

# Around the State: HSU sees enrollment increase

September 11, 2024

Total enrollment for Hardin-Simmons University's 2024-2025 academic year has increased to 1,665 students. This year, HSU saw an 8.5 percent increase in first-time freshmen. This growth, along with steady retention rates, has contributed to a 6 percent rise in students living on campus. The newly opened Prichard Hall, a suite-style residence hall with private bedrooms, has proven to be a popular option, reaching nearly full capacity of 163 students in its first year. Seventy students will join HSU's new nursing program to launch in Spring 2025. HSU's engineering program, now entering its second year, has nearly doubled its enrollment. Additionally, the College of Arts and Media, which moved into its own distinct college in Spring 2024, has seen enrollment grow by 48 percent in just a few months.



Renovations are underway inside Veda Hodge Hall at Howard Payne University.  
(HPU Photo)

Howard Payne University recently began renovations on Veda Hodge Hall, the female residence hall on campus. The renovation project is estimated to cost \$4 million. This year, \$2 million in renovations will improve the east wing of the building. Female residents will occupy the west wing of the building while the renovations take place. Then, the remaining \$2 million of the project will complete on the east side of the building during the 2025-2026 academic year. Veda Hodge Hall was built in 1955 and has been in continuous use on the campus for 69 years. Over the past five years,

more than \$16 million has been invested in renovations across campus and to athletic facilities.



HCU Residence Life leaders met for training before the new semester. (HCU Photo)

As the start of the new semester approached, Residence Life leadership at Houston Christian University spent two weeks training resident assistants for their work and ministry. RAs learned about conflict management and resolution strategies as well as policies to be well-equipped to fulfill their duties. Beyond standard policies and procedures, RAs received training focused on their role as front-line disciple-makers, including training on how to share the gospel. “At HCU, we want to equip all of our student leaders by preparing them to share the gospel, so we prioritize training them,” said **Nathan Mahand**, HCU’s Baptist Student Ministries director. This year, HCU’s RAs also volunteered at the Houston Food Bank and helped box over 3,500 meals. Resident Director **Jacob Elliot** emphasized the importance of incorporating community service into training.



ETBU honored Fred Luter’s contributions to the cause of Christ by awarding him an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity. (ETBU Photo)

East Texas Baptist University held its annual convocation chapel service on Sept. 9, welcoming students, faculty and staff to Baker Chapel for a time of worship, prayer and dedication to officially launch the 2024-2025 academic year. The convocation featured a message from **Fred Luter Jr.**, the first African American president of the Southern Baptist Convention and the senior pastor of Franklin Avenue Baptist Church in New Orleans, La.

During the service, ETBU honored Luter's contributions to the cause of Christ by awarding him an Honorary Doctorate of Divinity degree. Convocation also included the annual dedication of ETBU's undergraduate classes and concluded with the official pronouncement of the 2024-25 academic year by university President **J. Blair Blackburn**.



Volunteers plant flags to commemorate 9/11. (UMHB Photo)

The University of Mary Hardin-Baylor's chapter of Young Conservatives of Texas planned to plant 2,977 American flags at Luther Memorial on the UMHB campus to honor the lives lost on Sept. 11, 2001. "While the majority of students here now did not witness the tragic events of 9/11, we still honor those who lost their lives on that day," said **Cassidy Schnoor**, chairman of Young Conservatives of Texas at UMHB. "Our generation needs to learn about that day and continue our commitment to freedom." This memorial is open to the public, and the community is invited to join in remembering those who perished and in paying tribute to the heroes who emerged.

The Mitchell Family Foundation Award inducted three Dallas Baptist University students into the Texas Business Hall of Fame for entrepreneurial endeavors and business brilliance. **Jaret V. Grayson** of Mobile, Ala. Grayson started Lone Star Sports, a marketing agency that helps high school and college athletes with exposure to recruitment and NIL opportunities, after one of his social media posts went viral in 2021. He has amassed over 200k followers across TikTok and Instagram in the last three years. Grayson graduated from DBU with a Bachelor of Business Studies in August 2024. **Micah Harkless** of Washington. Micah is the founder of two marketing agencies—Monastery Media and ParlorLens. Monastery Media is a referral-based agency that seeks to help companies

drive growth, establish digital integrity and develop supercharged sales strategies. ParlorLens is tailored to tattoo artists and parlors, where they help increase bookings, provide professional creative media services, manage scheduling, and create engaging websites that encourage sales. Micah will graduate from DBU with a B.B.A. in entrepreneurship in 2025.

**Christopher Castle** is a current graduate student at DBU pursuing an M.B.A. in marketing. Christopher served in the U.S. Air Force more than 20 years, focusing on repairing aircraft, which earned him several medals for his service and expertise. Christopher earned his bachelor's degree from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University and a Master of Divinity from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. After retiring from the Air Force in 2022, Christopher combined his business knowledge with his passion for motors, classic cars and getting his hands dirty. He founded Built with Faith Motorsports to mentor others while creating a business from restoring classic cars.



Children learning at San Antonio Baptist Temple's ELC. (Courtesy Photo)

Often praised as among the best child care centers in San Antonio, Baptist Temple Early Learning Center has raised their level of care. They recently received a Four-Star Texas Rising Star program rating (the highest) from the Texas Workforce Commission. This means they have been recognized as being above and beyond the strict minimum standards for licensed childcare facilities. "We are aiming for best practices," said Baptist Temple Executive Pastor **Jonathan Clark**. "These include additional training for teachers and staff, optimizing the environment for children, and a focus on teacher/child interactions." Director **Corchelle Mabry** and her staff performed well as they prepared for the evaluation. Mabry has only been director for a little more than a year, but she brought a clear vision of

building on past successes to improve the ELC image as more learning center than daycare. Her 36 years of experience in childhood education suit her to the task. Generations have been served by the Early Learning Center. It is not unusual for someone who received care from ELC to return with their own children and find their teachers still here. Faith lessons are also part of the teaching, with age-appropriate lessons that focus on God as Father, creator and Lord of all and chapel services every Wednesday in each classroom. The ELC was established in 1970 to meet the growing need for child care in the community, as moms were entering the workforce in increasing numbers. In 2012, the ELC began accepting vouchers from Child Care Services. These scholarships are available to help working parents who make less than a living wage and those who are searching for work or attending school. This allowed the ELC to increase its level of service to the community. They also began accepting infants and offering after-school care, in response to community needs. The ELC continually expands its scope to fill unmet needs. Grants from the Charity Ball Association, the Baptist Mission Foundation, Baptist Health Foundation, HEB Tournament of Champions, fundraisers, local businesses and individual donors helped them build an accessible playground where children with disabilities and typical abilities can play together. It was the first of its kind in the Southside of San Antonio. Perhaps the biggest challenge came during the COVID-19 pandemic. The ELC retooled and retrained and remained open to serve the needs of parents who were essential workers. In the aftermath of COVID, many childcare centers failed to reopen, and it became difficult to find childcare workers. Grants from the Small Business Administration, the United Way and others helped them stay open and fill the gap.

## **Anniversaries**

Pioneer Drive Baptist Church in Abilene celebrates its 70th anniversary Sept. 22. **John Whitten** is senior pastor.

**Bob Ray** celebrated 59 years of serving Fairy Baptist Church as their pastor, Sept. 8. Ray accepted the call to pastor his first and only church in 1965 and has remained faithful to this calling as he continues to serve Christ.