

Introduction

The following is a letter (2/28/20) from HSU's current Provost and Chief Academic Officer, Chris McNair, to HSU graduate Laura Taff. Mrs. Taff wrote McNair to express concern regarding recent changes at HSU. Mrs. Taff wasn't sure about some of what McNair stated in his letter, and gave former Logsdon Dean and HSU Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs/Associate Provost, Dr. Donald Williford the opportunity to comment on the letter. Dr. Williford's remarks appear line-by-line below in red.

Laura,

Thank you for your frank presentation of your concerns and your questions. UMHB has indeed done well and one of the reasons for that might be that it does not have a seminary. **The attribution that the success of UMHB is due to not having a seminary is ludicrous and unproveable! There are several demonstrable factors which have attributed to their success. The location of UMHB directly on the I35 Corridor with large concentrations of population within easy reach on the interstate is a major, justifiable explanation. Generally speaking, educational institutions, including faith-based universities, located on this corridor from Denton to San Antonio have experienced significant growth over the past twenty-five years or more. Additionally, the administration and trustees of UMHB have been aggressive and successful in raising funds for attractive, functional facilities. Consider the beautiful fitness center and the football complex that is far superior to any other complex in ASC schools, just to name a couple. The current leadership of HSU have experienced one miserable year after another in raising funds. Instead they have chosen to attack and close programs. Funds for the Houston-Lantrip Center have been in the pipeline from the previous administration. Likewise, the plans for the program and a separate facility originated over fifteen years ago. Check with Donna Snook , Administrative Assistant for the current and past deans of the Irvin School of Education for the records verifying this. While HSU is approaching its 130 year anniversary, the Logsdon Seminary is only 15 years old, having been established in 2005. Chris' statement is incorrect concerning Logsdon Seminary establishment. Dr. Vernon Davis, Dean of the Logsdon School of Theology from 1998 to 2003, led the process of gaining accreditation for a seminary within the Logsdon School of Theology. I was a participant in the faculty meetings Dr. Davis led when the faculty discussed the name "Logsdon Seminary" for the seminary. That necessitates a date preceding the date Chris cites. In February 2004, the HSU trustees created Logsdon Seminary as an entity within the Logsdon School of Theology to offer the MDiv and MAFM degrees. Essentially, The Trustee action in 2004 ratified the name selected by the faculty for the seminary and established its relation to the Logsdon School of Theology. Long before there was a seminary, HSU had a very vibrant undergraduate Bible studies program and in 1983, thanks to the generosity of the Logsdon family, an endowment was set up to create a the Logsdon School of Theology. This endowment was not given to HSU, but to the Baptist Foundation of Texas, since renamed High Ground Investments. They manage this endowment, and release some of the earnings each year to HSU, but HSU does not, and has not ever, controlled this endowment. This statement is true as far as it goes. All HSU's endowments are housed in the Baptist Foundation of Texas (BFT), now High Ground Investments (HGI). Each year HGI delivers the earnings from each endowment to HSU for use in the manner the donors directed. However, the gifts were always given to HSU. HSU then placed the endowment gifts with the BFI now HGI. It is true that HSU never managed the endowment corpus, however, HSU did/does manage the earnings each year by law using the earnings in the manner directed by the donors**

