

Save HSU representatives meet with university leaders

August 25, 2020

More than six months after Hardin-Simmons University trustees voted to close Logsdon Seminary, top university administrators and several trustees met with two representatives of the [Save Hardin-Simmons](#) group.

Laura Moore of Abilene, chair of the HSU board of trustees, facilitated the mid-August meeting. Participants included Eric Bruntmyer, HSU president; Chris McNair, provost and chief academic officer; and Jodie McGaughey, vice president for finance; as well as Drue Pounds of Colleyville, chair of the board's finance committee; several other trustees; and additional senior-level members of the HSU administration.

"As always, our goal is to affirm the relationship Hardin-Simmons University has with its alumni, friends, benefactors and others in the community. Our goal was the same for this recent meeting," university officials stated in an Aug. 25 email.

Kyle Tubbs, president of the Logsdon Alumni Council, and Rob Sellers, retired professor of theology and missions at the seminary, represented Save Hardin-Simmons, a group initially formed on social media as Save Logsdon Seminary.

"The idea for the meeting was first floated as just between the president and me. I have been requesting a meeting with him since February," Tubbs said. "It then grew to a meeting between the president, board chair and me."

When it expanded later to include other members of the university administration and trustees, Sellers offered to attend and provide the

perspective of a former faculty member who was not currently under contract with the university or bound by a nondisclosure agreement, Tubbs said.

“I was grateful for such a growing audience in the room,” he said. “It provided an opportunity to ask questions directly to individuals who made the recent decisions to close Logsdon and those who created and changed the narrative around Logsdon’s closing. It also provided the opportunity for more ears to listen to the truth.”

Tubbs focused on different views about Logsdon

Tubbs noted his presentation focused on assertions made by HSU administration that have been [contradicted](#) by former administrators, faculty and staff.



The Logsdon School of Theology on the Hardin-Simmons University campus. (Photo / Ken Camp)

Bruntmyer wrote in a [Feb. 12 letter](#) to the “HSU Family” that closing Logsdon Seminary was “solely a financial decision.” A [Feb. 14](#) news release from HSU explained the plan to close the seminary was part of a larger

reorganization implemented to address a more than \$4 million operating deficit at the university.

Three days later, Bruntmyer told the [Baptist General Convention of Texas Executive Board](#) that HSU trustees decided to close Logsdon Seminary and direct endowment earnings to the school's undergraduate religion programs because the university could not afford to "keep two financially weak programs going."

"The seminary was never properly funded," Bruntmyer told the BGCT Executive Board.

However, [Don Williford](#), former dean of Logsdon Seminary, disputed that assertion, insisting that earnings from several endowments should have been sufficient.

"Considering the faculty reductions, which have primarily impacted Logsdon Seminary and endowment incomes which rightfully provide funding to both seminary and non-seminary programs, along with income from tuition income generated by both entities, it seems inconceivable that Logsdon Seminary should be creating such a financial crisis for Hardin-Simmons University," Williford wrote in his Feb. 17 response to Bruntmyer.

Williford, Sellers and some other former faculty also asserted HSU surrendered to outside pressure from influential individuals who raised questions about the theological positions of some Logsdon Seminary professors.

Tubbs noted he was surprised to hear an HSU administrator at the mid-August meeting say Logsdon Seminary would need 1,000 students to be viable.

By way of comparison, Baylor University's Truett Seminary fall enrollment for the current semester stood at 334 students as of Aug. 18—269 in

master's degree programs, 54 in the Doctor of Ministry degree program, seven in the Ph.D. in preaching program and four non-degree-seeking students.

HSU offered a clarification in an Aug. 25 email: “Based on the current seminary education delivery model, there is no specific number of students that would have provided financial sustainability for Logsdon Seminary. Increasing the number of students at the current tuition and discount rate would continue to increase costs as well. A large number was stated in the context of attempting to communicate this during the meeting, and focusing on the specific number misses the point. The Hardin-Simmons University board of trustees made decisions that have positioned and will continue to position the university for long-term success and growth.”

Group urges HSU to release documents

Tubbs insisted he and his group “just want the truth”—about motives for closing Logsdon Seminary and about the financial situation at HSU.



The Johnson Building on the Hardin-Simmons University campus. (Photo / Ken Camp)

“We have asked for a forensic audit of university finances, for minutes from trustee meetings to be released, and for the university financial plan to be made public,” he said. “We want to see how and why decisions were made.”

The university responded by stating, “HSU completes proper third-party financial auditing each year, provides regular documentation and reporting to our accreditors and regulatory agencies, and is therefore appropriately accountable in all respects to those with authority over the university.”

University officials voiced hope for the future, saying, “We appreciate the concern and love for Hardin-Simmons University and look forward to a long and bright future of providing education enlightened by Christian faith and values.”

Tubbs expressed appreciation to the trustee board chair, whom he said “worked as a gracious bridge-builder throughout this process” and voiced hope for cooperation in the future.

“I believe change, unity and progress can happen if we join with the trustees and work for a better future for HSU,” he said. “That being said, the truth of the recent past and present will need to be dealt with honestly and with transparency to move HSU to a healthy place.”