

# Updated: HSU trustees vote to close Logsdon Seminary

February 10, 2020

ABILENE—Hardin-Simmons University's board of trustees voted to close Logsdon Seminary.

President Eric Bruntmyer announced the board's action in a letter released about 9 p.m. on Feb. 7.

"The board approved new programs, and it closed other programs at the undergraduate and graduate level including Logsdon Seminary and its programs," Bruntmyer stated. "In the next week, the appropriate deans and vice presidents will be communicating the details of these actions."

He went on to write the trustees "made these decisions with prayerful consideration and spiritual discernment, emphasizing that Hardin-Simmons will continue to hold to the Christian values on which it was founded."

Students will continue to participate in chapel services and weekly Bible studies, and they will have "expanded opportunities to participate in ministry events locally and abroad and to take additional Bible courses," he wrote.

## Financial considerations noted

Bruntmyer noted the board had adopted The Way Forward, a strategic financial plan that calls for an annual evaluation of all academic programs and provides "a sustainable framework" that positions the university favorably in "an increasingly competitive marketplace."

"Under The Way Forward, Hardin-Simmons University will always pursue

financial excellence, which will allow us to maintain our academic excellence,” he wrote. “In the coming weeks, months and year, the HSU campus will change. Structural adjustments like these are important as we strive toward achieving financial excellence not only for ourselves, but for those to come.”

In Oct. 2018, HSU trustees voted to [close four Logsdon Seminary extension campuses](#) in Coppel, Lubbock, Corpus Christi and McAllen, along with other cuts in programs and personnel.

At the time, Bruntmyer noted “some external revenue sources are evaporating,” pointing particularly to decreased Cooperative Program support. He also noted the Baptist General Convention of Texas was eliminating pro-rata funding for all its partnering universities.

## **Current students offered ‘teach-out’ program**

In a subsequent statement from HSU issued Feb. 8, the university clarified that the trustee decision affects Logsdon Seminary and its graduate programs, but the Logsdon School of Theology will continue to provide undergraduate Christian education.

“Current seminary students will be provided a teach-out program to finish their degrees,” according to the statement.



That same day, Bob Ellis, dean of the Logsdon School of Theology and Seminary, sent a letter to Logsdon students saying he was “deeply saddened” by the decisions the trustees made.

Ellis announced the “teach-out program” and assured the current students that “the university is under obligation to provide a way for you to finish your degree with the seminary if you choose to continue.”

He also noted “the Logsdon School of Theology will become a school within the Parker College of Liberal Arts,” adding that “ongoing employment of the full-time Logsdon university (undergraduate) faculty is not impacted by these developments.”

## Reactions to the announcement

“I am heart-broken over these decisions,” Ellis wrote. “I tried everything within my power to persuade the administration and trustees to maintain their commitment to Logsdon, but that was not their choice. I will be serving as dean through the end of this semester and will do everything I can to provide for your needs and the needs of faculty.



Bob Ellis, dean of Hardin-Simmons University’s Logsdon Seminary, offers a prayer of dedication for the

Logsdon Seminary in San Antonio  
campus at Trinity Baptist Church.  
(File Photo / Isa Torres)

“This is a very sad day for Logsdon. But on this day we are upheld by God’s grace, by our calling to follow Christ in ministry, and by the certainty of Christ’s faithfulness.”

The Feb. 8 statements addressed some questions the *Baptist Standard* raised in emails sent earlier that day to Bruntmyer, Ellis and Laura Moore, chair of the HSU board of trustees. Moore did not reply to the email.

Bruntmyer subsequently released a [letter to the “HSU Family”](#) on Wednesday afternoon, Feb. 12, in which he addressed many of the concerns that had been raised and answered many—but not all—of the questions.

Ellis responded to a series of questions and offered additional comments on the trustees’ action.

“HSU has been struggling for several years to increase economic efficiency, a concern of every small, private university. My sense is that the faculty are fully on board with the need to improve our financial situation. However, there are differing perspectives on what kind of changes should be made,” Ellis said.

