of that year and suggested that he should be invited to Fort Lauderdale for an interview before he returned to Europe.35 Although there is no specific reference in the SFEC minutes to such an interview, it must have gone well since the SFEC offered Winstead the job.

The trustees initially hired Winstead as the director of university programs for the SFEC and offered him a three-year contract, beginning July 1, 1964, with an annual salary of $25,000. The contract directed Winstead to perform any tasks that the SFEC asked of him and to give his full time and attention to his duties. In specific terms, Winstead was tasked to coordinate the overall plan for the institute of technology, raise funds, and hire faculty and staff. Winstead thus had the responsibility of coordinating all of the various institutions in the educational complex, as well as beginning the planning for the technological university.36

Warren J. Winstead was born on November 10, 1927, in Washington, DC. He obtained his BA and MS degrees from the University of Richmond, and an EdD in education from Harvard University in 1958. He taught at the University of Heidelberg, the University of Richmond, and the University of Virginia.37 He appeared to be highly qualified for the position as director of the SFEC complex, and the trustees felt fortunate in attracting a person with such good credentials. Abraham (Abe) Fischler, who would later serve as Nova’s second
Figure 1.2 Warren J. Winstead, EdD, president, 1964–1969. (By permission of Nova Southeastern University Archives, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.)
president, recalled that in 1964, since there was no university and only a barren field without any buildings, not many highly qualified applicants would even consider the post.\textsuperscript{38}

One of the new director’s first assignments was to perform a study and make recommendations about the type of university Nova should become. Winstead’s next task was to establish the SFEC’s executive offices in leased space at 232 East Las Olas Boulevard in Fort Lauderdale. The board authorized Winstead to hire two assistants. His first hire was Colonel Duval S. Adams as his administrative assistant. The proposed budget for the year ending June 30, 1965, was $127,000,
which included funds to be applied toward the ongoing payments for the 125 acres. The board authorized Winstead to administer the new budget and to approve expenditures up to $500 without approval of the trustees.

Helen Graham, one of the earliest employees at Nova, remembered the rather spartan interior of the executive offices on Las Olas. There were old oak desks donated by the county school board, and venetian blinds and old carpeting donated by the banks. “Nothing quite fit,” she said. The staff had to refinish the furniture as well as cut the blinds and carpeting to fit. Graham described the early days of organizing a new university with a limited staff as “an effort of total dedication.”

On July 22, 1964, Jim Farquhar provided a significant boost to the fledgling university when he announced that he would donate an additional five acres of land for faculty housing. Even more significant was the gift of 100 acres in what is now Pembroke Pines from William Mather, the attorney for the Bailey Foundation, with the stipulation that a “bona fide” university be established within three years or the land would revert to the donor. Apparently, the board of trustees eventually sold 100 acres for $400,000; this sale provided most of the funds to build and operate the university in the formative period. Another early gift of $15,000 came from the Robert O. Law Foundation to help with the cost of organizing the new university.

A very significant and unexpected contribution came about in a most unusual way. In November 1965, a rather undistinguished-looking man named Louis W. Parker walked unannounced into the headquarters on Las Olas and handed an envelope to a staff member. The back of the envelope read: “I hereby pledge one million dollars to Nova University.” No one in the office knew who Parker was or believed he intended to contribute $1 million; everyone dismissed his offer, but Parker kept his pledge.

Louis Parker was born and educated in Hungary. He came to the United States and became a naturalized citizen in 1932. After learning English, he studied at City College of New York and then became a prolific inventor. During World War II, Parker designed and manufactured portable radio transmitters for military use and established his own company, Parker Instrument Corporation. NASA chose his company to furnish instruments for the manned Apollo flights to the moon. His most successful invention was the intercarrier sound system—the modern basis for coordinating sound and pictures, and a part that is still used in every television set. He developed the first color television system using vertical color lines. Parker had more
than 250 patents for electronic equipment devices, including radio direction finders for airplanes and an electric car. Parker's inventions made him quite wealthy, and he was looking for opportunities to give his money away. He had no connection with the university but had read about it in the newspaper and wanted to help. Most of his $1 million gift was used to construct what became the Louis W. Parker Physical Sciences Center, always known as the Parker Building. Nova University honored Parker for his generosity in 1970 with an honorary doctor of science degree. Louis Parker died in 1993 at age 87.

The ultimate success of Nova University was due to unexpected and absolutely essential gifts of land and money, such as Parker's $1 million donation, and from the SFEC's shrewd planning and perseverance. Tinsley Ellis revealed that the original board of trustees for the SFEC consisted of conservative Republicans who had no experience in organizing or running a university, but they remained committed to their design despite local sniping that the concept was not doable.

By mid-July 1964, Winstead reported that planning for the new university was going well and, despite the doubters, he emphatically insisted that the university would be established within three years. Winstead agreed with the trustees' original concept for the university and thought it should be founded as only a graduate school. "You can start a graduate school with one student and one professor if you have to. Aim high—at the highest degree of academic excellence. Let your university strive for the excellence of MIT or Caltech and industry will help you. PhDs in research represents brainpower, and industry follows brainpower." Winstead stated that Nova was not designed to be a sprawling "multiversity," attempting to meet the diverse needs of great masses of young people. He envisioned that the student population would never exceed 1,500, and 1,000 of them would be graduate students.

