



April 6, 2020

**ATTN: Hardin-Simmons University Board of Trustees**

Hardin-Simmons University  
2200 Hickory Street  
Abilene, TX 79698

Dear members of the Hardin-Simmons University (HSU) Board of Trustees,

HSU needs a plan to save the university spiritually, culturally, historically, and financially. This proposal serves as a vision for the better way forward for Hardin-Simmons. Without ***The Better Way Forward: A Plan to Save Hardin-Simmons***, we fear HSU may not exist in the near future. A clearer ethical, spiritual, and financial future for our beloved university must emerge and be implemented.

Please understand that we are not casting stones; rather, we aim to be part of the solution. We fully support HSU, which is why we are committed to saving the university. Upon adoption of these items, we are committed to rallying together in unity to continue to help save HSU.

The ideas in this plan are a collaborative effort, representing alumni, students, donors, current and former faculty, current and former staff, and other supporters of Hardin-Simmons.

We hereby ask the trustees to immediately adopt each step of ***The Better Way Forward: A Plan to Save Hardin-Simmons***:

**1. Reexamine the founding documents which gave birth to HSU**

- All decisions by the trustees should ask the question, “How are we being faithful to the historical values which are the foundation of this university?”
- Fully commit to the motto of an “education enlightened by faith.”
- Prioritize former president Jesse Fletcher’s assertion that an education best serves a student when they are taught how to think rather than what to think.

# **The Better Way Forward: A Plan to Save Hardin-Simmons**

## **2. Create Open and Safe Forums To Discuss University Changes**

- Provide open forums for students, alumni, faculty, staff, and donors to give direct feedback to the trustees *without interference of HSU administration or fear of retaliation for employees.*
- Host numerous Zoom calls and phone conferences with expanded space for Q&A at different times of day to boost wide participation.

## **3. Recognize, celebrate, value, listen to, and work with the faculty**

- 64% of faculty recently voted “no confidence” in the president. Relationships between faculty and administration need to be strengthened moving forward.
- Resolutions adopted by the faculty senate should be made public. The administration and trustees should at minimum, have to make public statements on those resolutions. All passed resolutions must come up for a vote with the trustees at the next trustee meeting.
- The administration should encourage, recognize, and support innovative teaching methods.
- The faculty should be respected through the affirmation of written policy, historical practice, and the accreditation standard that curriculum adoption, change, and evaluation are the primary responsibility of the faculty.
- Shared leadership between the administration and faculty should be collaborative, consultative, and collegial.
- The faculty will support HSU’s goal to become a distinctive leader among Christian liberal arts universities in the southwest by 2030.

## **4. Recruit and prepare students for leadership in the world**

- Adopt a robust recruiting plan with the goal of increasing the overall HSU student population by 30% by the year 2030.
- Increase student graduation rates. Prepare graduates for leading in the future.
- Focus on boosting starting salaries for students upon graduation.

## **5. Protect students’ freedom of speech**

- Students should be able to speak freely on university matters without the fear of retaliation.
- Do not threaten students’ on-campus jobs or student athlete’s playing time if they speak out regarding the present situation at HSU.
- Invite a speaker or representative from the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education to speak to students, faculty and administrators regarding best practices regarding freedom of speech, freedom of association, due process, legal equality, and sanctity of conscience.

## **6. Restore trust with alumni and donors**

- Cease alienating past and future donors, honor donor intent, and provide transparency concerning the use and allocation of endowed funds.
- Build a more cohesive relationship with alumni by engaging with constructive criticism and building positive alliances with key leadership in the alumni community.

## **7. Establish a culture of transparency and integrity**

- Conduct a detailed external audit of the entire university’s finances, including the specific corpus and use of each endowment fund, and make the results public. To boost donor confidence, stakeholders need to know and understand a clear picture of HSU’s finances.

# The Better Way Forward: A Plan to Save Hardin-Simmons

- Release the minutes from all trustee meetings, including Executive Session meetings, held since February 2016.
- Minutes of all future trustee meetings should be made public.
- Publish all university bylaws and handbooks related to trustees, students, faculty, and alumni to the HSU website.

