

Around the State: HCU launches new admissions program

February 11, 2025

Pursuing a college education at Houston Christian University is easier with the launch of the Guaranteed Admission Program. The program enables qualifying students at Alief, Fort Bend, Katy and Lamar Consolidated independent school districts and YES Prep Public Schools with a 3.0 GPA to bypass the traditional admissions process and be enrolled automatically at HCU. **James Steen**, vice president for enrollment management at HCU, said the program allows the university “to accept qualified high school seniors based on their cumulative GPA, as well as guarantee them a scholarship offer before they officially submit an application. Those who are interested then fill out an onboarding form that can make them eligible for even more institutional aid.” Under a memorandum of understanding with each institution, HCU identifies eligible students for the program and assigns an admissions counselor to work with students to facilitate the enrollment process and ongoing communications. The program’s aim is to reduce the stress and expense high school students experience applying at multiple educational institutions during the college search. For more information, visit the [Guaranteed Admissions](#) landing page.



UMHB's professor of social work and director of international study abroad, Kerry-Ann Zamore-Byrd, leads a panel discussion during last year's Black History Month. (UMHB Photo)

In celebration of Black History Month, the University of Mary Hardin-Baylor's Kingdom Diversity Office, together with K. Zamore Enterprises, is hosting a "Unified Praise" gospel gathering. This night of worship will emphasize God's word conveyed through dramatic narratives, expressed in dance, and surrounded by inspiring praise and worship. The celebration of gospel music will be held in the Sue & Frank Mayborn Performing Arts Center at 7 p.m. on Friday, Feb. 21. General admission tickets are \$30 each, and UMHB alumni and employees can purchase tickets for a reduced price of \$20. Admission is free for UMHB students. The general public can purchase tickets online at [Unified Praise "A Gospel Gathering" | KerryAnn Zamore](#). Before the performance, UMHB's Kingdom Diversity Office will host a panel discussion entitled "The Importance of the Black Church in the Black Community," a conversation around the Black church's importance and quintessential voice in the Black community, at 5 p.m. on Feb. 21. It will open with an oration featuring David Holcomb, UMHB history and political science professor. This event is free and will be held in the Manning Chapel at UMHB's Paul and Jane Meyer Christian Studies Center.

“We are committed to our students’ preparedness in their chosen fields of study. The social experiences that shape their attitudes and ability to connect with those around them is also a primary focus for us,” explained **Sanfrená Britt**, director of the Kingdom Diversity office. “We understand that the quintessential pillars within the various ethnic communities shape the core values of each student before they ever step foot on our campus. We are careful to hold these foundational elements of their lives as treasured parts of our university. Cultural awareness events such as this are how we continuously do this.” To learn more about these events, visit [Kingdom Diversity](#).



Wayland Baptist University’s School of Humanities and Leadership hosted the annual Festival Hispano de Cultura y Lengua (Hispanic Language and Culture Festival) on Feb. 6. (Wayland Photo)

During the university’s Homecoming week, Wayland Baptist University’s School of Humanities and Leadership hosted the annual Festival Hispano de Cultura y Lengua (Hispanic Language and Culture Festival) on Feb. 6. The event welcomed approximately 200 students from regional high schools to the Plainview campus for a day filled with cultural celebration, educational experiences and artistic expression. “We are thrilled to host

this special event, which not only celebrates the beauty of the Hispanic culture and language but also brings together young students to experience the university environment,” said **Erin Heath**, associate dean. Attendees participated in interactive sessions highlighting the richness of Hispanic language and culture, engaged with peers from across the region and enjoyed a showcase of student artwork. The Festival Hispano de Cultura y Lengua is one of the many ways Wayland Baptist University continues to support education, diversity and cultural enrichment within the local community.



HPU students recently competed at the American Moot Court Association Regional Tournament at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., and are pictured from left to right: Alli Harvey, Katelynn Turner, Amber Williams and Sadie Willie. (HPU Photo)

Howard Payne University’s Moot Court team competed in two tournaments

in the fall. During a competition, students are given a problem with constitutional issues to determine. This year, there were two major constitutional issues to argue—the Fifth Amendment right against self-incrimination and the Free Speech clause of the First Amendment. The students must read 20 legal cases and develop constitutional arguments for both sides. Then, they argue before a panel of judges, similar to a Supreme Court case where the judges ask the competitors legal questions directly. In October, they competed at Colorado Christian University, where senior jurisprudence and Guy D. Newman Honors Academy majors **Amber Williams** and **Sadie Willie** placed in the top 16. In December, the Moot Court team competed at the American Moot Court Association Regional Tournament at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass. **Katelynn Turner**, junior history and Academy major, placed 20th out of 60 competitors in the individual category. Amber Williams and Sadie Willie made it to the Top 16. **Alli Harvey**, senior jurisprudence and Academy major, also participated. For more information about Moot Court at HPU, visit www.hputx.edu/mootcourt.



Grant Jay, who plays on DBU baseball's No. 17 ranked team. (DBU Photo)

Coming off their 10th consecutive appearance in the NCAA Regional, the DBU baseball team kicks off the 2025 season ranked No. 17 in the nation in

Perfect Game's Preseason Top 25. Under the guidance of Head Coach Dan Heefner, the Patriots have solidified their place among college baseball's elite programs. DBU is one of just five teams nationally to reach the NCAA postseason each of the past 10 years, joining powerhouse programs like Florida, LSU, Oklahoma State and Vanderbilt. Additionally, the Patriots have averaged 43 wins per season since 2015, ranking as the third-highest win total in the nation over that span. The Patriots will open their 2025 season at home on Feb. 14 against North Dakota State. Their schedule features 14 games against teams that advanced to the postseason in 2024. As DBU enters its third season in Conference USA, the Patriots are coming off a strong year, having clinched the conference tournament championship after winning the league's regular season title in their inaugural season in 2023.