According to Winstead, the primary emphasis would always be on advanced research in science. Nova intended to limit itself to a few narrow fields and would serve those fields better than "any other institution anywhere is serving them." Instead of starting with relatively cheap undergraduate instruction and gradually acquiring expensive graduate specialists, Winstead planned to lure top scholars from prestigious universities by offering generous salaries and complete freedom to research and teach only in their graduate-level specialties. He argued that "serious graduate students could not care less about the name of the school. They want to study under specific professors. The name, Nova didn't have; the professors, it could get."
The Making of Nova Southeastern University

president, insisting that the school also offer educational training and liberal arts subjects, said, “You can’t separate the technologies from the humanities in the world of today.” He wanted to integrate the arts, humanities, and natural sciences. “The technical and theoretical, the aesthetic and the scientific, the factual and the valuable, the creative and the inventive must be recognized as merely facets of one single, cultural core.”

Winstead clearly overstated the potential for the new university—it would certainly never become another MIT—and he raised expectations that could not be met, but at the time the excitement about creating a graduate school in science from the ground up appealed to the board of trustees and generated enthusiasm from the community and important scientists across the United States.

Although the trustees had changed the name of the new university from Florida Institute of Technology to Nova University of Advanced Technology, they needed to make the name formal and official. The SFEC wanted to continue using the name Nova (although that was the name of the high school) because it reflected the new idea of a unique institution. The board finally agreed upon Nova University of Advanced Technology, Inc. Tinsley Ellis and Warren Winstead were appointed to come up with a charter of incorporation for the university.

James Hartley fortuitously offered to act as architectural consultant for the university to assist in the initial planning. Hartley agreed to work without a fee, but the board agreed to pay Hartley’s out-of-pocket expenses. Hartley had been the architect for Nova elementary schools, Nova Middle School, and Nova High School, and the Ford Foundation considered him to be an excellent educational architect. As Hartley later remembered, “Since I had done schools my entire practice, working with Nova was a labor of love. I got so involved in it, I couldn’t have let go if I’d wanted to. I was bound and determined to see it through to its fruition.” Nova eventually succeeded because of the skills and determination of early founders like Hartley, the Formans, and Farquhar who were willing to make personal contributions of time and money, forego payments for services, and do whatever it took to succeed despite daunting barriers and little community support.

The most troubling problem continued to be raising funds to get the project off the ground. The trustees decided to invite a fund-raising firm, Tamblyn and Brown, based in New York City, to advise them on the best way to increase contributions. A.C. Barnett, of Tamblyn and
Brown, said that before formal solicitations began, the group should
determine how much could be logically raised and the most effective
way to raise the money. After Barnett’s presentation, the trustees hired
the firm to conduct a preliminary survey about how to raise the funds.
The preliminary report indicated that adequate financial resources ex-
isted in Broward County and that the climate seemed favorable for
a local fund drive. Tamblyn and Brown recommended immediately
initiating a fund drive with a goal of $5 million to be raised in two
years. The SFEC board retained the firm to conduct the campaign.49

Winstead, in an attempt to get advice on curriculum and how to
structure the new university’s administration, went on a fact-finding
trip to Caltech and the University of California at Los Angeles (UCLA)
with limited results. The board of trustees was short on funds, but
they were encouraged by Winstead’s progress and gave him permis-
sion to hire some key staff members: a vice president for academic
affairs, a vice president for finance, a librarian, a dean of the manage-
ment center, a dean of the education center, and a dean of the school
of engineering.50 Winstead, however, did not fill all of these positions
at that time.

Winstead also began recruiting an advisory board that would in-
clude a distinguished group of leaders in American science and busi-
ness. The first four members were James R. Killian Jr., president of
MIT in Cambridge; Paul F. Brandwein, assistant to the president of
Harcourt Brace and World in New York City; Robert B. Gilmore, vice
president for business affairs and treasurer at Caltech; and Ernest V.
Hollis, director of college and university administration in the divi-
ision of higher education at the U.S. Office of Education in Wash-
ington, DC. This original group had representatives from two of the
most prestigious universities in the country, Caltech and MIT. Killian
was one of the most admired and successful administrators in the
country. Robert Gilmore had experience in running the business af-
fairs of Caltech, and there was a representative from a major publish-
ing house and a key official in the federal government.51

The advisory board was later expanded to include another group of
eminent educators. Johannes Hans Jensen, a Nobel Laureate in phys-
ics and director of the Institute of Theoretical Physics at the Univer-
sity of Heidelberg, Germany; Richard Folsom, president of Rensselaer
Polytechnic Institute; Abram Sachar, president of Brandeis University;
Emilio G. Segre, a Nobel Laureate in physics and professor of physics
at the University of California, Berkeley; Frederick Seitz, president of
the National Academy of Sciences; and Athelstan Spilhaus, dean of the
Institute of Technology at the University of Minnesota. This outstanding board of advisors gave Nova instant national credibility. Warren Winstead accomplished this remarkable feat thanks to his charisma and unbridled enthusiasm for the concept of a graduate university in science. A great salesman, he persuaded some of the most acclaimed scientists in the country, including two Nobel Laureates, to sign on to a project that had not yet broken ground for its first building and did not yet have enough money to develop a university.

