

# Group's alternative plan would cut ties between BGCT and HSU

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Two months after Hardin-Simmons University's board of trustees voted to close Logsdon Seminary and eliminate multiple academic programs as part of [The Way Forward](#) financial plan, a group of concerned alumni, donors and others sent trustees its own 14-point proposal called "[The Better Way Forward: A Plan to Save Hardin-Simmons.](#)"

In addition to urging trustees to reverse The Way Forward plan and reinstate Logsdon Seminary, another part of the plan proposed by the group calling itself "Save HSU" calls on the university to restructure its board of trustees.

Specifically, the group wants to eliminate mandated Baptist General Convention of Texas representation on the board of trustees, require at least 51 percent of board members to be HSU graduates, and allow alumni to nominate and elect one-third of the board.

BGCT executive leaders were asked for a response but chose not to comment at this time.

Institutions related to the BGCT fall into two categories. Messengers to the BGCT annual meeting elect a simple majority of the governing boards of affiliated institutions, such as HSU. A few institutions relate to Texas Baptists through contractual agreements that allow the institutions more control over their boards, while still allowing some BGCT representation.

A relationship with the convention—and the way in which an institution relates to the BGCT—has a direct impact on funding from Texas Baptists. (See related article [here.](#))

# Financial support and trustee representation

In an April 17 [blog](#), Save HSU leaders asserted “the BGCT’s influence over the HSU board has been flagrantly disproportionate to the convention’s level of giving and support to the university.”

The university reported \$49,783,087 in total budgeted operating expenses in the 2019 fiscal year. HSU received \$866,776 in cooperative giving from Texas Baptist churches through the BGCT in 2019, according to the office of the convention controller.

The Save HSU group cites lower figures, which appear to reflect the base support the BGCT provides through the Cooperative Program to each of its affiliated institutions, without factoring in the theological education support universities and seminaries also receive. Still, total BGCT funding in 2019 constituted less than 2 percent of the university’s operating expenses.

“Clearly, the BGCT’s influence is proportionally out of balance with its giving. We believe that in light of recent events HSU should fundamentally reevaluate her relationship with the BGCT, because the relationship has not only caused the erosion of an independent trustee board, but also has endangered academic freedom—both of which consequences have resulted in a less healthy university,” leaders of the Save HSU group stated.

## ‘Outside and outsized influence’

The group repeated its previously stated charge that BGCT Executive Director David Hardage met with President Eric Bruntmyer, “a few West Texas pastors” and “a couple of trustees” regarding Logsdon Seminary.

“This private meeting can be a threat to accreditation itself, because

accreditation agencies take very seriously the independence of a board,” the Save HSU group’s leaders stated.

The group asserted HSU could make up the loss of revenue from the BGCT “by getting its ballooning administrative costs under control, increasing recruitment and retention and being more careful about not getting into protracted, expensive construction projects.”

“It is time for trustees at Hardin-Simmons to take full control of the university and hold the BGCT’s leadership accountable for undermining the existence of Logsdon Seminary. We believe this will ensure that future board decisions are made free of outside and outsized influence by an organization that gives an increasingly small percentage of HSU’s revenue,” the group’s leaders stated.

“The real question is not whether Hardin-Simmons can live without the BGCT’s annual contributions. Rather, it is whether Hardin-Simmons can afford the cost of continuing to receive them.”

## **BGCT Executive Director responds**

In February, Hardage told the [Baptist Standard](#): “For several years, numerous church leaders from all over the state began expressing concerns about some theological positions at Logsdon, and those concerns were shared with leaders of both the seminary and the university privately and in small group settings. Certainly, others from Texas and beyond did not share those concerns.

“However, as I understand it, a full theological discussion regarding Logsdon was not a part of the HSU board of trustees decision to close the seminary. Apparently, the stark, negative financial realities facing the seminary negated the need for such a discussion.

“Personally, I was never a part of any conversation with anyone who wanted Logsdon to close and was surprised when I heard the news. I continue to pray for all those whose lives and families have been impacted by the decision to close the seminary. I also continue to pray for and believe in university leadership and hope for a very bright future for HSU.”

## **Other proposals**

In addition to the proposal calling for the HSU board of trustees to be restructured with no mandated BGCT representation, the Save HSU group’s Better Way Forward plan also urged trustees to:

- Re-examine the university’s founding documents.
- Create open and safe forums to discuss university changes.
- Recognize, celebrate, value, listen to and work with faculty.
- Recruit and prepare students for leadership in the world.
- Protect students’ freedom of speech.
- Restore trust with alumni and donors.
- Establish a culture of transparency and integrity.
- Internally review all standards of accreditation to ensure compliance.
- Evaluate current HSU leadership.

In addition to the April 6 letter to the board of trustees, leaders of Save HSU also sent a letter to HSU Board Chair Laura Moore on April 16, inviting her to meet with them by video conference to discuss their concerns.

## **HSU responds**

In response to the Better Way Forward proposal, the university issued a statement April 13. It said the HSU board of trustees and administration

“have full confidence” in the decisions reflected in The Way Forward, noting they “went through a detailed process to determine steps needed to evaluate and enhance the university’s financial condition.”

“The Way Forward is Hardin-Simmons University’s next chapter and long-term strategic plan to guide the university’s community of students, alumni, faculty and staff to be good stewards of our resources and to embrace the change required of us as we boldly prepare for the future. Being good stewards has required us to close a longstanding HSU operating deficit,” the statement from the university said.

In the next few years, the actions taken by the administration and board “will help bring the university’s expenses in line with revenue to fulfill current fiscal responsibilities while also preserving the university’s future ability to serve the greatest number of students in a cost-effective way, create new and innovative programs and invest in needed technology and infrastructure,” the university stated.

*Read related articles [here](#) and [here](#).*