

HSU faculty vote 'no confidence' in President Bruntmyer

October 27, 2022

ABILENE—Hardin-Simmons University faculty by a significant majority voted “no confidence” in President Eric Bruntmyer Oct. 26 and called for his termination by HSU trustees.

Jennifer Eames—HSU faculty president, physician assistant program director, and professor of physician assistant studies—confirmed the faculty vote by email.

The 11-member faculty council cited “serious concerns over the health and future of the university under the current administration and requested the HSU Board of Trustees begin the replacement process for the university’s top leader.”

Specific concerns cited include “a sharp decline (25 percent) in enrollment during Bruntmyer’s time in office” and “a lack of drop in expenditures despite steep program and faculty cuts.”

Faculty also expressed concern about a “failure to raise funds; consistent failure to establish, engage in, or develop shared governance as required by accreditation; unanswered questions regarding reallocating endowment funds; breakdown of recent negotiations for the purchase of the Patty Hanks Shelton School of Nursing resulting in a lawsuit from McMurry University; and poor handling of the development and implementation of a [University Statement of Faith](#), including Baptist faculty outcry against the required signature of a Confession of Faith.”

Faculty members were surveyed and the results shared with Bruntmyer and the HSU board of trustees in October of this year. According to the survey results, “an overwhelming majority of faculty are dissatisfied with the president’s performance in multiple areas.” The survey also showed “a devastated faculty morale.”

Faculty encouraged to be bold

During the last six years, the HSU faculty council reported, more than “50 faculty have either been cut or left HSU ... and more indicate they either intend to leave or are currently seeking employment elsewhere.”

“Hardin-Simmons University’s namesake, James B. Simmons, was an abolitionist minister who was not afraid to boldly speak out against injustice. We must be brave like Simmons,” Eames stated.

“The institution has a proud legacy and a potentially bright future, but it is clear the university cannot uphold its historic mission and continue to thrive with the current leadership. Therefore, change is needed,” she continued.

The HSU faculty council added that a letter to the board communicating the results of the no confidence vote notes: “We have waited, meeting after meeting, decision after decision, patiently giving space for any signs of stabilization or improvement. The continuous declining results we have seen to date merit action now.”

A statement from the HSU board of trustees states, “The Hardin-Simmons University Board of Trustees has great confidence in President Bruntmyer and the direction of the University.”

Board Chair Rick Strange stated: “I have worked closely with President Bruntmyer for the last several years and have observed, first-hand, the

tremendous work he has done for Hardin-Simmons. His actions, which have all been supported by the Board, and difficult, but necessary, decisions made by the Board during the last several years have positioned HSU for a bright future.”

The *Baptist Standard* first asked HSU administration for comment on Thursday, Oct. 27. No response was received as of Wednesday, Nov. 2.

HSU administrative actions

The no-confidence vote follows more than two years of administrative action at the university, beginning with [the closure of four Logsdon Seminary extension campuses](#).

In their Oct. 2018 meeting, HSU trustees approved the closures “to improve [the university’s] financial stability in light of ‘evaporating’ external revenue.” Trustees also approved personnel reductions, some of which related to extension campus closures.

Less than two years later, HSU trustees voted Feb. 7, 2020, to [close Logsdon Seminary](#) and its programs, leaving the scaled-down Logsdon School of Theology in operation.

In his announcement of this decision emailed Friday evening, Feb. 7, Bruntmyer cited financial considerations, writing: “The Board of Trustees adopted *The Way Forward*, a strategic financial plan that calls for an annual evaluation of all academic programs. The plan provides a sustainable framework allowing HSU to proactively pursue outstanding academic opportunities and to position Hardin-Simmons favorably in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

“In the coming weeks, months, and years the HSU campus will change. Structural adjustments like these are important as we strive toward

achieving financial excellence not only for ourselves, but for those to come. Last year's actions began our move toward financial sustainability. The decisions made today continue the process," he continued.

Statement of faith

[The statement of faith](#) was adopted by HSU trustees May 19. The statement is broadly evangelical. It also is [similar to a faith statement approved by the Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board](#) May 24, originally scheduled [to be recommended to messengers](#) during the BGCT annual meeting Nov. 13-15 in Waco.

BGCT Executive Director David Hardage later [called for a "pause"](#) on the GC2 statement of faith, indicating messengers will not vote on it during the upcoming BGCT annual meeting.

Lawsuit

June 28, [a crosstown university filed a lawsuit against HSU](#). McMurry University filed its lawsuit in the Taylor County District Court, claiming HSU breached contract.

The contract in question involves the Patty Hanks Shelton School of Nursing, an intercollegiate consortium formed in 1979 by McMurry, HSU and Abilene Christian University. ACU left the consortium in 2012.

McMurry charges HSU with trying to dissolve the school. HSU's public statement in response reads: "Hardin-Simmons deeply appreciates the long history of working with the other local universities in the Patty Hanks Shelton School of Nursing. We have been in discussions with McMurry about how each university could continue to provide nursing education in Abilene, and unfortunately, we have not been able to agree on the best path

forward.

“We are disappointed that McMurry has chosen to take this matter into court, instead of working together cooperatively, and we will respond to the lawsuit to accurately set forth HSU’s position. HSU’s desire is to continue to provide excellent training and education to accommodate the need for quality nursing professionals in our community.”

Updated 10:34 pm, Oct. 27: Added response from HSU board of trustees and clarified source of faculty quotes as coming from the entire faculty council.

Updated at 1 p.m. on Wednesday, Nov. 2, to indicate HSU administration still had not provided any comment.