

# **Baylor alumni: President should be servant leader, person of integrity**

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DALLAS—Members of the Baylor University “family” want a proven leader who possesses vision, relationship skills and, above all, integrity to be their school’s 14th president.

That’s the assessment from Baylor alumni who attended a listening session sponsored by the Baylor presidential search committee in Dallas May 19. Alumni in Dallas voiced the same sentiments expressed by constituent groups at about 15 similar events, committee Chairman Joe Armes said.

The search committee and an advisory committee held listening sessions on the university’s Waco campus and across the state this spring. They heard from faculty, staff, students and deans; Waco community leaders; representatives of the Baptist General Convention of Texas; and alumni who attended sessions in Dallas, Fort Worth, Houston, San Antonio and Waco.

The search committee is composed of 14 members of the Baylor board of regents. The advisory committee includes representatives of various constituencies.

“We know your willingness to give us your time and wisdom is a product of your great love for Baylor. We’ve come to hear from you,” Armes, chief operating officer of Hicks Holdings in Dallas, told alumni. “We are early in the process. We want to hear from our constituents before taking definitive steps in the search process.”

“Your problem is one of perception,” observed Os Chrisman, the leadoff respondent in Dallas. “I would encourage you to be transparent in every way. ... This is a critical time for Baylor.”

Chrisman noted he served “on a previous search committee” that sought a successor for Baylor President Herbert Reynolds in the mid-1990s. Baylor has been embroiled in controversy surrounding its presidents for much of the time since then.

The search committee on which Chrisman served recommended Tom Corts, then president of Samford University, but the Baylor regents rejected the suggestion. Instead, they hired Robert Sloan in 1995. After several years of relative calm, Baylor divided over Sloan’s leadership. The Faculty Senate passed two no-confidence votes, alumni groups squared off both for and against him, and the regents voted three times on his continued service.

After Sloan left, the regents elected John Lilley president in late 2005 but fired him about a year ago, halfway through his five-year contract, for “failing to bring the Baylor family together.”

The search committee should draw a wide circle of potential candidates, Chrisman advised. “We found not very many people had the credentials listed on the profile we drew up” for president, he explained of the previous search.

Those credentials include a range of qualifications, according to advice offered by alumni in Dallas.

“We’re looking for a ‘man of all seasons’ or a ‘woman of all seasons,’” John Chiles observed, noting Baylor deserves a president with the highest ability.

“No. 1 is a person of integrity,” Chiles said of the next president’s ultimate qualification.

Other participants in the listening session echoed that sentiment.

Baylor needs a “servant leader” who embodies integrity, respect for others and humility, Shelba Shelton Jones advised.

Participants also urged the search committee to find an exemplary leader.

“The word I would emphasize is ‘leadership,’” Gwin Morris said. “Leadership and vision are the most important aspects of a president of an institution like Baylor. Leadership has allowed us to produce great leaders. People look for Baylor to produce great leaders.”

“We’ve had weak leadership” in recent years, Renee Sessions lamented. “We want to see strong leadership return.”

Similarly, Baylor needs a strong, experienced, visionary administrator, participants said.

“Professional qualifications are a top priority,” Chrisman said. “Baylor is a huge business in a very competitive environment,” he added, noting administrative skills will be vital to the next president’s success.

“We need a man with a broad background of experience—hopefully, administrative experience—in running a large organization,” Chiles added.

Baylor’s next president must possess specific qualities that make for good leadership, Kirby Ligon noted. He cited administrative experience, the ability to listen well and communicate clearly, the capacity to work with the city of Waco and with the university’s faculty and staff, and the inclination to recruit high-quality colleagues and delegate effectively.

Participants did not agree on all qualifications. They split on whether the next president should have an earned doctorate or other “terminal degree”—the highest academic degree awarded in a particular discipline—and whether the president should be an accomplished fund-

raiser.

The president should “have a track record of being successful,” which could be demonstrated in “university, business or political life,” Ligon said.

Dary Stone, newly elected chairman of the regents, asked if the participants could support a “non-traditional candidate” who has not earned a doctorate. Several affirmed that idea, and Chrisman added, “Yes, if other qualifications were present, but also if this would not damage Baylor’s reputation in the academic community.”

Rhonda Reynolds Winslett countered the president should possess a terminal degree, especially since the years of study and discipline required to earn such a degree would help the leader “identify with the faculty.”

Ligon urged the search committee to find a president who can raise the huge sums of money necessary to help Baylor advance. “One of the things (the president) has to do is work with donors,” he explained, noting the president must be adept at building strong personal relationships.

“He’s got to be able to raise money and have an impeccable reputation,” Chiles said. “The university can be run by any number of vice presidents and subordinates, but there’s no substitute for the president for raising money. The willingness and ability to get out and raise money is absolutely essential.”

Sessions countered: “Don’t be so concerned about someone who can be a fund raiser. The parents want to see leadership, and when they see leadership, they will open their pocketbooks.”

Although participants generally agreed the next president does not need to be a Baylor alumnus, they insisted that person have a strong affinity for and identification with the university.

“The president must have a deep love for Baylor—its traditions, its heritage, its history,” Jones advised.

The requirement that Baylor’s president must be a Baptist “is a limiting factor,” Chrisman conceded. “Most people who have gone into education with the credentials you want probably live on the East Coast or West Coast” and likely are not Baptists, he explained.

Still, Baylor’s governing documents require each regent to be a member of a Baptist church. And since the president is an ex-officio member of the board, that means the president must be a Baptist, noted Ken Hall, chairman of the advisory committee and president of Dallas-based Buckner International, which, like Baylor, is an institution affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

Jones urged the search committee to select “a committed Christian.”

Chrisman suggested the committee consider a woman.

Winslett pleaded with the committee to listen to the faculty. “What Baylor has to offer is education—through the faculty,” she said. “I hope those of you who went to Baylor will contact your former professors. I hope you will give great credence to what the faculty say.”

The search committee hopes to develop a presidential profile and job description in June, Armes said.

“The good news is we don’t feel like we’re under any time pressure. We have the luxury of time,” he noted, praising Interim President David Garland and Interim Provost Elizabeth Davis. Likewise, the committee wants to balance its use of time, so that the process is not unduly long, he added.

Echoing the regents’ stated reason for firing Lilley about a year ago,

Chrisman called on the search committee to unify the “Baylor family.”

“Baylor is much better than the disputes we have had,” he said. “I hope you will be unifiers. ... No one can come into a divided environment and be successful.”