

Envisioning our Future

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The panorama of contemporary American higher education is increasingly diverse. Baylor's distinctive position on this landscape is defined by the way it combines its enthusiastic commitment to its Christian identity with a vigorous quest for continued academic excellence. In light of this singularity, Baylor must, in these opening decades of the twenty-first century, reaffirm its identity clearly, recommit to fulfill its purpose faithfully, and aspire to extend its influence globally through its faculty, staff, students, and alumni.

Two temptations stand before us as we begin to think about our University and its immediate future. First is the temptation to focus upon all the changes in and to Baylor—and the transformations have been both many and meaningful—over the last two decades. Understanding as best we can our recent past is indeed helpful for the task ahead, but we must not dwell upon recent accomplishments so much that we do not embrace new opportunities.

A second temptation seeks to describe our future under the assumption that change, for its own sake, is to be prized. In this instance, what might be next would be embraced only because it reverses the polarity of what has been.

Baylor should not succumb to either of these temptations: neither should we become enamored by our recent past to the point of inertia, nor should we bite the apple of charting a new course just because 2012 looms near. On the contrary, we are well-advised to begin our collective conversation about Baylor's next years by reminding ourselves what has not changed and what will not change.

Baylor has already clearly identified and stated its [foundational assumptions](#), its [core convictions](#), and its [unifying academic themes](#), which I will call here Baylor's commitments. These commitments, together with [Baylor's mission](#), collectively work to define Baylor's character and purpose. Baylor has also, for the entirety of its history, lived under and leaned into its own unique calling – *Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana*. Like a deep spring-fed well, our commitments form a place to which we can return over and over again, to find rest and nourishment for Baylor's inner self. And, like a timeless clarion call, Baylor's historic charge to marshal all of its energies for others, for the church and for our world, orients us and gives us the gift of vocation.

Essential to these commitments is the assumption that human decision should be guided by God as His nature and will are revealed in Jesus Christ. Such a claim might affect our work in an infinite number of ways. From the perspective of outsiders, for us to give such priority to a theological and Christian claim at a major research university—especially in an age of suspicion and pluralism—may seem odd or, perhaps, even quaint. But this commitment simultaneously breathes life into our unique mission as a research university and provides the premise for interesting cross-disciplinary discussions of what we can and can't know.

Because of the vitality of these abiding commitments of our University, then, I invite you to read and reflect on them. They will provide a foundation for the entire Baylor community (faculty, students, staff, alumni, and friends) to engage in an open, public, and civil dialogue of Baylor's future. This conversation should begin with, make reference to, and be in accordance with Baylor's commitments and should also extend to our unique vocation to serve, both church and the world.

I am calling upon all who wish Baylor well to do her this great service: to spend some time in considered thought on what our future might be, given our commitments, our mission, and our goal of service (*Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana*). I request both your wisdom and your imagination in identifying the best ways we can, today and tomorrow, connect our primary commitments to the work that we do.

The remainder of this invitation establishes the framework for our discussion. Each section—Education, Christian Commitment, Community—is drawn directly from the University's mission statement. As you read, you will note repeated references to our mission statement, foundational assumptions, core convictions, and unifying academic themes. Questions are posed to help stimulate your thinking, and, if you are responding to this as part of a group, the questions are also intended to generate dialogue. You should not regard the questions as limiting; please feel free to address any matter you think is appropriate.

This process will also stimulate dialogue that will continue long past this visioning exercise. Nevertheless, we will continue to face the constraints of finances, human capital and infrastructure, which will compel us to seek the very best of the new ideas that emerge from this conversation. Many will no doubt be implemented in lieu of current practices. Others may be so compelling as to inspire prospective donors to join us in making them a reality. Even while recognizing these challenges, though, I urge you to consider freely any possibilities that the following remarks and questions call to mind.

I – Education

Undergraduates

The undergraduate experience has been the heart and soul of Baylor since its founding in 1845. Undergraduates comprise more than 80% of the student body and provide most of the university's funding. Our dedication to the total development of our students—intellectual, spiritual, social, and physical—flows directly from our commitments and is an obligation of the entire Baylor community. Changes in our world—societal, economic, and technological—have implications for the way in which we should go about developing our students while remaining true to our motto *Pro Ecclesia, Pro Texana*. Our position as a national research university should complement the undergraduate experience and broaden student development far beyond what we would otherwise be able to accomplish. And so, to remain true to our traditions and our aspirations, we hire faculty members who share our conviction that excellent undergraduate teaching and excellent research are not mutually exclusive. Likewise, we hire staff and administrators who embrace our mission and are dedicated to the role they serve in student development.

Given our identity as a Christian national research university, what should we prioritize in order to improve the undergraduate experience at Baylor? What partnerships and/or reputation can we leverage to enhance the undergraduate experience? Given the vast array of post-graduation avenues they pursue, how do we prepare our students to lead? How can we nurture in our students the integration of Christian faith and the intellectual life? What types of social, spiritual, and physical programs should complement our academic offerings? How can we equip Baylor undergraduates to understand their life work as a calling? How can we help our students to orient their lives to serve others? How can our efforts to increase scholarly productivity improve the undergraduate experience? What experiences would ensure that our students would be able to bring a global perspective to their own pursuits and that they would understand and be sensitive to the cultures and traditions of others? How do we extend our influence globally through our undergraduates or through our undergraduate programs?

