

BUA on track toward healthy future, president says

August 15, 2018

SAN ANTONIO—When Abraham Jaquez became president of Baptist University of the Americas one year ago, the school faced financial distress. But now BUA is on track to move forward, he said.

[Last September](#), the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board approved a \$1 million loan, as well as a \$250,000 gift and \$250,000 challenge grant, to BUA. The university's debt at that time totaled about \$800,000.

After René Maciel's resignation as president of BUA in 2016, the school spent almost a year in search of a president.

Thanks to Texas Baptists' help and the school's commitment to financial stewardship, BUA can maintain the course as a donor-driven institution, Jaquez said. BUA can honor its past, bring the best aspects of its heritage to the forefront and chart a new course, he said.

'Being good stewards'



Abe Jaquez

“The mission and vision of BUA is to equip and educate cross-cultural Christian leaders” both for the ministry and the marketplace, Jaquez said, which the school accomplishes by “being good stewards of the resources God has given.”

While BUA maintains a steady uphill trajectory, the school is on its way to becoming sustainable if it maintains the course it is on now, he said.

In managing BUA’s resources, Jaquez said, he had to streamline some departments and cut some programs, such as the baccalaureate in Spanish literature.

Internal analysis showed a low number of students interested in the Spanish program in the past five years, and the program was not sustainable, he said.

“You have to make the decision of closing a program when you know it is time,” he said. Even so, discontinuing the program was a difficult decision, he added.

Those who previously graduated with a degree in Spanish Literature from BUA still have a valid baccalaureate, Jaquez said. The five students at BUA currently pursuing the major will be able to finish it, but it no longer is an option for students starting this fall semester, he explained.

BUA is researching additional majors that would complement what it offers now, considering what will attract students and what its constituents may need in the future, he noted.

The Baptist General Convention of Texas historically supported schools that faced difficulties in their early years, Jaquez noted. Although BUA began in 1947, it did not achieve accredited university status until 15 years ago, Jaquez said.

Committed to serving students

BUA continues to grow and expand its friends and partners, and the university is committed to serving students who are called into the ministry and the marketplace, he added.

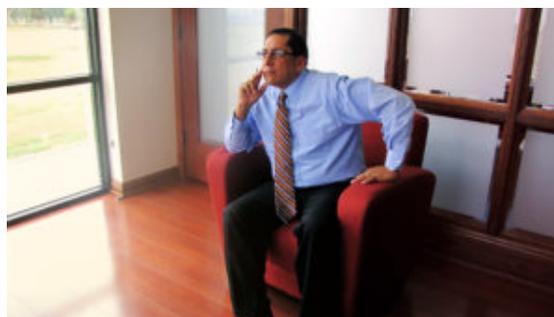
The school's commitment to its students includes ensuring their safety and meeting legal requirements. While multiple schools across the nation have faced reports of sexual harassment and abuse on campus, Jaquez said he is grateful no cases of sexual misconduct have been reported to the executive office during his tenure.

The school lists in its student handbook the help it offers to those who make a report of sexual harassment, as well as the procedures it will follow. As an academic institution, BUA complies with Title IX requirements regarding how to handle reported allegations of sexual misconduct.

Mary Ranjel, BUA's vice president for student services and enrollment management, serves as Title IX coordinator of BUA, handling any cases and making sure the school is compliant with the law.

Reaccreditation process completed

In March, the Association for Biblical Higher Education evaluated BUA accreditation. Although the reaccreditation process followed soon after a presidential transition, and preparation for the accreditation study consumed significant time, the school "crossed the finish line with flying colors," Jaquez said.



Abe Jaquez became the eighth president of Baptist University of the Americas in 2017. (BUA Photo)

The Association for Biblical Higher Education issued three recommendations for BUA: to complete an independent audit, which the school submitted on time this past May; upgrade its library resources; and publicly disclose its transfer credit policy, as well as the list of institutions with which BUA has articulation agreements to transfer college credits. The institutions listed [online](#) are Wayland Baptist University, Texas A&M-Commerce and the graduate programs of Dallas Baptist University.

After the Association for Biblical Higher Education evaluated BUA, Jaquez said, he was told the school is the only university in the United States that offers cross-cultural studies from a Hispanic context.

Jaquez pointed out he told the accreditation board in March about the changes he planned to implement at BUA, and its response to those changes was positive.

The Association for Biblical Higher Education reaccredited BUA for 10 years after its site visit to the San Antonio campus earlier this year, Jaquez said.

One of the Association for Biblical Higher Education's requirements for accreditation is institutional stability and capacity. As part of the stability requirement, a school must report changes regarding discontinuation of a

program six months before it goes into effect and “abnormal turnover” in board administration or faculty.

BUA has experienced personnel changes, including at the university’s Baptist Biblical Institute, which has its roots in the school since its foundation in 1947. Despite staff changes in the past year, the BBI program continues to grow, and it will grow to include more institutes in Texas this fall, Jaquez asserted.

“We want to try to add 10 to 15 BBIs a year,” Jaquez said.

Plans to increase enrollment in place

One of the consequences of not having a permanent president and preparing for ABHE’s evaluation was a lag in recruitment. According to information BUA provided for the BGCT Book of Reports, between the 2016-17 academic year and the 2017-18 academic year, enrollment declined 36.53 percent—from 375 students to 238 students.

BUA has developed a recruitment task force that involves faculty, staff and students in recruitment, Jaquez noted. The 2018 fall semester should show a greater number of students, and the fall of 2019 should be even better, he added.

Thanks to the changes that have been implemented and the support the school has received from the BGCT, total revenue rose to \$961,161 in the most recent year, as noted in the Book of Reports.

Jaquez believes it is vital for BUA to maintain the relationships it has with Hispanic Baptist churches and strengthen them, since that is the primary group the school educates, he said. As pastors interact with church members who are considering college at a low cost, Jaquez hopes ministers will mention BUA.

With the support of the school's board, Jaquez said, he hopes to guide the university to follow the plan he believes God has given.

"BUA is on track to providing education to students who want to pursue higher education and at a low cost," Jaquez said. "That is who we are, and that is what we will do."

With additional reporting by Editor Eric Black.