Country music stars Cross Canadian Ragweed and Turnpike Troubadours will co-headline a live show at McLane Stadium in Waco on Aug. 23. The concert event also will feature special guests Shane Smith and the Saints, Wade Bowen and American Aquarium. One of the most influential indie country rock bands of the late 1990s and early 2000s, Cross Canadian Ragweed—based out of Stillwater, Okla.—disbanded in 2010. They will reunite in April for four sold-out nights at Boone Pickens Stadium at OSU, followed by the Aug. 23 concert at McLane Stadium. The Turnpike Troubadours—another Oklahoma band with roots in Tahlequah—have resided at the forefront of the Red Dirt music scene since their 2005 debut. Ticket pre-sales for fans with a pre-registration code will go live on Feb. 18. General public tickets go on sale on Feb. 21, if inventory remains. Fans may sign up to get a pre-sale password at www.theboysfromoklahoma.com. Pre-registration closes at noon on Feb. 16. Tickets are only available for purchase online in advance and may not be purchased by phone or in person. For more information, contact **Luke Holcomb** with Baylor Sports Properties at luke_holcomb@baylor.edu.



East Texas Baptist University continues to see strong enrollment for the spring 2025 semester, marking the second-highest spring enrollment in the university's history. (ETBU Photo)

East Texas Baptist University continues to see strong enrollment for the spring 2025 semester, marking the second highest spring enrollment in the university's history. The spring 2025 enrollment stands at 1,612 students, following last year's record-setting spring enrollment of 1,657 students. This marks the first time in ETBU's history that spring enrollment has exceeded 1,600 students in consecutive years. Undergraduate enrollment remains strong at 1,440 students, making it the second highest in ETBU history, following last year's record of 1,481 students. Additionally, dual enrollment totals 258 students, the second highest for a spring term. The returning student retention rate is 91 percent, tying the highest on record for fall-to-spring retention. Additionally, freshman cohort retention stands at 87 percent, while transfer cohort retention is 86 percent. Prospective students and families interested in joining the ETBU community are invited to attend Preview Day on Feb. 17 or Tiger Day on March 29. More information about campus visits is available at www.ETBU.edu/visit.

Hardin-Simmons University College of Health Professions launched a new online degree program to better serve professionals in the ever-changing

health industry. The Doctor of Medical Science degree is a 30-hour degree entirely online, allowing working physician assistants/associates to manage work-life balance while furthering their education. “Following the implementation of the entry-level physician assistant program offered at the master’s degree level at HSU approximately eight years ago, the Doctor of Medical Science degree was a perfect segue to advancing the skills and knowledge of today’s physician assistant,” said **Janelle O’Connell**, dean of the College of Health Professions. “The two-semester online program is designed for flexibility to meet the needs and interests of each student, and the College of Health Professions is proud to add this doctoral degree to its outstanding educational opportunities.” The curriculum equips physician assistants to publish their work, elevate their clinical practice, and broaden their understanding of medicine through the lens of medical humanities and wellness. The degree will provide the skills and momentum for next-level advocacy, leadership and participation in teaching opportunities. Currently in its first semester, the program has eight students enrolled, with 60 percent of the first cohort being alumni of the Master of Physician Assistant program at Hardin-Simmons. For more information on HSU academic programs, visit www.hsutx.edu.

Texas Baptists will host the State Bible Drill for children and regional Bible Drill & Speakers Tournament for youth and high school on April 5, from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. at First Baptist Church in Allen. For more information contact **Jennifer Howington** at jennifer.howington@texasbaptists.org or call (214) 828-5287.



David Wells presents Wendell Romans the Joel Phillips Award for disaster relief commitment. (Texans on Mission Photo / Rupert Robbins)

Southern Baptist disaster relief honored Texans on Mission volunteer **Wendell Romans** of Farmersville last week with its Joel Phillips Award. “This is like the most valuable player award in sports,” said **David Wells**, Texans on Mission disaster relief director. The steering committee for Southern Baptist relief receives recommendations from the state directors and then selects the award recipient. Romans, a member of First Baptist Church in Farmersville, is involved in multiple leadership roles with Texans on Mission disaster relief. He is state leader of Texans on Mission’s chainsaw work, serves on the Incident Management Team for varied disaster efforts and trains new volunteers in multiple categories. “Wendell served over 160 days in service this past year. He is willing to go where the need is and discover where God is at work and join him in that work,” Wells said. Already this year, Romans has volunteered in California after the devastating wildfires there. Texans on Mission hosted Southern Baptist disaster relief for its annual meeting last week in San Antonio. Both Wells and **Mickey Lenamon**, Texans on Mission chief executive officer, addressed the group.

Anniversary

First Baptist Church in Gustine celebrated 125 years on Feb. 9. **Emmanuel Jimenez** is pastor.

Retirement

Danny Pickens, director of missions, retired Dec. 31, 2024, after 25 years with Smith Baptist Association in Tyler. Pickens served in ministry for 46 years. He served in several churches in East Texas—First Baptist in Winona; First Baptist in Hallsville; First Baptist in Kilgore; Southern Oaks Baptist in Tyler and First Baptist in Canton—before moving to Tyler to join the staff of Smith Baptist Association. Pickens graduated from East Texas Baptist University in 1984, then obtained master's and doctorate degrees from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. He was recognized and honored for his years of service at the Smith Baptist Association annual meeting Feb. 10.