Winstead also decided to form a national founders council. This group was just as impressive as the advisory board and included Pierre Bedard, chairman of the executive committee of Cartier and advisor to the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; General Lucius D. Clay, a senior partner at Lehman Brothers; Thomas C. Fogarty, chairman of the board of Continental Can Company; Admiral David L. McDonald, chief of naval operations for the U.S. Navy; and W. Homer Turner, vice president and executive director of United States Steel Foundation. All of these illustrious names gave Nova national recognition and may well have swayed some donors, but their relationship with Nova was superficial. The Nova administrators, all academic amateurs, did not know how to take advantage of these important contacts. With the exception of Brandwein’s work in developing Nova High School and Killian’s favorable remarks about Nova’s future, history does not record any special contributions to Nova from these gentlemen.

As President Winstead requested, university architect James Hartley outlined to the board the proposed building sequence for the new campus. He discussed the siting of buildings and the estimated cost of a four-phase construction program scheduled to be implemented in the spring of 1965. Hartley divided his conceptual plan into two phases. The first was the master plan, which completely developed the site and tentatively located the building groups, walks, and drives that would comprise the university in its final stage. The second phase consisted of designing, developing, and supervising the construction of the first buildings. Hartley described the site as a flat, irregular shape—an abandoned airport without any natural landscape and with some of the runways removed prior to construction. He planned to create an independent community of learning, leaving to the town of Davie the responsibility of supplying food, commercial goods, and utilities.

The campus architect divided the campus into four areas: administrative, cultural, academic, and housing and social. Each area would
have its own identity yet would be integrated with the other areas via pedestrian walks, malls, and vehicular drives. Hartley placed the areas in such a manner as to allow for maximum flexibility and sufficient room for expansion so that the complete campus could be developed in stages without destroying the spatial relationship. Vehicular drives and parking were confined to the periphery “to prevent the invasion of the automobile into the center of the campus with the resulting congestion and confusion.”

The buildings were to be grouped around open courts where students would congregate before and after class. Malls would connect the courts, and a profusion of trees would protect them from the heat and sun. Hartley envisioned significant landscaping with palm trees, shrubbery, and colorful flowers, but the fledgling institution would not have the funds to spend on landscaping until many years later. Several artificial lakes would provide the campus with fill material for site conditioning, improve storm drainage, and add color and texture to the scenery. Hartley was careful to insist that the master plan’s unity be maintained throughout the various stages of construction, “especially since there will be a long span of time between the first and last buildings of the completed campus.”

With the assistance of developer A.D. Griffin, owner of Griffin Brothers Company, primarily a landscaping and paving business, the trustees authorized planting a few trees and some grass. Since the SFEC had limited landscaping funds, Griffin started by taking trees “out of people’s yards and taking them out of nurseries, making people give me their trees” until they had at least a modicum of landscaping.

While President Winstead met in Washington with the GSA and the HEW in an attempt to secure the final release of the land designated for the university, Tinsley Ellis worked on a draft of the proposed university’s charter. As Ellis later reported, he had never incorporated a university, so he went to see Tommy Thomas, associate counsel for the University of Miami, and asked for a copy of that school’s charter. Ellis recalled that the charter for Nova University of Advanced Technology was essentially a copy of the University of Miami’s charter with the names and dates changed. Ellis presented the document to the board on October 1, 1963, and the board quickly approved it.

Now that the SFEC had a charter, it could move ahead and get official authorization and recognition from the State of Florida. On December 4, 1964, five months after Winstead became president, the State of Florida approved Nova University of Advanced Technology,
Inc., under the laws of the state as a private, not-for-profit, degree-granting institution. Although chartered as a separate institution of higher learning, the SFEC trustees indicated that the university remained an integral part of the overall South Florida educational complex and declared that the SFEC would retain financial control of the university.56

By November 5, 1964, the SFEC belatedly recognized the reality that very few people in Broward County, let alone the state of Florida and the rest of the country, had ever heard of Nova University. Desperate to get some recognition and publicity to help with fund raising, the SFEC hired Jack Drury and Associates to do publicity and conduct a public relations program. Drury proposed a comprehensive and carefully coordinated program designed to create a favorable public image for the university. Drury expected to start in Broward County, using local media, and then expand as rapidly as possible to state and national scope.

The SFEC’s fund-raising effort went very slowly. Because the SFEC had limited assets and no campus buildings, it was unable to persuade local banks to establish a line of credit, nor would any bank lend it money without sufficient collateral. The founders hoped for a more favorable response from the banks when the Mather land gift cleared. At the time, the university had assets of only $115,000. When the Mather land grant became official and was combined with the value of the Forman Field land, the university would have assets valued at $750,000. As would be the case through the first twenty years, the fiscal situation was dire, and the university lacked the money to meet the November 1964 payroll. Tinsley Ellis offered a $1,500 loan; and when Jim Farquhar gave another five acres, the school took out a $10,000 loan against that land. These were merely stopgap measures, and the trustees realized that they had to step up the fund raising or the university would never become a reality.