“The decision to close the seminary as a part of restructuring the university is a heart-breaking choice for the Logsdon community. We have spent 25 years building an excellent place to prepare ministers, a place into which the university and its donors have invested significant resources, a place to which the BGCT has given hundreds of thousands of dollars in scholarships, and a place where very dedicated faculty and staff have invested their lives. We have graduated 417 students from the seminary who are serving Christ

across the state and some around the world.”

## **Insisted students ‘think deeply and prayerfully about the Bible’**

Ellis noted he became part of the extended HSU family at age 2 when his father accepted a faculty position in 1957.

“An immediate member of my family has been on the HSU faculty for over six decades, with the exception of a three-year period. We are deeply invested in the university,” he said. “I have personally known every faculty member of the Bible department and theology school since the 1960s. I have great respect for those professors because they were deeply committed to the Scripture and preparing students to interpret it well, as led by the Holy Spirit.

“They have been focused on serving the church and upholding Baptist heritage and values. They have been rigorous in their academic expectations for students because service for Christ demands it. And they have insisted on students learning to think deeply and prayerfully about the Bible and theology, rather than simply parroting what someone else has said.

“In short, the faculty for decades have been about theological education in a Baptist tradition, rather than indoctrination in a narrow way. I am privileged to have been a part of that legacy, and it deeply saddens me that its contributions at the graduate level will be lost for future students. Faculty who remain in place look forward to continuing the good work of Logsdon with undergraduate students after the seminary teach-out is completed.”

David Hardage, executive director of the Baptist General Convention of

Texas, said he was certain the decision reached by the HSU board of trustees to close Logsdon Seminary was “difficult and painful for them.” He asked Texas Baptists to pray for Bruntmyer, the board and “all those in the Logsdon family at this time.”

“Logsdon was an important part of Texas Baptist life, and we understand the disappointment many friends and alumni share,” Hardage said. “We believe in and are praying for a bright future for Hardin-Simmons University and our many Texas Baptist educational institutions. As a convention of churches, we continue to support theological education across the state.”

## **Logsdon Alumni Council appealed for dialogue**

Prior to the trustees’ meeting, officers of the Logsdon Alumni Council—Kyle Tubbs, president; Scott Sharman, vice president; and Yvonne Harold, secretary—sent a letter signed by more than 50 other Logsdon alumni and friends of the seminary to the HSU president, provost and chair of the board of trustees.

“We understand Hardin-Simmons experienced challenges over the last few years financially. Many beloved faculty and staff are no longer part of the university. We kept your tough decision making and actions in our prayers as you guided the university into the present as well as the future,” the letter stated.

Those who drafted the letter said they wanted to voice support for Logsdon Seminary and to invite the administration to engage in dialogue with the Logsdon Alumni Council and other graduates.

“Logsdon Seminary cultivated and prepared us for our callings,” the letter

stated. “Logsdon Seminary proudly averages a 90 percent placement rating, meaning 90 percent of all students who graduate Logsdon Seminary go on to serve in a related field. This number is incredibly impressive and is evidence of the good work of the staff and faculty of Logsdon Seminary over the years.

“Logsdon Seminary has been a Christ-centered place where we have found unity in the gospel of Jesus Christ, through the guidance of Scripture. While graduates serve in various contexts and capacities, we are brought together through preparation of the good news.”

Those who signed the letter included pastors and other ministers on church staffs, chaplains, counselors and teachers.

(As a matter of full disclosure, others who signed the letter included Marv Knox, coordinator of Fellowship Southwest and former editor of the *Baptist Standard*, and Julie Sorrels, marketing manager for the *Baptist Standard*. A current member of the Logsdon faculty, Meredith Stone, serves on the *Standard* board. Bruntmyer attends the church where John Whitten, current chair of the *Standard* board, is pastor.)

