

HSU trustees remain committed to decision to close Logsdon

March 3, 2020

ABILENE—After their second meeting within three weeks, Hardin-Simmons University trustees expressed “full confidence” in President Eric Bruntmyer and in their decision to close Logsdon Seminary and several other university programs.

A majority of trustees voted Feb. 7 to close Logsdon Seminary and move undergraduate programs offered by the Logsdon School of Theology under the Cynthia Ann Parker College of Liberal and Fine Arts.

The board took the 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 a subsequent called meeting of the trustees.

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 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.

“Our recent decisions will allow HSU to sustainably support its academic offerings and experiences for all current and future students, because students remain the priority of the Board. We are dedicated to being good stewards of those God has entrusted to us and are determined to continue to preserve our heritage of academic excellence.”

The university also updated posts on its website replying to “frequently asked questions” both about “[campus changes](#)” in general and [Logsdon](#) in particular.

The FAQ stated enrollment in undergraduate programs at the Logsdon School of Theology declined 34.3 percent over the last five years, and graduate programs in Logsdon Seminary experienced an overall 16.2 percent enrollment decline.

Logsdon endowments

Regarding endowment gifts to the Logsdon School of Theology and Seminary, the university reported their current value as \$32,463,000.

“These funds are restricted, which means that based on donor restrictions, HSU cannot use the entire amount, only a set distribution amount from those funds each year,” the FAQ response stated, adding the annual distribution is about \$1,623,000.

According to the university, restricted endowments given specifically for Logsdon Seminary amount to \$792,786—about 2.4 percent of the total—and they produce about \$39,640 in endowment distributions annually.

Student tuition payments and support from the Baptist General Convention of Texas provide an additional \$1,368,254 annually, the university reported.

In the most recent financial year, the university reported spending

\$2,462,000 on salaries, employee benefits, travel, supplies and equipment related to the Logsdon School of Theology and Seminary, plus an additional \$1,797,000 in overhead costs such as utilities, maintenance, repairs, rent on satellite campus facilities and other expenses.

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 HSU must absorb, the university reported.

In response to a question about anticipated cost savings to the university once Logsdon Seminary is closed, the FAQ stated: "HSU anticipates a cost savings of \$400,000-\$600,000 annually. The Board of Trustees considered the closure of other programs, but after consideration, discussion, and prayer, made the decision to close Logsdon Seminary."

Outside influence?

Multiple sources indicated the pastors of some West Texas churches had expressed displeasure with Logsdon Seminary.

David Hardage, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of Texas, 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."

The FAQ included a question about whether opinions expressed to the university's president or board by churches influenced the board of trustees' decisions.

"Faculty, staff, alumni, parents, churches, community leaders and many

others have always provided Hardin-Simmons University with their advice and opinions of HSU and its programs. These opinions range from glowing reviews and encouragements to negative impressions and words meant to be derogatory and hurtful,” the university stated. “These opinions do not influence the financial analysis that is assisting the Board of Trustees as they make financial decisions about HSU’s academic offerings.”

More than 550 sign letter to president and trustees

While the “frequently asked questions” responses offered additional information about enrollment and finances, they do not address specific requests made in a Feb. 16 letter to Bruntmyer and the trustee board from the Save Logsdon Seminary group. More than 550 people had signed the open letter as of March 2.

“We find ourselves concerned and disheartened by the lack of transparency, faithfulness, and integrity of Hardin-Simmons University’s leadership,” the letter stated.

The letter made three specific requests:

- “Be financially transparent. Conduct an external audit of Logsdon Seminary and Hardin-Simmons University’s finances.”

The letter stated its drafters “no longer can say with confidence that we trust the data—and lack of data—provided as a justification for the closure of Logsdon.”

The letter specifically asked that HSU’s budget for all colleges and programs be disclosed “so that we may understand the financial necessity to close Logsdon and other beloved programs.”

The letter raised questions about the Logsdon endowment—both about how it will be used in the future and whether the university is honoring donors’ wishes.

“It appears that beginning Fall of 2021, Logsdon School of Theology will have only three faculty members. How can the university justify that the endowment can support no more than three faculty in the future?” the letter asked.

“We are suspicious that closing Logsdon Seminary is a move to divert Logsdon funds from donors’ intentions of preparing men and women for ministry. How a Christian university can prioritize anything above the preparation of ministers is incomprehensible to us.”

- “Listen and communicate honestly. Host a town-hall meeting with the Board of Trustees to listen to students, alumni, and university faculty and to provide honest and compassionate communication.”

The letter stated its drafters and those who signed it feel “confused, uncared for, and unheard.”

“We ask that the Board of Trustees formally and publicly listen to our concerns at a town-hall meeting. We hope and pray that you will speak with compassion, sincerity, and transparency,” the letter stated.

- “Demonstrate integrity. Release the minutes from all Board of Trustees meetings, including Executive Session meetings held in the past three years.”

“We believe that the communication surrounding the decision to close Logsdon Seminary does not reflect the true character or integrity of the leadership of Hardin-Simmons University,” the letter stated. “We believe that transparency, truth, and discretion are central to Baptist identity and Texan identity. ... Baptist history teaches us that the first Baptists were

dissenters, speaking against those unjustly wielding power. As the signers of this letter, we return to our Baptist roots and dissent from the decision made by the Board of Trustees and those in power.”