

# The Way Forward for HSU involves balance, provost says

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Ask Provost Chris McNair about the future of Hardin-Simmons University, and he often returns to the theme of balance—between mission and market demand, between residential education and online instruction, and between traditional liberal arts courses and innovative new majors.

Hardin-Simmons developed The Way Forward strategic financial plan to place the institution on firm financial footing so it can continue in the years ahead to offer students an education enlightened by Christian faith, McNair asserted.

The evaluation process that led to The Way Forward involved asking hard questions about how central each academic program was to the university's mission and how sustainable it was financially. And that led to the decision to begin the process of closing Logsdon Seminary.

"No one wanted to see Logsdon Seminary close," McNair said. "It was not a spur of the moment decision. A lot of thought and planning went into it."

## Cutbacks and restructuring

To address the university's more than \$4 million [operating deficit](#), trustees in early February approved The Way Forward, a plan that included eliminating 11 graduate degree programs, five undergraduate majors, four undergraduate minors and two certificate programs.

The Way Forward plan reorganizes the university into five colleges and schools: the Cynthia Ann Parker College of Liberal Arts, the Holland School

of Science and Mathematics, the Kelley College of Business and Professional Studies, the College of Health Professions and the Patty Hanks School of Nursing.

The Logsdon School of Theology becomes part of the Cynthia Ann Parker College of Liberal Arts, along with the School of Music, the Department of Counseling and Human Development, and the Department of Fine Arts.



Chris McNair

While the financial and market analysis of the university that led to The Way Forward carefully examined recent years, it included a general look back as far as the 1970s, McNair noted.

“There has been an ebb and flow, with some good years and some bad years,” he said, noting the value of assets and donor contributions have been affected by the oil and gas economy in Texas.

Some alumni, donors and supporters of HSU have criticized the administration for not giving the campus community a greater voice in making the decision. Some questioned whether the university communicated the significant financial problems sufficiently and appealed to donors for additional gifts.

McNair, who became provost two years ago, noted town hall meetings already were being held when he was named interim dean after Tommy Brisco retired from that role in December 2017.

“Town halls were scheduled with faculty and staff in order for them to give their suggestions,” he said.

Leaders of Logsdon Seminary were asked to develop a plan to make the graduate programs financially sustainable, but they were unable to present a workable model, he said.

“That’s not a criticism. Seminary education is struggling around the country,” McNair said.

Development officers and administrators “worked hard” to find additional gifts, but raising enough endowment to produce sufficient annual distributions to make Logsdon Seminary sustainable was beyond the capability of the university’s donor pool, McNair said.

## **Dollars and cents**

Once the “teach-out” program for students currently enrolled in Logsdon Seminary programs is completed in 2023 and the seminary is closed, the university anticipates between \$400,000 and \$600,000 in annual cost savings.

On its website, HSU posted responses to frequently asked questions regarding campus changes caused by The Way Forward plan. That [FAQ](#) reports the university’s budgeted operating expenses in fiscal year 2019 were \$49,783,087. HSU reported \$143,857,000 in restricted endowment funds and \$50,850,000 in unrestricted endowment funds at the time the web pages were developed.

While most endowment funds are managed by HighGround Advisors, formerly known as the Baptist Foundation of Texas, “we don’t just use one manager,” McNair noted.

Another section on the website that deals specifically with [questions](#)

[regarding Logsdon](#) reported the current value of restricted funds given to the Logsdon School of Theology and Seminary as \$32.46 million, which produce an annual distribution of \$1.62 million. The reported value of restricted endowments specifically for Logsdon was less than \$793,000—about 2.4 percent of the total. They provide less than \$40,000 in annual distributions, accounting for about \$320 per student annually in endowment scholarships.

The website reported HSU spent \$2.46 million on employee salaries and benefits, travel, supplies and equipment related to the Logsdon School of Theology and Seminary and close to \$1.8 million in Logsdon’s overhead costs.

Total costs related to Logsdon minus the annual distribution from endowments leaves more than \$2.6 million that have to be funded in other ways. Tuition payments—including support from BGCT—provides less than \$1.4 million, leaving more than \$1.2 million in unfunded costs for the Logsdon School of Theology and Seminary.

“Tuition is significantly discounted by us,” McNair said.

## **By the numbers**

Looking at enrollment over the last five years, the website reported an overall decline of 34.3 percent in the Logsdon School of Theology’s undergraduate programs and a 16.2 percent decline in Logsdon Seminary graduate programs.

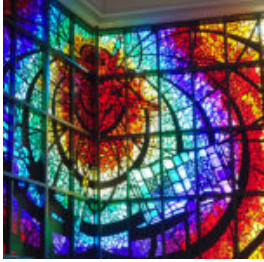


Photo by Julie Sorrels

A detailed look at enrollment reveals a somewhat more complex picture. According to information the university provided to the *Baptist Standard*, enrollment in Logsdon Seminary graduate programs increased 3.4 percent from fall 2014 to fall 2018, from 148 to 153.

Enrollment in the Master of Divinity degree program grew about 13 percent, from 85 in 2014 to 96 in 2018.

Overall enrollment for Logsdon Seminary peaked at 175 in 2016 and at 99 for the Master of Divinity degree program in 2017.

Enrollment in the Doctor of Ministry degree program declined from 34 students in fall 2014 to 27 students in fall 2019, reaching its peak enrollment at 44 students in fall 2016. The family ministry studies program enrollment declined from 25 students in fall 2014 to 17 in fall 2019, with a peak enrollment of 29 in fall 2015. Enrollment in the Master of Arts in Religion program never exceeded single digits, reaching its highest enrollment in fall 2017 with 7 students.

HSU trustees voted in October 2018 to close seminary extension campuses in Coppell, Lubbock, Corpus Christi and McAllen.

Undergraduate enrollment in the Logsdon School of Theology declined from 70 in fall 2014 to 46 in fall 2019. Enrollment peaked at 80 students in fall 2017 before dropping to 57 the next year.

Overall enrollment in Logsdon Seminary graduate programs far outpaced enrollment in the three Logsdon School of Theology undergraduate majors—Bible and biblical studies, ministry and youth ministry, and religion.

However, the high cost of operating a seminary and the university's need to retain undergraduate Bible courses as part of its mission led to the decision to close Logsdon Seminary and direct assets toward the Logsdon School of Theology's undergraduate programs, McNair noted.

## **Looking ahead**

Elements of the three current undergraduate programs offered by the Logsdon School of Theology will be incorporated into the new major in Christian Studies, McNair said.

Bible classes have been a graduation requirement for all undergraduate students since 1902, the HSU website reports.

In the future, course offerings and academic programs will continue to be evaluated as part of The Way Forward, McNair said. The evaluation will include examination of enrollment, the number of students graduating with a particular major and operating expenses. At the same time, the university will find a way to offer programs vital to its mission.

"The fine arts will never be big revenue generators, but they are central to our focus as a liberal arts university," he said, noting the undergraduate Logsdon School of Theology falls under that umbrella.

McNair anticipates HSU will continue to expand its online course offerings, but he emphasized it will not become an online-only school.

"I am a fan of traditional residential education. My parents sacrificed to send me here in the early 1980s," he said. "I do not want us to become

completely dependent on online courses, but there certainly is room for growth there.”

Academic programs will “ebb and flow” in the years ahead, just as they have throughout the university’s history, he noted, but a commitment to providing “quality education in a Christian environment is always foundational to everything we do.”

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