



Southwest Baptist UNIVERSITY

Peer Assessment Committee Executive Summary

October 22, 2019

In December 2018, Southwest Baptist University commissioned an external Peer Assessment Committee to lead a University-wide dialogue regarding faith, learning, and theology. We are grateful to all the committee members for their time and effort:

- Joseph Crider, Professor of Music and Worship and Acting Dean at Southwestern Seminary (and former SBU faculty member)
- David Dockery, Chancellor, Trinity International University/Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Committee Chair)
- Ken Hemphill, Former President, Southwestern Baptist Seminary and currently serving as Special Assistant to the President and Distinguished Professor of Christian Studies, North Greenville University (and also Interim Pastor, Second Baptist Church, Springfield, MO)
- Tim Howe, Teaching Pastor, Heritage Baptist Church, Lebanon, Missouri (SBU alum)
- Barbara McMillin, President, Blue Mountain College, Blue Mountain, Mississippi and Past Chair, International Association of Baptist Colleges and Universities
- Camden Pulliam, Director of Admissions, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary (SBU alum)

Over the course of its assessment during the Spring 2019 semester, the committee met with SBU administration, faculty and staff, SBU trustees, and Missouri Baptist Convention leadership.

The scope of the review was an evaluation of the University's policies and practices. The report was submitted to the SBU Administration and the Executive Committee of SBU's Board of Trustees as an internal resource. In the interest of transparency and building trust with our constituents, we are releasing the following Executive Summary.

Please pray for the University as we work together in response to the findings and recommendations provided by the committee.

Mark Rains

Chair, Southwest Baptist University Board of Trustees



General Observations

- SBU does not have an operational Statement of Faith. The 1921 Statement, which is a minimal statement regarding Baptist identity and distinctives as they were popularly presented during the early decades of the 20th century, does not function in any meaningful sense at this time in the life of the institution.
- SBU's current situation is due in part to its long-standing lack of explicit and publicly articulated theological commitments.
- Even without an operational Statement of Faith, there has been a stated desire for the school to walk in fidelity to Christ and to reflect the institution's Christian values.
- Confusion exists regarding SBU's institutional identity and relationships with its Baptist constituencies.

Trust

Trust and relationships are closely tied together. The restoration of relationships and the rebuilding of trust will be high priorities that have implications for all the other stated concerns and the implementation of the recommendations. In particular, a lack of trust exists on both sides of the MBC and SBU relationship, though progress has been made in this area during the months since the committee was appointed.

Recommendations:

- Strategic steps are needed to strengthen SBU's relationship with Missouri Baptists.
- If resources are available, a new staff member with the primary responsibility of strengthening church relations should be secured as soon as possible.

Doctrinal concerns

Due to lack of awareness of the 1921 statement, the SBU community has been operating without a clearly communicated touchstone. The lack of an operational Statement of Faith speaks to the corresponding confusion regarding institutional and denominational identity within the SBU community.

Recommendations:

- Clearly define the school's theological identity through a robust Statement of Faith.
- Administration needs to offer a clear and decisive path concerning the institution's future trajectory, including the place and priority of doctrinal commitments.
- Develop an approach to student life that better connects faith, learning, and living.

Denominational identity and hiring priorities

The 1921 Statement of Faith seems to operate in a virtually irrelevant manner for hiring, promotion, or tenure processes. Clarity is needed regarding the Baptist identity of the institution and expectations for hiring employees.

Recommendations:

- Renewed efforts must be made to further develop all faculty regarding faith, teaching, and learning matters.
- Administration should make every effort to fill the vacant faculty position within the Redford College for the coming academic year.

Conclusion

The challenges facing SBU in recent months are best viewed as an opportunity from the Lord to clarify and solidify the theological identity and denominational commitments of the school. The committee encourages the SBU community to take the next steps to strengthen the university's mission, Baptist identity, and doctrinal commitments in order to enhance distinctive Christian higher education at SBU in the years ahead.

The committee wishes to thank the SBU Board, administration, faculty, and staff for their kindness to the committee members during this process. In addition, gratitude is expressed to everyone who participated in the conversations and various communications. The openness with the committee and the willingness to pursue improved processes for the good of the SBU community have been commendable in every way. The members of the committee join with others in offering prayers for God's help, guidance, and blessing for SBU for the days to come.