

Truett program explores integration of faith and sports

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WACO—The [Faith and Sports Institute](#) at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary offers coaches, administrators, sports chaplains and athletes the opportunity to explore the integration of faith into the highly competitive environment of sports.



The Faith and Sports Institute at Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary offers coaches, administrators, sports chaplains and athletes the opportunity to explore the integration of faith into the highly competitive environment of sports. (Baylor University Photo / Robert Rogers)

The institute offers graduate degree programs, an online certificate program and high school retreats, as well as conducting research and offering resources.

Co-founder and program director Cindy White describes the Faith and Sports Institute as “a collaborative and interdisciplinary effort” involving athletes, coaches, chaplains and scholars to “provide theological education, research and best practices for Christian leaders in sports.”

The residential graduate program offers two degree paths—a certificate of studies in sports ministry/chaplaincy as part of the Master of Divinity degree program and a concentration in sports ministry/chaplaincy in the Master of Arts degree program.

These programs offer students “not only a robust theology of culture and sports, ethics and chaplaincy skills, but also internships in the community and around the world, so they can practice what they learned in the classroom,” White said.

While the institute officially launched in 2021, co-founders John and Cindy White had been putting the program together since they began work at Truett Seminary 11 years earlier.

With an extensive background in sports and ministry, the couple began “sensing the need to examine the culture and those who participate” when it came to Christianity lived out in sports.

They began to ask hard questions, including:

- Can a Christian love God, neighbor and self and still be competitive?
- What does it mean to be neighborly to one’s strongest rivals?
- While winning can be a result of excellence in leadership, character and skill, is that a Christian’s ultimate aim in sports?
- How might the “never good enough” messages in today’s culture be

antithetical to the gospel?



Cindy White

To reflect further on these complex questions, the Whites needed a home where they could do it. They needed a place with “institutional support , a priority on research and an unambiguous Christian tradition,” Cindy White said.

In 2010, they received a call from Baylor regarding a graduate program in sports ministry and chaplaincy. In 2016, they received a sizeable grant from the Lilly Endowment to take the faith-integration to the high school level, and then in 2019 launched a professional certificate program.

In the fall 2022 semester, the institute was the first to inaugurate an online graduate degree program in theology and sports studies due to the level of interest of those who cannot move at this point in their lives.

As an NCAA Division 1 and Research 1 institution, Baylor offered an ideal home for the development of the Faith and Sports Institute, White said, noting the program continues to grow.

**‘Amazing people’ doing
‘groundbreaking work’**

Abby Lee, Faith and Sports Institute retreat ministry coordinator, completed her degree in May 2022. After meeting “amazing people” doing

“groundbreaking work,” Lee moved to Texas from Connecticut, convinced Truett Seminary was where God called her to complete her Master of Divinity degree.



Abby Lee

After her graduation, Lee began working at the institute, leading summer retreats for high school athletes. These retreats teach many of the same concepts included in the degree programs, and “inspire younger athletes to think about sports differently,” Lee explained.

Upon entering the program, Lee discovered she needed to think about sports in a new way.

“I wasn’t seeing sports in a very positive light” she said, noting the institute offered “space to think about how the broken areas of sports could be redeemed.”

Choosing the Faith and Sports Institute at Baylor helped give Lee the “tools, space and knowledge” she needed to transform her thinking about sports.

Lee concluded that her time as a student “shaped and refined” her relationship with God, transformed her relationship with sports, and gave her the gift of best friends.

Following Christ in the competitive sports culture

In addition to the degree programs and Lee's high school summer immersion retreats, Cindy White directs a Deep Dive Retreat for leaders in sports in partnership with the [Tracy Hanson Initiative](#).

This new initiative involves much "trauma training for leaders in sports," Cindy White explained.

"We can't impart what we don't possess. If we're not healthy and whole, we're not going to be very good at helping other people," she said.

Helping others flourish is the goal of the Faith and Sports Institute, the graduate degree programs, the high school retreats and the new Deep Dive initiative, she explained.

Students ask, "How do we follow Christ in this competitive sports culture?" In the process of reflection, research and collaboration, athletes find a higher purpose in sports and their calling to love God and others more faithfully, Cindy White said.

As the Faith and Sports Institute continues that pursuit, the Whites and Baylor University look forward to hosting the Global Congress on Sports and Christianity in 2025.

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