

# HSU donors accuse university of breaking trust

September 22, 2020

If Hardin-Simmons University cannot honor donors' wishes regarding how their gifts are used, it should return the charitable gifts, according to an open letter to the university's board of trustees.

About 70 HSU supporters—who assert their combined donations total more than \$10.5 million and who say they represent more than 1,000 years of service to the university—issued the open letter to HSU trustees voicing “a common disappointment” about how their gifts have been handled.

The Sept. 21 open letter, posted on the Save HSU organization's [website](#), asserts the university leadership's “The Way Forward” financial plan “is actually taking the university toward financial and spiritual bankruptcy.”

The letter calls on trustees to restore donor confidence by undertaking “a thorough review of all restricted gifts.”

In response, HSU issued this statement: “Hardin-Simmons University follows a well-established process to ensure compliance with donor intent. We greatly value the relationship with our alumni, donors and friends and understand the responsibility we have to be good stewards of the contributions entrusted to us. We will be reaching out to the mentioned donors directly about individual concerns that they may have. We certainly appreciate the time, effort and resources given by all those in the HSU family who help us continue to provide an education enlightened by Christian faith and values.”

# Ongoing response to February action

The open letter to trustees marks the latest in a series of repercussions following a vote by trustees on Feb. 7 to [close Logsdon Seminary](#) and move undergraduate religion programs offered by the Logsdon School of Theology under the Cynthia Ann Parker College of Liberal and Fine Arts.

The university insisted it had to eliminate multiple programs—not only at Logsdon, but also in its schools of education and music—to address a more than [\\$4 million operating deficit](#).

“Many of us have dedicated our support to programs which you have voted to close, like the Logsdon Seminary of the Logsdon School of Theology, and programs within the Irvin School of Education, and the School of Music,” the open letter to trustees states.

“The dreams we had when we made our donations to HSU cannot possibly be fulfilled, yet the university has refused to act in good faith and return our gifts, in order for them to be used as they were originally and clearly intended.”

Signatories include Jeff Sandefer of Austin, a descendant of Jefferson Davis “Prexy” Sandefer, longtime president of Simmons College. In a [letter to trustees in March](#) written on behalf of himself, his father’s widow and his sister, Sandefer had asked his family’s name be removed from all buildings and that “Prexy” Sandefer’s remains be moved from the HSU campus to “a more suitable resting place.”

Others who signed the open letter to trustees include Vernon Davis and Don Williford, former deans of the Logsdon School of Theology and Logsdon Seminary, and Ronald A. Smith, former provost and executive vice president. All three previously had been [critical of decisions](#) HSU made to close the seminary and scale back the university’s remaining religion

program.

## **Call to ‘restore confidence’ in HSU**

The letter identifies its signatories as “individuals and diverse donors who share a common disappointment concerning how the university has handled our gifts.”

The letter’s authors also presume to speak on behalf of deceased donors “who can no longer express their concerns”—Virginia Connally, who endowed a chair of missions at HSU, and Charles and Koreen Logsdon, whose bequest established the Logsdon School of Theology and Logsdon Seminary.

“HSU has broken our trust—and theirs,” the letter states.

The letter asserts donors have tried to work with HSU leaders but “have been met with stalling tactics or worse—with silence.”

Appealing to Scripture, the letter urges trustees and university administration to “serve as a godly example for students at HSU by exercising humility and wise stewardship.”

“As trustees, you have a legal, fiduciary responsibility to ensure donor gifts are used in accordance with the terms of gift documents, not in subjective ways that could undermine donor intent,” the letter states.

“You also have the power to act and restore our confidence in HSU’s future. We ask that you undertake a thorough review of all restricted gifts. If the university cannot honor our intent, please work toward solutions with donors, up to and including the return of our charitable gifts—many donated to honor the memory of our loved ones, but all given to honor the university we love.”

*EDITOR'S NOTE: The 10th paragraph was edited after originally posted. As originally written, Jeff Sandefer was mistakenly identified as the son of J.D. "Prexy" Sandefer.*