The reality of seminary education is that virtually all seminaries lose significant money each year and that without a substantial endowment dedicated that purpose, they cannot operate. The Logsdon Seminary itself only has a \$700,000 endowment, which yields only about \$31,000 per year. Just the cost of the faculty members plus benefits is over \$1,250,000. That leaves a substantial operations deficit of six figures just for the seminary. While the Logsdon money HSU receives each year has helped with that offset, it has not been enough to come close to covering both our undergraduate Logsdon School of Theology (what the Logsdon endowment was given for) and the seminary. As early as 2011, there are financial records that indicate the serious nature of the deficit. HSU exhausted much of their savings dollars to help defray this cost until we are at a point where there is not a source of revenue to make up the difference any longer. This entire paragraph is perplexing to me. First, I don't know what endowment to which Chris refers with a corpus of \$700,000.00. I'm not aware of any endowment with that corpus, and I'm certainly not aware of any endowment designated to the seminary alone. Logsdon School of Theology (PLTS), the parent structure under which both the seminary and the undergraduate Logsdon School of Theology (LSTUG) reside, and which benefits from all endowments for Logsdon (PLST) and supports both programs without separately designated benefits. The number Chris cites for salaries and benefits is fairly accurate if it refers to salaries for the 2018-2019 academic year. Since that year, Dr. Larry Baker has retired, leaving only six full-time faculty in Abilene and San Antonio, including the Dean, one part-time faculty person who is ineligible to receive benefits according to HSU policy, and three administrative assistants on the two campuses. Unless faculty salaries have significantly increased since I retired, the salary and benefit number will be significantly less for 2019-2020. Chris' statement that "our undergraduate Logsdon School of Theology (what the endowment was given for)" is entirely false. That statement reflects the reconstruction work of the current administration. I have previously cited the testimony of two other retired Deans and two retired Provosts who corroborate the proper designation of the gift. Chris' statement about serious deficits dating back to 2011 is a misrepresentation of Logsdon's financial state then and at the time of my retirement. To support this statement, the administration has cherrypicked snippets of a report called the Austen Report. The Austen Report was the culmination of an analysis of the Austen Group. The first edition of the report indicated Logsdon School of Theology and Seminary did not appear to be very viable. However that first edition reflected none of the large endowment income and was based merely on tuition revenue generated by Logsdon. I sent memos to then President Hall and Provost Tommy Brisco appealing the omission of the endowment incomes. The Administration instructed the Austen Group to rework their report to reflect all sources of revenue. The amended Austen Report indicated Logsdon Seminary and School of Theology were financially viable.

The HSU Board has studied these financial problems for several years, and determined that as painful as it is, the Logsdon Seminary must close. We all have agonized over this decision but in today's world, we realize that although seminary education is something we wanted to continue forever, training women and men for Christ, and of Christ, that at the end of the day, bills have to be paid, overhead must be covered, and we must do what is best for the whole university in order to keep it open and functioning. Private, Christian universities are much like a non-profit business and we must be nimble enough to close programs that are not working and reallocate resources to those that thrive. We have

done the same, adding PT, PA, and starting next year three other new programs that are poised to bring in students to train for what is needed in the world. While the calling to minister is the highest of calling, it still has to be able to pay for itself in a seminary. There were no financial alternatives. The closure of Logsdon represents less than half of the closures made on campus, and as you probably know, we had to close all of our music graduate programs. When the orchestra program was closed, the HSU President at the time, Dr. Lanny Hall, had made a plea for people to donate money to save it, yet only a small amount of money was raised. Our gifted and talented program on campus was run by a faculty member who chose to take a buy-out and leave Hardin-Simmons and no one has taken up the challenge of continuing this program. Much of our educational faculty efforts are now invested in the new Houston-Lantrip Center for Dyslexia and Autism Spectrum Disorders. **Again, this paragraph is fraught with misinformation. I would encourage you to look at President Bruntmyer's report at the 2019 BGCT Annual Meeting on pages 633-634 of the Annual Book of Reports. Jonathan Davis has secured screen shots of these pages. A reader of these two pages will ask, "What are the real facts here?" Dr. McNair is just repeating the party line. If one needs further corroboration of my assertions, ask Mr. Bruntmyer and Jody McGaughey to show full copies of the financial audits for years 2011 to present. You won't be allowed to view them because the audits would present a very different reality than the mere summary information put out by Bruntmyer and McNair. Concerning Chris' statements highlighted in yellow above, please see Appendix 1.**

I covet the prayers of you and your husband, as we see the end of graduate theological training at Hardin-Simmons. Both of you are much more enriched for the time he was able to spend and train in Logsdon and we are grateful for that. I only wish it could be longer. Churches face the same types of crises, and even the pastors on our Board have relayed how they have had to cut staff and close certain operations in churches when donations and giving in the church falters.

I would encourage you and your husband to go to the FAQ link on the HSU homepage and read through the questions and the answers provided by the administration and Board of Trustees that can hopefully give you a more clear picture of the struggles we face at Hardin-Simmons. UMHB is blessed to be located on the I-35 corridor and they are not ashamed or apologetic for closing academic programs that do not attract enough students. I admire their success and wish them continued growth.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to me if I can answer any of your questions.

Blessings,

Chris McNair

Christopher L. McNair, Ph.D.
Provost and Chief Academic Officer
Hardin-Simmons University

Dr. Chris McNair has been a dear friend for twenty-eight years. I love him, so it grieves me to have to reveal the inaccuracies and misinformation in his email to you. He is merely reflecting the party line.

