Florida Atlantic University was established by the Florida State Legislature in 1961 as the fifth university in the state system.

When it opened in 1964, FAU was one of the few universities in the country to offer only upper-division and graduate-level work, on the theory that freshmen and sophomores could be served by the community college system. Located in rapidly growing Southeast Florida, the University responded to the need to provide increased access to educational opportunities by opening its doors to freshmen in 1984. Today, with its well-developed system of distributed campuses and sites that offer students high-quality degree programs at multiple locations, FAU serves as a model for America's urban, regional universities. FAU offers a comprehensive array of undergraduate and graduate programs, enrolling more than 30,000 students who bring rich cultural diversity to campus life.

Florida Atlantic University's 10 colleges are the College for Design and Social Inquiry, the Dorothy F. Schmidt College of Arts and Letters, the College of Business, the College of Education, the College of Engineering and Computer Science, the Graduate College, the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing, the Charles E. Schmidt College of Medicine, the Charles E. Schmidt College of Science and the Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College. Established in 1999, the Honors College provides a unique and challenging curriculum for academically talented students from Florida and beyond. Together, these colleges offer more than 175 degree programs. In addition, the University is home to one of the largest and most successful lifelong learning programs in the nation.

The University's campuses are located on the Gold and Treasure Coasts of Southeast Florida. The region's temperate climate, beautiful beaches, innovative industries and unique cultural opportunities provide a stimulating environment for scholars and researchers. FAU has 17 Eminent Scholar Chairs in many diverse academic disciplines, and it is the home of nationally recognized research centers. The University's Research Park facilitates research and learning initiatives by bringing high-tech industries into close collaboration with faculty and students. In recognition of the University's research funding and doctoral programs, the Division of Colleges and Universities of the Florida Board of Education has classified FAU as a research university. Additionally, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching has designated FAU a "High Research Activity" university.

Florida Atlantic University is a member of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, which has granted it full accreditation, the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities and the Council of Graduate Schools in the United States.