## **‘Positive impact’ of seminary and its graduates cited**

“Logsdon Seminary has been a true education for students over the years. Rather than indoctrinate, Logsdon Seminary educates. Former HSU President Jesse Fletcher once said that an education serves a student best when it teaches a student ‘how to think over what to think.’ This serves Logsdon’s graduates well as they do ministry under the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the real world and have to think/feel/do for themselves,” the letter states.

“The faculty and staff of Logsdon Seminary has been top notch over the years. They have invested in students and continue to do so. The faculty and staff are committed to the mission of the seminary to equip students to respond to God’s call through academic and spiritual formation for a lifetime of servant leadership in the kingdom of God. The seminary simply centers itself on the Lordship of Christ, guided by the authority of Scripture, focuses itself on the global mission of the church, and affirms historic principles of Baptist identity.

“Thousands of individuals and hundreds of churches have experienced the positive impact of Logsdon Seminary graduates. We believe in both the importance of the seminary now and in the world moving forward.”

The letter concluded with an invitation to “conversation surrounding how wonderful and important Logsdon Seminary is, as well as how we graduates can help grow the university and seminary moving forward.”

The Logsdon Alumni Council received no response either before or after the trustee meeting, Tubbs said.

## **CBF leader responds to Logsdon closing**

HSU’s Logsdon School of Theology was created in 1983 by a gift from the Charles and Koreen Logsdon family. The school began offering seminary programs leading to a Master of Divinity degree in 1995, the year after trustees of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary fired Russell H. Dilday as that school’s president for criticizing a political movement within the Southern Baptist Convention.

In 2004, Logsdon Seminary was created as an entity within the Logsdon School of Theology in 2004 and achieved accreditation with the Association



of Theological Schools.

The Cooperative Baptist Fellowship—formed in 1991 in response to what critics called the “takeover” of the SBC—has provided scholarship support to students at Logsdon Seminary as one of its partner institutions.

Paul Baxley, executive coordinator of CBF, learned about the HSU trustees’ action on Saturday morning, Feb. 8.

“Certainly, there is much we do not yet know about this decision. One thing we know is the closure of this school is a tremendous loss,” Baxley said.

“For 25 years, the ministry of Logsdon Seminary has blessed Cooperative Baptist partner congregations and indeed our whole Fellowship, as well as Baptists and communities far and wide. From its beginning until now, the faculty of this school has demonstrated a deep love for Christ and his church, a commitment to the Scriptures, and a deep desire for the thriving of congregations.

“While being intensely committed to the core theological curriculum, Logsdon has also demonstrated a capacity for faithful innovation. Logsdon has embodied the best of a Baptist vision of church, pursuing faithfulness in a context of freedom, knowing the most meaningful love for God and the most faithful service of the church must arise from freedom because it cannot be coerced.”

Baxley noted more than 400 Logsdon Seminary alumni serve around the world as pastors, ministers on church staffs, missionaries, church starters and chaplains. He also applauded the faculty as being “not only impressive scholars but also deeply committed Christians whose lives are run through with the fruit of the Spirit and evidence of genuine commitment to Christ.”

“Today, my hope is that all Baptists who have been touched by the life of Logsdon Seminary will join me in praying for the school’s current faculty

and students, as well as for the larger community of alumni and congregations who are most profoundly shaped by this unique school, and therefore, most deeply grieve the news that came from the university,” he said.

Baxley pledged CBF will “offer its full support to current students, faculty and alumni in this time of transition.”

“We will also continue our pursuit of a new and still more faithful covenant between congregations, theological schools and our Fellowship for the calling and preparing of new generations of women and men whom God is calling to the ministry,” he continued. “We do so in full recognition of the challenges facing theological education and congregations. But we also believe that the ministry of congregations and the calling to congregational leadership has never been more important than it is today.

“In these days of gratitude for what has been at Logsdon and grief for what is being lost, may we care for those who grieve most and take up the task of calling and preparing ministerial leaders with renewed determination.”

*This article originally was posted at 8 a.m. on Feb. 8. It was updated at 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. on Feb. 10 with additional information. It also was updated at 4 p.m. on Feb. 11 and at 9 p.m. on Feb. 12.*