More promising news came when President Winstead reported on a trip to Washington, DC, New York, and Boston. Winstead explained that the U.S. Office of Education would put Nova on a priority list to receive grants, and that NASA would consider Nova for grants as soon as the university was able to execute such grants. The National Science Foundation and the Ford Foundation continued to provide advice and assistance, and Harvard University faculty promised to help with recruiting faculty and students.57

While fund raising remained a top priority, Winstead proceeded with hiring the first faculty and administrative staff. Charles Gauss became the assistant to the president for academic affairs. Abraham S.
Fischler came from the University of California, Berkeley to be dean of the Hollywood Education Center. William S. Richardson, employed to head the physical oceanography unit, brought major research contracts with him. Raymond Pepinsky, with a grant of $35,000, was appointed as the Robert O. Law Professor of Physics. Winstead selected Arthur W. Wishart as head of Nova’s planning and development functions. Duval S. Adams served as business manager, and Henry E. Kinney was placed in charge of public relations.58

Nova’s attempt to get national recognition received an important assist when Winstead journeyed to New York to publicize the school on NBC’s Today show with Barbara Walters. On January 21, 1965, in a follow-up, the Today show came to Fort Lauderdale. The SFEC expected that the Today show would concentrate on publicity for Nova University and explain the Nova concept as a cooperative community undertaking. The Today show producers, however, focused on Nova High School and only reluctantly mentioned Nova University.59

Although Winstead had managed to hire his initial faculty, money remained in short supply. If the SFEC were ever to fulfill the founders’ ambitious plans, it needed a massive infusion of cash as soon as possible. Robert Ellyson, vice president for finance for the SFEC, reported that the cash shortage was such that after having just enough money to pay November’s bills, the school could barely meet the December payroll. Ellyson anticipated that the following month would end in a deficit unless something was done immediately. Farquhar, recognizing a significant crisis, implored SFEC members to provide additional financial support. Farquhar reminded his colleagues that the board had to show its faith in the project with personal contributions before it could expect outsiders to make substantial donations.60

A financial study by Miami firm Hunter Moss and Company became the rationale for a renewed fund-raising effort. The thirty-four-page research report concluded that Broward County citizens would receive a great return on their investment as Nova University grew in size and influence. The study indicated that Nova University would be a huge financial boon for the county and that the economic outflow from the establishment of Nova University would provide a beneficial effect for business, industry, and ordinary citizens. Hunter Moss predicted that by 1975 the university would have constructed twenty-five buildings at a total cost of approximately $27 million. The report claimed that in specific terms, the university would attract high-tech industry to Fort Lauderdale and by 1980 would add 25,000 skilled jobs and 35,000 service workers, (a total of more than 60,000 new
positions), and a payroll of $630 million. Hunter Moss concluded that Nova, combined with the research facilities that would be attracted to it, would represent one of the largest industries in Broward County.61

The Hunter Moss study of Nova University was flawed in factual content, promotional in tone, and overly optimistic. Despite its extravagant forecasts, the study did reflect the optimism and zest with which Broward County’s civic leaders joined the new Nova president in planning the new university. The predicted economic impact was certainly premature, especially in regard to the pace of building construction, but would eventually prove to be more accurate as Nova expanded and prospered. Winstead and the SFEC effectively used this financial study to persuade donors to come to the aid of the fledgling university.

In some ways, the time and place were propitious for establishing an innovative, interdisciplinary, elite graduate research center for advanced technology. In the early 1960s, the federal government was investing more funds into scientific research and exploration and had an increased interest in oceanographic studies. The rapidly growing Broward area had a strong economic base, and the state of Florida would see a population explosion in the 1960s and 1970s. Trained graduates would be needed for the expanding technology markets, and Nova could supply those scientists and inventors.

As the SFEC increased its efforts to obtain more money, they sponsored fund-raising events of every conceivable kind. Cocktail receptions and dinners were frequent but garnered limited results. The SFEC created a newsletter and a fact sheet to explain the university’s goals and financial needs. Brochures were sent out to newspapers and possible donors to elicit more interest in and support for Nova. Winstead persuaded the state legislature to extend Broward County’s racing season by one day, and then wheedled the pari-mutuel track operators and jai alai frontons into using the extra day as “Nova Day,” with all proceeds going to Nova University. These funds netted Nova $153,000 in the first year, but, while helpful, did not provide enough income to establish a new university. One of Nova’s early supporters, James Donn Sr., was an honorary member of the board of trustees and a member of the Gold Key Club. The Donn family had established Gulfstream Park as one of the East Coast’s most important and best-managed racetracks. James Donn made the Derby Ball and the Nova University Days at the Races annual charitable events; both benefits eventually grossed more than $300,000.
Donn also provided funds for the James Donn Sr. Chair of Science Education.  

Winstead kept up his constant search for new sources of income. He managed to get a $1,100,000 federal loan to build married-student housing and a $552,000 HEW grant for an educational center. He talked social activists in nearby Hollywood, Florida, into donating the proceeds of their annual Derby Ball to Nova and picked up another $47,000. He asked local merchants to donate outdated merchandise that was not selling. Nova held a sale of these items and netted $8,000. He managed to convince seven local millionaire yachtsmen that there were tax advantages to giving their old yachts to Nova. One of the donations was the famous racing ketch The Ticonderoga, holder of more sailing records than any other craft of its kind. By chartering or reselling the yachts, the university made $100,000. Earl Vettel made a splendid and badly needed donation of fifty acres of land contiguous to the university, and then promised another fifty acres under a life income trust agreement.

