

BGCT president: A new journey

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What a journey it has been to serve as president of Baptist University of the Américas these past 10 of the 30 years I have served in Texas Baptist higher education. It has been a joy and life-changing for me to be at BUA.



René Maciel This cross-cultural learning environment that is unashamedly training Christian leaders is a Texas Baptist treasure. God has been using BUA for 69 years to prepare students for ministry, and he used this university to prepare me for a new journey.

BUA began as the Mexican Baptist Bible Institute in San Antonio in 1947, changing its name to Hispanic Baptist Theological Seminary, then Hispanic Baptist Theological School and, in 2003, to Baptist University of the Américas as the scope expanded to grant accredited college degrees while maintaining the focus on training ministers for Hispanic churches. Our mission statement expresses the challenge—“the formation, from the Hispanic context, of cross-cultural Christian leaders.”

The primary language of instruction was Spanish until 2000. For most of those years, the school offered a non-accredited, non-certified diploma in traditional seminary areas like Bible, religious education and music. With the exception of those who came from Latin America, Puerto Rico and Spain who already had theological education, most Baptist Latino(a)

ministers in Texas were trained either at the school or one of the affiliated Bible institutes.

The school experienced some of the best years in enrollment and support during the 1970s and 1980s after moving to a 12-acre site in South San Antonio, but suffered a decline in enrollment during the 1990s, when programs were dropped and reduced. Some considered closing the school, but leaders decided to invite Albert Reyes as president of the school, and a new period of growth began.



Baptist University of the Américas moved into a new campus this year, the Baugh Building. During Dr. Reyes' tenure from 1999 to 2007, the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board authorized BUA to grant bachelor of arts degrees, and the school received full accreditation from the Association for Biblical Higher Education. Since accreditation and certification in 2003, BUA students have been able to transfer credits to other Baptist institutions, other ABHE schools and seminaries. BUA students who earn their bachelor's degree now can transfer directly into master's programs at Association of Theological Schools seminaries and many religion departments of Baptist universities.

In 2007, I was invited to serve as president. Across these years, a period of sustained growth and deepening of BUA's historical roots has been taking place.

Changing the primary language of instruction to English made it possible for BUA to expand its reach to a greater diversity of students and allowed students from multiple cultural/language groups, such as African-

Americans, Anglos, Koreans, Dutch, Hungarians, Japanese, Turkish, Indian and students from Africa and non-Spanish-speaking Latin American countries to enroll.

BUA's expanded curricular offerings include the associate of arts degree in cross-cultural studies, and bachelor of arts degrees in biblical/theological studies, business leadership, human behavior, music and Spanish.

In 2015-2016, enrollment reached its highest level, with 336 students in degree programs, certificate programs and English-as-a-Second-Language.

A certificate program, under the name of Baptist Bible Institute, continues to bless congregations in Texas, the United States and around the world with a solid biblical and theological education delivered at the point of need and in the language spoken by those congregations. Currently, BUA has more than 34 extension centers that serve more than 400 students.

Graduates have enrolled in graduate programs at institutions across the United States. Many of these students are serving in multiple capacities in churches—as pastors, music/worship ministers, church planters and other areas of ministry—serving at community ministry organizations, teaching public school, teaching at colleges and universities, and working in the general workforce.

This fall, in order to better serve our students and to continue our journey toward excellence, we acquired a new campus—a former medical office building, re-designed as a college campus and named the Baugh Building in honor of the Eula Mae and John Baugh Foundation's financial support. It joins a student-housing complex opened in 2008 for single and married students with families.

The new campus signals our new journey toward the future we have envisioned and have accepted as God's calling and mission in the church and in the workplace: "Baptist University of the Américas, within the

context of its Hispanic heritage, will be the standard for educating all students for Christian ministry and missions to change our world.”

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