

Around the State: HPU earns top Model UN honors

December 10, 2024

The Howard Payne University Model United Nations team recently took home three of the top five honors, including the top team at the Northwest Model United Nations Conference in Seattle, Wash. The HPU team won outstanding delegate in the beginner committee, outstanding delegate in the intermediate committee and the “Outstanding Delegation” award. Model U.N. is a simulation in which students from various schools participate as delegates of assigned countries. They then advocate for their country’s perspective on an issue. The goal is for students to experience how countries with different viewpoints would attempt to reach peaceful solutions to international issues. Sophomore **Maddie Duncan**, Guy D. Newman Honors Academy and psychology major, was named the Outstanding Delegate in the General Assembly, out of 50 students. Senior **Hannah Parnell**, Honors Academy and psychology major, was named Outstanding Delegate in the Economic and Social Committee, comprised of 36 students who all had competed in Model U.N. conference before. Senior **Sadie Willie**, Honors Academy and jurisprudence major, coach and head delegate of the team, helped prepare the team for the competition, half of whom never had competed before. Additional HPU team members include **Andrew Mathis; Kellen McKee; Hannah Jordan; Michael Jones; and Madison Jenkins**. There were 132 students from multiple countries and 10 other universities who participated in the conference, including the eight students from HPU.



East Texas Baptist University has been awarded a \$2,208,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Strengthening Institutions Program. The Title III grant will be dispersed over the next five years to enhance ETBU's academic support initiatives and student success programs. (ETBU photo)

East Texas Baptist University has been awarded a \$2,208,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Strengthening Institutions Program. This Title III grant, titled *Project G.P.A.—Grow! Perform! Achieve!*, will be dispersed over the next five years to enhance ETBU's academic support initiatives and student success programs. The Strengthening Institutions Program is designed to help eligible higher education institutions become self-sufficient and expand their capacity to serve low-income students. By providing funds to improve and strengthen academic quality, institutional management and fiscal stability, the program enables universities like ETBU to deliver a transformative education while addressing the unique challenges faced by their student populations. The funding will allow ETBU to implement initiatives to improve student retention and success, with a particular focus on first-year students, student-athletes and Pell Grant recipients. Plans include renovating the Jarrett Library to create a centralized academic supportspace, equipping students with a collaborative environment designed to foster learning and development. The university

also will expand its academic support services by hiring additional peer tutors and academic coaches for student-athletes to improve academic performance and increase four-year graduation rates. One hundred percent of these initiatives will be funded by the grant.

Houston Christian University's inaugural Narrative Arts Conference is scheduled Jan. 18, 2025, in HCU's [Morris Family Center for Law & Liberty](#). The conference will feature guest speakers who explore the craft of storytelling in fiction, film, video games and more. With acclaimed songwriter and novelist **Andrew Peterson** opening the conference and featured sessions with bestselling author **Bret Lott**, Emmy Award-winning actor **Tony Hale**, and groundbreaking game designer **Chris Skaggs**, the Narrative Arts Conference will help writers and artists explore how to develop narrative skills, navigate creative industries and pursue excellence in community. Anchored by a shared Christian foundation, the department of narrative arts and conference guests hope to inspire and encourage a new generation of storytellers. Bret Lott will also give a free public reading in [Belin Chapel](#) at 7 p.m. on the Friday evening before the conference begins. For further information, visit <https://hc.edu/narrative2025> or call 281-649-3600.

Hardin-Simmons University's Cowgirl basketball team won the 200th game of head coach **Kendra Whitehead**'s career on Wednesday night, defeating Pacific University 78-73 in overtime. The Cowgirls fell behind heading into the half 39-31 to the Pacific Boxers. HSU came back in the second half and pushed the game to overtime 65-65. The Cowgirls outscored Pacific 13-8 in overtime to win 78-73. **Aiken Semones** scored 14 points for HSU, including six points in overtime. **Jacqueline Berry** led the team in scoring with 20 points and had 11 rebounds. Transfer **Caroline Croft** had 11 points for HSU and led with four assists. **MaeSyn Gay** led the Cowgirls in rebounding with a career-high 19 rebounds. Whitehead won No. 200 in her ninth season as a head coach and seventh year back at HSU with an overall

record of 200-52.