From the very beginning, as it would be throughout its history, Nova University demonstrated an entrepreneurial drive in raising funds and establishing the university. Whether selling yachts or outdated merchandise, Nova took advantage of whatever opportunities were presented and figured out new and innovative ways to raise funds. Tinsley Ellis praised Winstead for doing a great job as the “front man” for the university, for persuading the advisory board members to sign on, and for his fund-raising: “He was very charismatic. He had a wonderful personality.”  

To increase participation from the community’s more affluent members, President Winstead set up two special organizations: the Gold Key Society of Nova University, whose fifty members agreed to give $1,000 every year to the university, and the Royal Dames of Nova, whose members pledged $2,500 for a lifetime membership. The Royal Dames solicited funds for cancer research through the Germ-Free Life Research Center, later renamed the Leo Goodwin Institute for Cancer Research. The Royal Dames was a highly selective organization whose membership was chosen to reflect a broad spectrum of talent, leadership, and creativity.

The fund-raising efforts, while picking up significant sums of money, did not attract the very large donors necessary for survival. Most of the local citizenry simply were not interested in making sizeable contributions to such an iffy proposition. After all, there was no physical presence in the community—there were no buildings on
campus, no students, no faculty. Many still saw Nova as an unattainable pipe dream. As would be the case throughout the early history of the institution, just when it appeared the plan would fail for lack of money, a white knight, often Jim Farquhar, would come up with money or a land donation. Nova University came very close to never opening at all, and when it did so, it came close to failing on several occasions. In retrospect it seems a miracle that the institution survived, but it did so because of the courage, ingenuity, resourcefulness, and commitment of those who truly believed in the dream.

To provide more information about the university’s activities to the general public, the SFEC started a four-page bimonthly pamphlet called *NovaTech*. In 1965, this publication became the monthly *Nova University News*. The Gold Key Club had its own board of directors and its own monthly publication, the *NOVACRAT*, which kept the public informed about fund-raising.65

The founders, now ready to begin construction on the first building, asked architect Hartley to explain the sequence of events and the funding requirements. Hartley announced that the first construction would be for the student center, which would cost $1,317,000. He estimated that it would take approximately one year to complete the building. Hartley told the board that as the architect, he had gone as far as he could and now they needed to hire structural, mechanical, and electrical engineers to proceed. Hartley cautioned the finance committee that they must know exactly where all the money was coming from before they entered into any construction agreement. Winstead, Hartley, and Farquhar reported that they had visited several universities and colleges on the East and West Coasts, and that they intended to incorporate the best architecture and structural designs from these institutions into the planning of Nova University.66

The development of the administrative structure for the governance of the new university proceeded slowly. At the February 4, 1965, meeting, Winstead asked the SFEC to restrict the new board of trustees for Nova University of Advanced Technology to a small group of dedicated and active individuals rather than a large and unwieldy group, which might find coming to a consensus on issues difficult. The SFEC decided that Nova’s Board of Trustees would consist of twenty-five members—the thirteen members of the SFEC executive committee, the university president, and eleven others to be selected by the initial thirteen board members for staggered three-year terms.

For the time being, however, trusteeship of the university continued to be vested in the SFEC executive committee. This small group of
dedicated individuals wanted to remain engaged in the constant and strenuous effort of making the university a reality. The SFEC had to continue the planning and organization since Nova University had not yet received its tax-exempt status and thus could not raise money or take over assets held by the SFEC. Shortly thereafter, however, Nova University received its tax-exempt status, and on July 1, 1965, the trustees of the South Florida Education Center signed over all of the assets, including land, all funds save for $1,000, and all liabilities to the not-for-profit corporation known as Nova University of Advanced Technology, Inc., which would “develop and operate the university contemplated by the SFEC.”67 Nova University was now an independent entity. It was on its own. As the first technical university established in the United States in twenty years and with a prominent advisory board, Nova was under extreme pressure to secure formal accreditation. In short, Nova had to become a first-class institution with a superior faculty and qualified students in a very short time.

Nova University of Advanced Technology

First and foremost for Nova would be obtaining the academic accreditation it so badly needed. Warren Winstead visited Gordon Sweet, executive director of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the accrediting agency, based in Atlanta. Sweet, who would prove to be a loyal friend and staunch supporter, revealed that Nova should have no trouble getting accredited during its first two years of existence. Sweet and the SACS inspection team visited Nova University and found its development on track. Based on SACS’s favorable report, the U.S. Office of Education, on October 4, 1965, certified the university’s eligibility to receive grants and loans under federal programs—a huge step forward.