Below is Laura Taff's original email to McNair:

Dr. McNair,

I obtained my bachelor's degree from the University of Mary Hardin Baylor (1994) and my Master's in Family Psychology from Hardin Simmons (2008). My husband graduated from Logsdon seminary in 2007. As an alumna from UMHB giving back to the school was discussed even while attending school and we had many opportunities to do so. I received a great deal of scholarships and my grandmother established a scholarship so I understood the importance of giving. That has not been my experience at HSU. It was not until recently that I received requests to donate to HSU.

My children benefited from programs at HSU that have since been closed. My oldest and youngest attended Threshold through the education department. The oldest received educational testing and tutoring for dyslexia. All three had private lessons through the former orchestra department. My middle daughter did not consider HSU when choosing a University because of the way it was handled when the Orchestra program shut down.

While I see my alma mater, UMHB, thriving, it appears that HSU is becoming a sinking ship. My hope is that as a member of the board of trustees you are seeking what is best for the university; however I am concerned with the direction it is taking. I hear rumors that Logsdon seminary only had three students but others tell me the numbers were between 80 and 100 students. I'm also aware of endowments specifically for Logsdon seminary so I have to wonder how the Seminary is not thriving.

As a Christian University I would expect these decisions and how they are presented to the public to be handled with integrity, yet I am concerned with the message we are sending to the community about Christian education. While there are rumors that the closing of the seminary is because it was "liberal," many I know experienced the opportunity to learn and grow in Faith with a strong theological foundation preparing them for ministry and service.

I hope that Hardin Simmons will continue to thrive and if we are unable to save Logsdon seminary that students will find other places to study and grow. I know that God's Word will not return void (Isaiah 55:11) and His purpose will be carried out. My question is will that happen through HSU or without it.

Sincerely,

Laura Taff

Appendix 1

Comment on Don Williford's Response to President Eric Bruntmyer's Letter to HSU Alumni and Members of the News Media

RON SMITH - THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 20, 2020

First of all, I want to commend and affirm the work of Dr. Don Williford, whose thorough, factually accurate, and carefully considered assessment of the principal issues raised by the recent actions of President Bruntmyer and the Hardin-Simmons University trustees with respect to the future of the Logsdon Seminary and the Logsdon School of Theology within which it exists provides an informative and helpful look into the most relevant information. What you will hear in his response is the voice of the one person who is, without doubt, the most familiar, best informed, and one of the best motivated of all of the individuals (including myself) who have spoken out on this matter. Neither the president nor the trustees can meet the obligations they bear to act in the best interest of the university as a whole without taking seriously the information and perspective expressed in this document, and then reconsidering the actions taken which, if they stand, will damage, and possibly destroy, the programs most focused on affirming and preparing those individuals exploring and responding to their call to Christian service.

Second, I want to add to my earlier statement of February 14 posted under the heading, "A Former Chief Academic Officer's Response to the News of Logsdon Seminary Closing." After posting that statement I saw a news report describing Mr. Bruntmyer's recent meeting with the Executive Committee of the BGCT in which he cited the use of "margin by major" metric assessments to assess the sustainability of individual programs. However, that approach, which can be very useful in certain types of operations where costs and pricing of products are both variables, is entirely unsuited for a university setting in which there is fixed pricing across all majors (same tuition across the board regardless of major) but the cost of producing the product (the actual cost of instruction) varies widely from one discipline to another due to the nature of the discipline and the resources required to provide quality instruction within that discipline.

Accordingly, within most non-public universities of our size and type there will be majors that will never produce an operational profit because tuition income plus any incidental revenues will never surpass the higher cost of instruction in that major (unless, like in the case of Logsdon, there is a substantial income producing endowment which can function to reduce the reliance on tuition), and there will be majors which will almost always produce an operational profit because tuition income and incidental revenues will always exceed its more modest cost of instruction. So if all of its non-profitable majors, many of which would be regarded as essential for the institution to retain its status as a university, were to be eliminated, the institution would be unable to defend its identity as an actual university and suffer serious harm. So in that setting, "margins by major" studies do not serve the purpose of the organization. Therefore, universities have what in the business world would be termed Cost Centers and Profit Centers. Then how does one justify retaining cost centers? The answer is that some organizational units that do not generate a profit are essential to the enterprise and must continue to function in order for the enterprise as a whole to serve its intended purpose and the constituency for which it exists. Given the distinctive history and purpose of this university, and the endowment

resources available, it is clearly evident that both the Logsdon School of Theology and Logsdon Seminary more than satisfy the criteria for identification as an essential organizational unit and must be allowed to continue.

Ronald A. Smith, Ph.D.,
Senior Professor Emeritus of Theology and former Executive Vice President and Provost