Kannur University was established by the Act 22 of 1996 of Kerala Legislative Assembly. The University by the name "Malabar University" had come into existence earlier by the promulgation of an Ordinance by the Governor of Kerala, on 9th November 1995. The University was inaugurated on 2nd March 1996 by the former Hon. Chief Minister of Kerala. The objective of the Kannur University Act 1996 is to establish in the state of Kerala a teaching, residential and affiliating University, promoting the development of higher education in Kasargod and Kannur revenue districts and the Mananthavady Taluk of Wayanad District.

Kannur University is a multi-campus university, at Kannur, Kasargod, Mananthavady, Payyannur, Thalassery, and Kanhangad.

Kannur University includes the following Department:

- School of Information Science & Technology, Department of Information Technology
- School of English & Foreign Languages, Department of Studies in English
- School of Education, Department of Education
- School of Social Sciences, Department of Anthropology
- School of Science & Technology
- School of Life Sciences, Department of Biotechnology & Microbiology; Food Science
- School of Management Studies, Department of Management Studies
- School of Development Studies, Department of Applied Economics
- School of Business Administration, (M.B.A)
- School of Legal Studies, Department of Law
- School of Physical Education and Sports Sciences, Department of Physical Education
- School of Chemical Sciences, Department of Chemistry
- School of Pure and Applied Physics, Department of Physics
- School of Visual and Fine Arts, Department of Music
- School of Pedagogical Sciences
- School of Indian Languages
- School of Geography & Environment
- School of Health Sciences
- Inter University Center for Bioscience
- Department of Library and Information Science