## 8. Publish a five year financial plan

- Hire the top educational consultants in the country to evaluate HSU's current financial picture and put together recommendations for the trustees to adopt.
- Make the results of the evaluation *public* for alumni and donors to see.

## 9. Reverse "The Way Forward"

- Stop and reverse "The Way Forward" proposal. Until financials and minutes are released from previous trustee meetings, we cannot truly know and understand the decision making behind closing programs and laying off faculty and staff.
- Plans to close programs and lay off faculty will be placed on hold until a more careful and objective analysis is made of HSU's budget.

## 10. Reestablish Logsdon Seminary

- Logsdon is the ethical, moral, and spiritual heartbeat of the campus and vital to HSU's future.
- Honor original intent of all donors by using endowment monies for training men and women to gospel ministry at both the seminary and undergraduate levels.
- Ensure the corpus of all gifts is used solely in accordance with gift agreements.
- Recognize that previous trustees named the seminary "Logsdon Seminary of Logsdon School of Theology" because they never wanted to separate the graduate seminary from the undergraduate studies when it came to allocating the endowment.
- Allow Logsdon to hire the faculty and staff out of the endowments given to keep the seminary strong and train next generation ministers.
- Re-establish the Logsdon recruitment position which should not have been eliminated.

## 11. Internally review all SACSCOS standards of accreditation

- Ensure compliance regarding,
  - a) donor intent with endowed gifts
  - b) outside influence on the board of trustees, and
  - c) the transparency and openness of the current administration with all constituencies
- Release review findings publicly. Provide an open forum for discussion and feedback.

## 12. Restructure the HSU Board of Trustees

- The board must be independent fiduciaries, and not influenced or intimidated by HSU administration or outside actors with hidden agendas.
- HSU should negotiate zero mandated BGCT representation on the board. Currently the BGCT gives 1-2% of HSU's total operating budget each year, yet represents 51%+ of board positions. This is wildly disproportionate.
- At least 51% of all board members should be HSU graduates.
- Alumni may nominate and vote on 33% of board members.

## **The Better Way Forward: A Plan to Save Hardin-Simmons**

- In recruiting new members, the board will take a holistic view of the skills and knowledge of all board members, recruiting with a variety of backgrounds and life experiences in mind for the formation of a healthy and diverse board.
- Board member term limits should not exceed two four-year terms of service. Board members should serve no more than two lifetime terms.
- Board members should be Christian servant leaders committed to the vision, mission, and core values of HSU.
- Remove requirements related to where board members live or place of church membership.
- Trustee meetings may be attended by alumni, students, faculty, and staff.

### **13. Evaluate current HSU leadership**

*Trustees should hold current leaders accountable by providing clarity around the following questions:*

- Do current leaders represent the culture, history, and heritage of HSU?
- Do current leaders have the trust of donors?
- Do current leaders listen to and act on faculty concerns?
- Do current leaders have students' best interests in mind?
- Are current leaders in good standing with alumni?
- Are current leaders communicating to the public HSU's "education enlightened by faith" ethos?

*If the answer is "no" to any of these questions, trustees are responsible for holding current leaders accountable on behalf of the larger HSU community. Additionally:*

- The university president must attend at least one event in the following schools or departments at least once per semester: Logsdon chapel and lectures, music events, fine arts and literature exhibits and readings.
- Major news from the university should not be transmitted after office hours on Friday evening unless in the case of life and death emergency.
- For the rest of the current president's tenure, the president will notify the entire board of all legal consultations, phone calls, emails, and conversations with the university attorney/s.

### **14. Rally around the growing base of the Save Hardin-Simmons group**

- This group has major potential to help unite and grow HSU moving forward.
- The energy from the group can help HSU implement these changes and support the better way forward.
- The group may give directly as well as help fundraise for future HSU initiatives.

We have an opportunity to move forward together in unity. If the measures mentioned in this letter take place, and the history and heritage of HSU is honored, we believe there is a wave of supporters who will unite together to help build HSU stronger than ever before. Unfortunately, if HSU continues down its current trajectory, we believe the university could be headed for spiritual and financial bankruptcy. Trustees, will you help HSU take ***The Better Way Forward?***

A movement inspired by faith,

Save Hardin-Simmons