Everywhere the new administration looked, they saw that they needed more money for salaries and operating expenses. They needed a physical sciences building, which would cost $2 million, but only $1 million was available. The much-desired administration building was projected to cost $1,400,000. The university had $400,000 from the sale of land, but it had trouble raising additional funds. Despite the lack of money, on December 11, 1965, the university decided to hold a site dedication ceremony for the first building. Having overcome many barriers, Nova was finally beginning construction on its new campus.68
The first building was the Edwin M. and Ester L. Rosenthal Student Center. Groundbreaking ceremonies for the Rosenthal edifice were held on June 2, 1966. Edwin Rosenthal, a pioneer resident of Hollywood, Florida, made his fortune in South Florida real estate. Rosenthal’s gift of $300,000 came to the university under unusual circumstances. Myron Segal, a heart surgeon with close ties to Nova (he was married to Marilyn ‘Mickey’ Segal, daughter of A.L. Mailman), had performed surgery on Ed Rosenthal. Rosenthal asked Segal what he would like in compensation for his medical skills. Segal asked for and received $350,000 from Rosenthal to set up a nursing facility at Memorial Hospital and requested that Rosenthal make a contribution to Nova University. Although Rosenthal had no connection to the university, he honored Segal’s request and donated $300,000 to the school.69

In the early years of fund solicitation, many of the large donors were not from Fort Lauderdale as would be expected, but hailed from nearby Hollywood. Interested citizens formed the Hollywood Founders of Nova University as a voluntary group to raise the funds to construct a science education center. They were very successful in obtaining contributions, and since they were from Hollywood, the new building would be named the Hollywood Building. Because A.L. Mailman came forward with a generous sum to complete the construction, the final designation was the Mailman-Hollywood Building. It is not often that residents have their city’s name inscribed on a building as principal donors.

Citizens of Davie, Florida, not to be outdone, formed a committee to conduct a fund-raising campaign to help pay for the construction of an apartment complex for married students. The Nova University Association, a group of “honorary alumni,” was also formed to help raise money for the university.70 Now that ground had been broken for the first building, area residents began to believe that this improbable idea might come to fruition after all and were eager to contribute. The Rosenthal building was completed and dedicated on May 21, 1967. Edwin M. Rosenthal, the octogenarian donor, described the ceremony as “the proudest day of my life” and urged the five hundred people in the audience “to take an interest in helping Nova become one of the outstanding universities in the United States.”71

In February 1966, Winstead initiated the school’s first recruitment of students by sending brochures to colleges and universities throughout the nation announcing Nova’s PhD programs. Nova was prepared to accept students in science education, physical oceanography, and
Figure 1.4  A U.S. mailbox, one of the earliest structures to be erected on-site during the building construction phase in the 1960s. (By permission of Nova Southeastern University Archives, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.)

Figure 1.5  The first three buildings constructed at what was then called Nova University of Advanced Technology. From left to right: Rosenthal Student Center, Louis W. Parker Physical Sciences Center, and Mailman-Hollywood Building. (By permission of Nova Southeastern University Archives, Fort Lauderdale, Florida.)
physical sciences. With the first building completed and student applications coming in, there was an air of optimism among the administration and trustees that the venture might actually become a reality. To persuade the public that the university was on sound footing and would survive, the twenty-five members of the board of trustees showed their faith in the institution’s future by making monetary commitments worth some $4.4 million. The original board of trustees for what was now an independent Nova University of Advanced Technology included the original members of the Oatmeal Club and the SFEC trustees. In essence, the leadership had not changed, and the same group of businessmen continued to guide Nova University during its first years of existence. Board members were James “Jim” Farquhar (chairman), W. Howard Allen, Warren J. Winstead, Stuart Synnestvedt; Robert O. Barber, Robert C. Ellyson, Henry E. Kinney, Henry D. Perry, Charles Forman, John J. Hines, William C. Mather, L.C. Judd, Robert E. Ferris, W. Tinsley Ellis, and Myron Ashmore.

On May 18, 1966, work began on the $2.65 million Louis W. Parker Physical Sciences Center. The university had $1 million from Parker, but lacked the funds to compete the building. Under these circumstances the university decided to build just the shell and wait until they could raise funds to finish the structure. James Hartley explained the reasoning behind the decision. He said that if Nova were to complete its vision of a viable university of technology, then the Parker Building—the physical sciences center—would have to be the primary academic building. So, rather than build one story, which is all they could afford, and add on to it later, they built the building’s shell and completed the interior portion of the first floor. Later, when the university had accumulated enough money, Nova went ahead and built out the third floor so that the Germ-Free Life Research Center could move its headquarters to the building. The second floor remained unfinished until the early 1970s.

Surprisingly, Nova did not initially build a central power plant for heating and air conditioning—again, due to lack of funds. The power plant was part of the original design, but Louis Parker wanted his donation put into the Parker Building. As Hartley recalled, the man who gave the money made the final decision, so the power plant was not built in 1966. Nova finally constructed a state-of-the-art central power plant in 2011.

One of Nova’s most important early developments was the creation of the Physical Oceanographic Laboratory. To begin with, Fort Lauderdale and Port Everglades offered a perfect location for
oceanographic studies. The idea for an oceanographic center at Nova evolved from Charles Forman, who had been instrumental in starting the oceanographic program at Florida Atlantic University (FAU). FAU, however, specialized in engineering, and Charles Forman and his brother Hamilton wanted oceanographic research on tides and coral reefs.

In July 1966, Nova hired William Richardson, who had been at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution and worked for the University of Miami, to be professor of physical oceanography. In August 1965, Richardson, writing to express his interest in Nova, noted that if he were employed to establish a center there, he would require technicians and electronics people as well as another scientist in physical oceanography. Richardson also requested a large two-story houseboat for a lab on the water and a forty- to fifty-foot diesel boat for use in the Florida Straits.74

After Richardson agreed to come to Nova, the university supplied him with almost everything he had requested. Richardson turned out to be a superlative hire. He was very well known in the profession, and because he brought with him several federal and scientific contracts, he could open for business immediately. Richardson had a $168,000 contract with the National Science Foundation to study tides and a grant from the Office of Naval Research to survey the Gulf Stream.

