

Academic freedom topic of latest public letter to Baylor

July 30, 2025

A public letter focused on academic freedom marked the latest development in an [ongoing controversy](#) surrounding Baylor University's decision to accept and later rescind a research grant.

"The University's handling of this matter raises grave concerns regarding the University's commitment to academic freedom, rigorous inquiry, and publication—concerns that drive at the heart of the character and nature of what it means to be a university, in general, and what it means to be Baylor University, in particular," the [online letter](#) states.

As of 1 p.m. on July 29, 250 members of the "Baylor Family" had signed the letter, including former faculty and staff, along with Baylor alumni and others.

The controversy surrounds Baylor's decision to accept and later rescind a grant from the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation to study "disenfranchisement and exclusion of LGBTQIA+ individuals and women" in churches.

'Apply an ideological litmus test'

Unlike previous public letters that center on issues of LGBTQ inclusion, the latest letter voices opposition to Baylor's "decision to apply an ideological litmus test to the types of inquiry, ideas, teaching, research, and publication that Baylor University and its faculty pursue."

"We believe the University's handling of this matter is contrary to the

University's long-held policy on academic freedom and, if not corrected promptly, represents a dangerous development for the present and future of Baylor University," the letter states.

The letter specifically called on Baylor University to make public statements:

- Reaffirming its commitment to the "unfettered study, research, inquiry, and publication" of research "without regard to ideological bent."
- Offering assurance "that no faculty or administrator will be prohibited from conducting research, inquiry, teaching, or publication on any subject, including subjects regarding the experience of women and LGBTQIA+ people in church settings."

"Baylor University's response to pressure from external groups and certain internal factions criticizing the University for a research project—Courage at the Margins—is at odds with the University's stated commitment to academic freedom, including Baylor's Academic Freedom Policy that affirms the value of liberty and dissenting perspectives," the letter states.

Activities inconsistent with institutional policies

When contacted for reaction to the latest online letter, a Baylor spokesperson directed attention to a [July 9 public statement](#) from university President Linda Livingstone that said Baylor's "concerns did not center on the research itself, but rather on the activities that followed as part of the grant."

"Specifically, the work extended into advocacy for perspectives on human sexuality that are inconsistent with Baylor's institutional policies, including

our [Statement on Human Sexuality](#),” the earlier statement from Baylor said.

“We will continue to support our faculty and researchers in pursuing meaningful scholarship, while ensuring that such work aligns with our institutional processes.”

The latest online letter specifically took issue with the July 9 statement from the university.

“The fact that the University’s message to the Baylor community suggests that research and publication activities at Baylor University must ‘align’ with the institution’s views and beliefs, if true, would be a stark new restriction on academic freedom prohibited by existing University policy and protections for academic freedom,” the letter states.

One in a series of public letters

The latest public letter marks at least the fourth such correspondence centered on Baylor’s response to the Baugh Foundation grant.

The first letter—endorsed by more than 60 church leaders—voiced support for Baylor’s decision to rescind the grant.

That letter [commended Baylor](#) for its “commitment to hold together theological conviction and compassionate presence,” and it applauded President Linda Livingstone for speaking “with clarity and conviction, rooted in love and guided by wisdom.”

“In a polarized culture, Baylor’s decision demonstrates moral courage, affirming biblical orthodoxy while cultivating a campus environment where every student is treated with dignity, care and grace,” the letter stated.

Less than a week later, a group of 25 pastors sent their own [letter to the](#)

[*Baptist Standard*](#), similarly expressing support for “the wise return of the Baugh grant.”

“We fully agree that any grant that advocates for perspectives on human sexuality that are counter to biblical sexual ethics should be declined or returned,” the letter stated.

A third letter—posted online—opposed Baylor’s decision to return the grant, asserting the denial of funding for research “exhibits indifference and disregard for the well-being of LGBTQ+ individuals and women in our churches.”

“When the Church becomes complicit in the very systems that cause trauma, we cease to be the Body of Christ and become instead an instrument of harm,” the “[public pastoral letter](#)” to Baylor stated.

When asked to comment on the “public pastoral letter,” Baylor University provided the following statement: “It is Baylor’s longstanding practice not to respond to online petitions or open letters. We always appreciate the different viewpoints represented across the 150,000-plus members of the Baylor Family—students, faculty, staff and alumni—as well as from others on issues of importance.”