Wayland Baptist University hosted the Greater Plainview community for “Lighting Up Wayland,” Dec. 5, for an evening of holiday cheer. (Wayland photo)

Wayland Baptist University hosted the Greater Plainview community for “Lighting Up Wayland,” Dec. 5, for an evening of holiday cheer. The celebration immediately followed Plainview’s lighted downtown Christmas parade. The university joined the parade with a float featuring **Micah Rodriguez Vega**, Miss Wayland 2025, and Wayland President **Donna Hedgepath**. The float led those at the parade to the Wayland campus. “Lighting Up Wayland” festivities included Hedgepath reading the Christmas story from the Bible to children and the ceremonial lighting of historic Gates Hall. The university’s choirs and staff led Christmas carols. Additional highlights included a visit from Santa Claus, delicious treats and hot cocoa, and plenty of festive photo opportunities around the illuminated campus.

Fall commencement



UMHB graduates celebrating during commencement ceremony.
(UMHB photo)

The University of Mary Hardin-Baylor held commencement services for the Fall 2024 semester at Crusader Stadium. This was the university's 168th graduating class, and an estimated 411 students were awarded degrees, including 295 baccalaureate degrees, 79 master's degrees, and 37 doctoral degrees. Student recognitions during the ceremony included the Provost Medal for highest overall GPA, which was awarded to nine students who each graduated with perfect 4.0 grade point averages: **Caroline Allen** of San Antonio; **Selah Marie Bentz** of Fallbrook, Calif.; **Gerald Adam Brady** of Temple; **Andrew Huneycutt** of Leander; **Rachel Leslie** of Temple; **Robert Benjamin Mills** of Longview; **Elise Ott** of Cedar Hill; **Emma Noelle Vaught** of League City and **Presley Shane Wall** of Decatur. **Yanelle Licon** of Taylor received the President's Award, presented to the graduating senior who has provided meritorious service to the university. The Loyalty Cup, awarded to the student most representative of the university's ideals, traditions and spirit, was given to two students—**Victoria Hernandez** of Robstown and **Isabella Ross** of Katy.



Scholar and educator Karen O'Dell Bullock was awarded an honorary doctorate during the second commencement ceremony, where she also delivered the keynote address. (ETBU photo)

East Texas Baptist University celebrated 202 graduates at its commencement ceremonies, conferring degrees to 140 undergraduate and 62 graduate students. The December 2024 graduating class marked the largest fall class in ETBU history. U.S. Sen. **Joe Manchin** from West Virginia delivered the commencement address during the morning ceremony, urging graduates to embrace their calling and approach life with a spirit of unity and collaboration. In the afternoon ceremony, **Karen O'Dell Bullock** was awarded an honorary doctorate and delivered the keynote address. Bullock has taught at the undergraduate, master's degree and doctoral levels for more than 30 years. She held leadership roles at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Dallas Baptist University and B.H. Carroll Theological Seminary, where she recently retired but continues teaching and mentoring doctoral students. Bullock serves as executive vice president of the Baptist Center for Global Concerns, addressing global inequities through leadership training, agricultural projects and medical clinics. She is a passionate advocate for Christian heritage, missions and justice, and also chairs the Baptist World Alliance Commission Council. Each semester, ETBU President **J. Blair Blackburn**

presents an award to a graduate who represents a Christian leader, scholar and servant on campus and in the local community. **Hannah Hobson**, a Bachelor of Arts graduate in worship studies, was honored with the President's Award for the Fall 2024 graduating class. A native of Shreveport, La., Hobson maintained a perfect 4.0 GPA throughout her time at ETBU and has been a cornerstone of ETBU's Chapel Bands for the past three and a half years.

Hardin-Simmons University will host its December commencement ceremonies at the Abilene Convention Center at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Dec. 16. The College of Health Professions, Holland School of Sciences and Mathematics, and the Patty Hanks Shelton School of Nursing will be included in the morning ceremony. Kelley College of Business and Professional Studies, the College of Arts and Media, and the Cynthia Ann Parker College of Liberal Arts will be included in the afternoon ceremony. A livestream will be available on the day of commencement on the university's [YouTube page](#).

Sixty-one Wayland Baptist University students are scheduled to participate in commencement ceremonies at 2 p.m., Dec. 14, at Hutcherson Center on the university's Plainview campus. Candidates for graduation include two students scheduled to receive doctoral degrees, 20 students set to receive master's degrees, 38 students planning to receive bachelor's degrees and one student set to be awarded an associate's degree. Livestream coverage of the ceremony will be available [here](#).