By September 1966, research was underway at the Oceanographic Center with a group of three professors, five students, and more than a dozen assorted assistants, associates, secretaries, and specialists. These new employees worked in a cluster of house trailers and in temporary quarters aboard a sixty-foot, two-story houseboat specially designed as a laboratory. The houseboat contained the instruments, library, machine shop, and radio room that were necessary for the center’s research. From 1966 to 1970, the Oceanographic Center was located on the waterfront alongside Southeast 15th Street in Fort Lauderdale. In December 1970, the houseboat, staff, and equipment moved to its permanent location on the Intercoastal Waterway opposite Port Everglades.

Richardson had two major research vessels at his disposal, The Gulf Stream and The Bellows. He used the former to drop small torpedo-like tubes overboard at intervals to measure the Gulf Stream’s flow, temperature, and salinity. Richardson indicated that the nature of this information was vital: “Regardless of what you want to do in the ocean—farm it, mine it, live under it, navigate over it—you first must know what the currents are doing.”
The research could not proceed as efficiently as Richardson desired with the main lab on a houseboat, so he requested a permanent building on the ocean. Hamilton Forman, using his contacts and influence, “made the rounds of the county commission and was able to get them . . . to give us ten acres” of prime land at Port Everglades. The Forman brothers then built a $125,000 basin on the new property and moved the houseboat to its permanent location on December 10, 1970. The location, just south of the Port Everglades Inlet, placed it within minutes of the Gulf Stream. Leading oceanographers pronounced the location as outstanding. Work soon began on a 17,000-square-foot multipurpose structure that would house laboratories and administrative offices and a 6,000-square-foot warehouse. Richardson believed the facility would be a model for future centers in oceanography and thought it would be to international oceanography what the Nova complex was: “a showplace of advanced ideas.”

In April 1969, movie star Steve McQueen came to the Oceanographic Center for advice on making a major film on oceanography. Winstead reported that he met with McQueen and the writer of the script for the immensely popular film Bullitt to discuss using the Port Everglades property as the site for the proposed motion picture. The film would be produced by McQueen’s film company, Solar Productions, which had produced Bullitt. Winstead later remarked that Nova was “led to believe that, should our site and university be selected for a film on oceanography, the film company might construct some buildings, [build] a submarine which would become the property of the university, and make a substantial cash gift.” McQueen apparently lost interest and nothing came of the idea.

The official opening of Nova University was targeted for September 25, 1967. The university planned for the event to be a “family affair,” with trustees, faculty, students, and their families participating in an on-campus program. Prior to the opening of the university, on September 20, 1967, Nova put out several news releases explaining what the institution was about and what it planned to accomplish. The initial news releases were replete with hyperbole and exaggerated claims, but this promotion was designed to capture the attention of scientists and educators around the country. One began with the statement that Nova University had been called one of the great ideas in twentieth-century education. Abram Sachar, president of Brandeis University and a member of Nova’s board of advisors, said about the school, “A university cannot be created in these times without a great idea—and you have here a great idea.” The press release went on to
claim that Nova University (although it had not yet opened its doors) “ranks unquestionably as one of America’s most exciting responses to the swiftly advancing technological needs of the nation and the times.”

Nova University, touted another news release, had been designed for the advanced, the gifted, and the creative student. The student would work in an enclave where he and his fellows would study together in an atmosphere dedicated to education and scientific discovery. Most students would be in graduate school, as the baccalaureate would not be offered as a terminal degree. The student-faculty ratio would be very low—one to five at most.

The university, continued the news story, believed that the “role of the humanist and scientist in our world are inextricably intertwined.” Nova intended to equip its students with “the flexibility of mind and imaginative power necessary for creative work in our world of rapidly advancing scientific knowledge” and give them “the skills and appreciation necessary for a full and rewarding life.”

All of this rhetoric sounded exciting and challenging, but these ideas were theoretical and had not yet been proven. A closer examination of the Nova concept revealed that the idea of a graduate-level-only institution had no chance of success. The theory was impractical, unrealistic, and simply would not work. How could the university survive if there were only seventeen students, all of whom were on full scholarship? There would be no tuition money to pay the faculty and run the university. The university would have to depend on grants and donations to survive, but these essential funds would not be forthcoming, and the school would be on the verge of bankruptcy in less than two years. The founders and President Winstead were so caught up in and excited by the boldness of their idea that they missed the impracticality of the concept.

In pursuing its unique plan for higher education, Nova announced that it would not be organized into colleges and schools in the traditional manner. Instead, each group of closely related subject areas would constitute a center where the research professors and their colleagues would have mutual interests and an intimate working relationship. Each center would be autonomous, but there would be constant cooperation among them in developing research programs.

