

# Family wants Sandefer name and remains removed from HSU

March 16, 2020

ABILENE—Family members of a longtime president of Simmons College have asked Hardin-Simmons University to remove their family's name from all its buildings and to allow the remains of Jefferson Davis "Prexy" Sandefer to be relocated from the campus to "a more suitable resting place."

"This is a letter I never thought I would write; however, I believe HSU is headed for financial and spiritual bankruptcy due to poor leadership, unwise financial decisions and a disregard for HSU faculty, students and alumni," Jeff Sandefer of Austin wrote in a March 5 letter to the HSU board of trustees, saying he was writing on behalf of himself, his father's widow and his sister.

He also pledged the family's financial support for any legal action "by any member of the HSU community who has been or will be wronged and wishes to contact regulators or accreditors with their concerns."

A university spokesman offered this response from HSU on March 17: "We are aware of and have made contact with Jeff Sandefer about his concerns. Hardin-Simmons University will continue to work toward a resolution with the Sandefer family. While we continue to respect the concerns the Sandefer family has raised, our priority as a faith-based institution has always been and will continue to be ensuring our students are prepared to learn, grow and lead—personally, professionally and spiritually. This is where our attention is currently focused, particularly in light of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and our commitment to keeping Hardin-Simmons University's campus community safe and healthy."

# Long-time president of Simmons College



Jefferson Davis Sandefer Sr. was named president of Simmons College in 1909 and served in that role for 31 years. (<https://www.hsutx.edu/about-hsu/dr-jefferson-davis-sandefer-sr/>)

J.D. Sandefer was president from 1909 to 1941 of what was then known as Simmons College. He is buried near one of several buildings on the HSU campus bearing his family's name, where one side of the monument marking his grave bears the inscription: "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches" (Proverbs 22:1).

He was president of the Baptist General Convention of Texas from 1920 to 1923, and immediately thereafter was elected vice president of the Southern Baptist Convention.

“While Prexy Sandefer would be proud of HSU’s faculty and its hardworking students, he would be embarrassed by its low graduation rates, abysmal starting salaries for graduates and acceptance of almost any student, as long as he or she is able to qualify for a student loan,” the letter from his family stated.

“My father and grandfather, both of whom served as HSU trustees, would never tolerate financial malfeasance, a raid on the endowment or disregard for the 64 percent of the faculty and 550 alumni who declared ‘no confidence’ in the president and board. My aunts would be particularly saddened by the gutting of HSU’s most important religious programs.”

## **HSU cuts multiple programs and faculty**

On Feb. 7, a majority of the [HSU board voted](#) to close the Abilene and San Antonio branches of Logsdon Seminary, once current students have completed their degrees. Later, the university announced a [\\$4 million operating deficit](#) required it to cut multiple faculty and programs.



The Logsdon School of Theology on the Hardin-Simmons University campus. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Under a reorganization, the Logsdon School of Theology will become part of the Cynthia Ann Parker College of Liberal and Fine Arts, which also will include the School of Music, the Department of Counseling and Human Development, and the Department of Fine Arts.

[Two former deans](#) of the Logsdon School of Theology—Vernon Davis and Don Williford—asserted the trustees’ actions appeared contradictory to the original intent of the donors whose gifts made both Logsdon Seminary and the Logsdon School of Theology possible.

Williford—who wrote a 14-page letter citing his concerns—particularly noted net income from the Charles W. and Koreen Logsdon Endowment Fund were “intended to help train young ministers.”

A “[frequently asked questions](#)” section on the university website with answers provided by HSU subsequently reported the current value of endowment gifts to the Logsdon School of Theology and Seminary as \$32,463,000, with an annual distribution of \$1,623,000.

Restricted endowments given specifically for Logsdon Seminary amount to \$792,786, which produce \$39,640 in distributions annually, the university reported. Student tuition payments and support from the Baptist General Convention of Texas provide an additional \$1,368,254 per year.

HSU reported spending \$2,462,000 on salaries, employee benefits, travel, supplies and equipment related to the Logsdon School of Theology and Seminary in the most recent financial year, plus an additional \$1,797,000 in overhead costs.

So, the total costs of \$4,259,000 minus \$2,991,254 from endowment distribution, tuition and BGCT financial support leaves \$1,267,746 in unfunded costs the university must absorb, HSU reported.

The HSU board of trustees took action to “ensure that Hardin-Simmons

University is a viable, financially stable institution that can move forward with boldness,” according to a [statement issued Feb. 28](#), following the group’s second meeting in less than three weeks.

Saying HSU is “at a critical juncture” in its 129-year history, the board noted its fiduciary responsibility to preserve the institution and its commitment to “making difficult decisions” that will ensure the university’s future.

“The Hardin-Simmons University Board of Trustees has full confidence in President [Eric] Bruntmyer, the administration, and the strategic financial plan known as The Way Forward,” the board statement from Chair Laura Moore said.

“We also have confidence in our recent Board decisions, which were made to ensure that Hardin-Simmons University is a viable, financially stable institution that can move forward with boldness.”

*EDITOR’S NOTE: This article originally was posted March 16. The 4th paragraph was edited March 17 after HSU provided a statement in response to the Standard’s request.*