

# HSU president: Seminary closing ‘solely a financial decision’

February 12, 2020

ABILENE—Closing Logsdon Seminary was “solely a financial decision” reached after an extended period of analysis, discussion and prayer, Hardin-Simmons University President Eric Bruntmyer wrote in a Feb. 12 letter to the “HSU Family.”

The letter, sent Wednesday afternoon, provided historical background and a timeline leading up to the [Feb. 7 vote](#) by the university’s board of trustees to close the Abilene and San Antonio branches of the seminary, once current students have completed their degrees.

The university’s initial announcement of that decision prompted [strong reactions](#) and expressions of concern from many alumni and other Texas Baptists.

A follow-up statement from the seminary on Feb. 8 clarified the decision affected only the seminary, and HSU would continue to offer undergraduate religion programs through its Logsdon School of Theology, but many other questions remained unanswered.

## ‘Theological issues’ discussed

The Feb. 12 letter addressed many of the concerns expressed publicly in the aftermath of the trustees’ action and answered some—but not all—of the questions raised.

On social media, some critics of the Feb. 7 decision had compared it to the

“fundamentalist takeover” of the Southern Baptist Convention. Kyle Tubbs, president of the Logsdon Alumni council, asserted “a small, but very influential, fundamentalist group” carried out a campaign to undermine support for the seminary by accusing its professors of liberalism.

In his Feb.12 letter, Bruntmyer wrote: “While theological issues did come up in our discussions, this was solely a financial decision.”

His letter did not offer any explanation about the nature of the “theological issues” that were discussed.

Instead, it pointed to the university’s history, noting as early as its second decade, “courses and programs were updated and added,” and that pattern continued through successive administrations over the course of more than a century.

## **Underfunded from the beginning**

In 1983, a gift from the Charles and Koreen Logsdon family—the largest in the university’s history up to that time—enabled Hardin-Simmons to establish the Logsdon School of Theology. Then in 2004, the university’s trustees voted to create what became Logsdon Seminary.



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“From the very beginning, the seminary lacked appropriate funding,” Bruntmyer wrote. “In faith, Hardin-Simmons University believed that seminary graduates could affect even more lives, and therefore HSU took on the financial burden to fund the work of Logsdon Seminary.”

Over the course of 15 years, Logsdon Seminary graduated more than 400 students, he noted.

“The Baptist General Convention of Texas and others have partnered to fund some of this training for our students. Endowment income of \$31,000 per year was designated by donors which provided some assistance in covering the \$600,000 annual costs of funding the seminary,” Bruntmyer wrote.

“To cover the remaining cost, funds designated for the Logsdon School of Theology were consistently moved over to the Logsdon Seminary in order to cover the deficits that occurred from the initial and continual lack of funding.”

## **Serious financial analysis in the last four years**

Four years ago, the HSU administration began a serious analysis of the university’s financial situation and “created metrics to identify low-performing programs,” he continued. “In this process, the Seminary and School of Theology were identified as low-performing programs.”

While the letter did not stipulate the exact nature of the metrics or offer any specific definition of “low-performing programs,” it noted enrollment numbers in both Logsdon Seminary and the Logsdon School of Theology “have continued to decline.”

Unlike some areas of the university that began offering online courses, the nature of the seminary’s accreditation through the Association of Theological Schools did not allow fully online programs without a waiver, the letter stated.

“Logsdon Seminary and Logsdon School of Theology can request a waiver

of this policy but have historically chosen not to,” Bruntmyer wrote.

A year ago, the board of trustees’ Logsdon Seminary committee and its Finance and Audit Committee “discussed the seriousness of the financial situation” of both the seminary and the Logsdon School of Theology, the letter stated.

## **Discussed ‘pathways to improve the financial situation’**

“It was after these meetings that administration sat down with faculty and staff of both the Seminary and the School of Theology to discuss once again the pathways to improve the financial situation” of both, the letter continued. During the fall semester, the board of trustees met in a workshop setting to discuss the matter.

“After much prayer, sharing of information and discussion, the seriousness of the financial situation of the School of Theology and Seminary was fully understood by the board,” Bruntmyer wrote.

“Last week after additional prayer, deliberation and decisions, it was determined that the funds initially given for the Logsdon School of Theology that had been used to cover the deficits of Logsdon Seminary would be directed back to the Logsdon School of Theology. These funds which had been originally given as endowments for our Bible department and religion department (that became Logsdon School of Theology) would again be used to support the university’s mission of Christian education for all of our undergraduate students.”

The letter explained current seminary students would be provided a “teach-out” program to allow them to complete their degrees, full-time faculty would be provided a one-year contract, and then the seminary would close

once students graduated.

## **Seminary ‘not singled out’**

“Logsdon Seminary was not singled out in addressing the university’s operational challenges,” the letter stated. “All programs were analyzed as part of a process known as The Way Forward, HSU’s recently approved strategic financial plan. Additional graduate and undergraduate programs outside the seminary will be teaching-out our students and then closing once all have graduated.”

The letter did not stipulate which other university programs would be closed, nor did it provide any specific comparisons with other cost centers at HSU.

“Hardin-Simmons University has been entrusted with the stewardship of significant financial and physical assets that position it well for long-term excellence, but each year it can spend only the income produced by the financial assets, not the assets themselves. The university is facing immediate short-term operational challenges that it is having to address now to preserve its assets for future generations of students, offering the programs they want in a cost-effective way,” Bruntmyer wrote.

“Logsdon Seminary has been a life-changing experience for many. It has been a 15-year mission of faith. It produced 400-plus graduates that have positively impacted the world for Christ. However, it is imperative that HSU continues to prioritize its programs as good stewards of our financial resources.”

The letter acknowledged the sorrow of faculty, staff, students and alumni, noting it had been “expressed through emails, texts, phone calls, social media and in-person conversations with the administrators and trustees.”

# **Possibility of seminary in San Antonio raised**

“I want to assure you that the actions to close Logsdon Seminary do not diminish the great sacrifice that HSU, our donors, faculty and staff have made to provide a quality, seminary education to so many,” the letter continued. “The lives of our students and alumni around the globe are the living embodiment of seeds planted by our Logsdon Seminary faculty and staff. The impact will carry on for generations to come.

“And while some would disagree with the decision and others fully support it, there is no doubt that there is a deep love for Hardin-Simmons University, the Logsdon School of Theology and the Logsdon Seminary amongst our global family.

“There is a need for seminary level education in Texas. A group of individuals have begun to consider the possibility of a freestanding seminary separate and apart from Hardin-Simmons University and located in San Antonio. If there are institutions, churches and individuals that are interested in taking this path or another path, Hardin-Simmons University stands ready to assist with any consultation and assistance.”