

# Florida university to open campus here

## Dirt to turn on 28 acres near Circle C soon

*Premium content from Austin Business Journal by Cody Lyon, Staff writer*

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One of the nation's largest institutions for graduate studies in physical and occupational therapy will build its third campus on 28 acres near the Circle C Ranch neighborhood in Southwest Austin.

Florida-based University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences plans to break ground on its future graduate school this month.

The private institution, which has campuses in Florida and San Diego, offers graduate degrees in occupational and physical therapy and an orthopedic physician assistant program. The school will also offer continuing professional education for practicing therapists.

The Austin campus will ultimately be capable of educating about 500 students. It will have two, two-story buildings housing 80,000 square feet of laboratory and auditorium-style classrooms plus library, research, office and administrative space, according to California-based Sawtooth Development Group, which is developing the campus.

"We decided on the southwest submarket of Austin because of its proximity to student housing. It's near the cool So-Co [South Congress] area, and we have to provide attractive housing options for our professors," said [Shane Felker](#), president of Sawtooth Development.

The new grad school comes at a time when the nation's demand for physical therapists has been booming. Part of the increased demand comes from an increasingly aging population. From 1990 to 2010, the number of Americans 65 and older grew from 29.6 million to 38.6 million, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. That number is expected to grow by 20 million in the coming years.

As the nation grows older, physical ailments become more abundant — and that boosts the market for physical therapists. The field is poised to grow by more than 56,000 jobs, or 30 percent, from 2008 to 2018, according to the U.S. Labor Department.

"There is a definite need for more universities offering a doctorate in physical therapy in Texas," said [Paul Hardin](#), executive director at the Texas Physical Therapy Association.

Demand for physical therapists in Texas exceeds the number of graduates in the state, he said.

"Just take a look at our career center and you can see the demand for physical therapists in Austin and other Texas areas," Hardin said.

Above-average salaries in the field also bode well for the University of St. Augustine being able to attract students. According to the Department of Labor, the median annual compensation for physical therapists was \$74,480 in 2009. The lowest-paid 10 percent earned about \$52,170, while the highest-paid 10 percent made nearly \$106,000.

Those and other factors have had Texas on the University of St. Augustine's radar screen for a long time, said university President [Wanda Nitsch](#), who agreed that the state's colleges and universities have struggled to meet Texas' demand for physical therapists.

"We started looking at Texas around four years ago," said Nitsch, adding that the university chose Austin for various reasons.

Nitsch said the school emphasizes wellness, which Austin has been noted as valuing with its abundant bike lanes, running trails and love of the outdoor lifestyle. It's reasonable to think that Austinites' affinity for fitness is something many would want to turn into a career, she said.

Meanwhile, Austin's ability to serve as a recruiting tool for faculty and students was stronger than she realized.

"Then you have all those [University of Texas graduates] sitting there, wanting to go into the health sciences field. So we knew this was a good recruiting place," Nitsch said.

The University of St. Augustine will need to hire a wide variety of faculty and administrative personnel as it starts the campus from scratch.

Construction of the campus will create about 200 jobs at its peak, said [Matt Murphy](#), business development director for Hardin Construction LLC, the project's general contractor.

Others involved in the project include Bury + Partners Inc. as civil engineer, Land Design Partners Inc. as landscape architect and KLT Engineering as structural engineer. The project was designed by California architect [Andrew Kjellberg](#).

**Courtesy of JB Goodwin**