Abraham Fischler, head of the Education Center, held his first meeting in September 1967, with the faculty members of his new center. Fischler explained that the main focus of the Education Center would be to develop new methods of teaching and learning, and to train
professional teachers to be more effective and productive. The center would have no formal courses or units, no semesters or quarters. Each student would be assigned to a committee of five faculty members who would assess the student’s current level of knowledge, determine the student’s goals, and provide the academic guidance for him or her to complete the work necessary to reach their goals. The Education Center would work closely with the public elementary schools and the high school in the Nova complex.78

To attract students and to provide detailed information about the new university to parents and other members of the community, Nova put out a brochure titled “Your Questions Answered.” Some examples: (Q) Is the university tax supported? “The university receives no support from local or state tax funds, nor does it seek any. It is proud of being a private institution.” (Q) Is the university accredited? “It has been accepted by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges as a ‘candidate’ for accreditation, which means that it is progressing satisfactorily toward formal accreditation. Accreditation cannot be made official until the university awards its first degree.” (Q) How are the students selected? “They are selected on the basis of their academic experience and academic goals, their experience and proficiency in research, recommendations from their professors, and their adjudged ability to perform successfully in the unique academic environment of Nova University.”

Other questions answered in the brochure included: (Q) What is the relationship of the university to Nova Elementary School, Nova High School, and Broward Junior College? “There is no direct relationship, since these schools are public and the university is private. However, the design for the Nova Complex provides that there shall be an interchange of activities and ideas between the public and private sector . . . that the public schools shall profit from the research and studies developed at the university . . . and that to some degree the public schools shall serve as laboratories for the university’s educational research programs.” The university announced a capital campaign to raise $15,000,000 and encouraged donors to provide gifts in the form of cash, securities, and property, and noted that the gifts were tax deductible.79

The university also announced the first members of the faculty. In an unusual academic ratio, there would be seventeen faculty members to tutor the seventeen graduate students enrolled for the fall semester, thus a one-to-one ratio between faculty and students. The list of new faculty (only fifteen of the seventeen faculty were eventually hired) is
presented below in alphabetical order by surname, with their position at Nova and the institution where they received their terminal degree:

Kuldip Chopra, professor of applied physics, PhD, Delhi University, India.
Abraham S. Fischler, dean of graduate studies and James Donn Professor of Education, EdD, Teachers College, Columbia University.
Charles E. Gauss, provost, PhD, The Johns Hopkins University.
Roy C. Herndon, associate professor of physics, PhD, Florida State University.
Robert J. Jones, assistant professor of psychology, PhD, University of Texas.
Aijaz Khan, postdoctoral fellow in solid-state physics, PhD, Osmania University, Hyderabad, India.
Joseph I. Lipson, professor of science education, PhD, University of California, Berkeley.
William A. Love Jr., assistant professor of psychology, PhD, University of Texas.
Peter P. Niiler, assistant professor of theoretical oceanography, PhD, Brown University.
Raymond Pepinsky, Robert O. Law Professor of Physics, PhD, University of Chicago.
William S. Richardson, dean of graduate faculty and professor of oceanography, PhD, Harvard University.
James Smith, research associate, science education, EdD, Stanford University.
Judith Rubenstein Steward, assistant professor of psychology, PhD, University of Connecticut.
Warren J. Winstead, president and professor of education, EdD, Harvard University.
Charles S. Yentsch, associate professor of marine biology, MS (biology), Florida State University.

A careful study of the faculty members hired for the opening of Nova University reveals some interesting and surprising information. There was only one female out of the fifteen new professors. The entire faculty, with one exception, had EdDs or PhDs. The one exception was in oceanography, and he had the terminal degree in his field. Not only did they all have terminal degrees, but the degrees were also from the best universities in the country. These included Harvard University, Teachers College Columbia University, University of Chicago,
University of Texas, Brown University, Stanford University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the Johns Hopkins University. Several of the faculty had already published and were experts in their fields. All were working on research projects that coincided with the academic programs at Nova.

How in the world did Warren Winstead manage to attract such a well-qualified faculty to a barren campus with only one building, a significant lack of funds, only seventeen graduate students, and a flawed concept for maintaining a viable university? As with his recruitment of the board of advisors, part of Winstead’s success was due to his charisma, his ability to sell the program, and his optimism that the Nova concept would work. He offered salaries much higher than the going rate and promised the faculty freedom to do their own research. The faculty was certainly attracted by the balmy weather in South Florida and the possible future benefits from living in a prosperous and rapidly growing area. They were also intrigued by the innovative ideas and creative possibilities of the new university. In Abe Fischler’s case, he saw a great opportunity for his research as he could use the Nova schools as a living laboratory for his educational design to improve science teaching in the public schools, and he liked the innovative and flexible design of the new university.81

The initial list of university employees included thirty-eight staff members. The university claimed $9,500,000 in assets and $1,228,000 in promised research grants. Using the research report done by the firm of Hunter Moss, Nova predicted that when the university achieved its full growth by 1980, there would be 255 professors, 200 associate professors, and 250 support staff. The university estimated that by 1980, industries that Nova had attracted would employ 60,000 engineers, technicians, and service workers. The university estimated that its annual payroll by 1980 would be in excess of $600 million.82 Nova University used these statistics to create a positive first impression and hoped the favorable predictions would garner increased support from the local community. Nonetheless, as indicated earlier, these estimations were a misrepresentation of the first order.

At this juncture, Nova University had accomplished its initial goals: it had hired a staff and faculty and recruited students, and was now ready to open its doors.