The rising cost of delivering an outstanding educational experience has taken its toll on students and their families across the nation, and it has placed burdens on our university as we make difficult trade-offs. What practices might we change to manage the rising costs of higher education without sacrificing our fundamental core values? How can our admission, retention, residential life, and other student support services help students to make choices that direct them to the right path to graduation, preferably in four years? What should we do to help students as they contemplate life after graduation?

Graduate and Graduate Professional Students

Though graduate and professional students at Baylor constitute a much smaller portion of the student body than do undergraduates, Baylor has been conferring degrees on such students almost as long as the institution has been in existence. Graduate and professional programs have grown in number during the last several decades, advancing more rapidly in the last decade than at any other time in Baylor's history. This growth was motivated by our assertion in Vision 2012: "Baylor will make its influence felt in the academic world and in our larger society as an institution informed and motivated by its Christian identity. Such influence requires a depth of scholarly excellence and volume of scholarly output that is found only in schools with first-rate graduate programs." Certainly, our quest to increase our scholarly productivity is inextricably linked with the increase in the number of graduate students and graduate programs. But beyond that, our mission to educate men and women is not limited to undergraduates. Our distinctive position in higher education calls us to prepare the next generation of lawyers, health-care professionals, businesspeople, and professors, among others.

What expectations should we have for our graduate and professional students in terms of presentations, publications, internships, competitions, and teaching? How can we improve the integration of our graduate students into the life of the university? How can our graduate and professional students serve as role models or mentors for our undergraduates, especially since many of our undergraduates will pursue an advanced degree at some time in their lives? How do we extend our influence globally through our graduate students or through our graduate and professional programs? Given the external criteria that abound, how should we assess the quality of our graduate programs, that is, what does it mean for a program to be "first-rate"?

Though the education of undergraduate and graduate/professional students will undoubtedly differ, some educational goals are shared between the two groups. Given the vast array of post-graduation avenues they pursue, how do we prepare our students to lead? How can we nurture in these students the integration of Christian faith and the intellectual life? How can we equip Baylor graduates to understand their life work as a calling? How we can help our students to orient their lives to serve others? What experiences would ensure that our graduate/professional students are able to bring a global perspective to their own pursuits and that they understand and are sensitive to the cultures and traditions of others?

So, too, has the rising cost of delivering an outstanding educational experience taken its toll on our graduate students and their families. What practices might we change to manage the rising costs of higher education without sacrificing our fundamental core values? What expectations should we have as to the financial contribution or financial cost of various graduate and professional programs? How can we improve our support of graduate/professional students as they contemplate life after graduation?

Scholarly Productivity and Creative Endeavors

As a university, we have long been called to “meet the needs of all ages to come” (university founding documents), to be “in front of the greatest universities on this continent” (Rufus Burleson, 1891), to “advance the frontiers of knowledge” (mission statement, 1994), and to “enter the upper echelons of higher education” (Vision 2012). *How* we respond to these admonitions changes as we anticipate and respond to change in higher education and the world, yet *that* we respond to these admonitions is part and parcel of our mission. *Pro Ecclesia*: As members of a research university, Baylor faculty strive to be researchers and scholars of the highest order, producing innovative research or creative/artistic works at the forefront of their disciplines. But we don’t engage in these activities as ends in themselves. Rather, our commitments guide us to facilitate the discovery of new knowledge to the glory of God and the betterment of humanity. *Pro Texana*: The results of our scholarship and creative/artistic works should make a difference in the world, informing policy and practice at the state, national and international levels.

How do we extend our influence globally through our scholarship and creative/artistic work? In what ways should Baylor provide leadership in national and international conversations regarding advances in science, the economy, public policy and technology? How can Baylor determine in which disciplines it has the best opportunity to make a significant impact on national and international challenges? How can we develop interdisciplinary partnerships to address the complex human and environmental challenges confronting the world?

Baylor’s continually strengthened commitment to society must recognize that this commitment is no longer limited to the state of Texas but now encompasses the world. How can Baylor best pursue international partnerships with universities around the world to enhance its research and scholarship initiatives? What industry and community partnerships would allow us to enrich the human experience both locally and internationally?

II – Christian Commitment

Baylor was founded as a Christian university. The Christian nature of Baylor means that the Gospel of Jesus Christ stands at the very center of the university. Baylor has also historically been Baptist. It was founded by three Baptists, who were commissioned by an association of Baptists to explore the founding of a university in the Republic of Texas. The nineteenth century witnessed an extensive discussion by Baptists in Texas about Baylor, and Baylor has enjoyed a long and fruitful relationship with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

One set of questions addresses ways that our Christian commitment relates to our Baptist heritage. What does it mean to claim that Baylor is a Christian university in the Baptist tradition? How do being Baptist and being Christian relate to each other? As one of its goals, Vision 2012 sought “to make Baylor an excellent university whose foundation rests on our ecumenical Christian mission, energized by our Baptist heritage.” How could or should this mission provide the foundation for what it means to be a university? What are the essential components of the Baptist heritage and how could or should they energize our work environment, our governance, and/or our curriculum? How, for example, could religious liberty contribute to our understanding of university governance issues? Or in what sense does the Baptist heritage of dissent shape the role of free inquiry and governance structures? How might the Baptist traditions of Christian hospitality shape our engagement with and treatment of those in our midst who are from other religious traditions or no tradition at all?

Questions about Baylor’s Christian heritage and Baptist identity also impact the university’s entire mission. Baylor strives to achieve a robust integration of Christian faith and the intellectual life. For us this dialogue between faith and intellect is not abstract or merely theoretical; rather, it reflects an existential commitment to the Lordship of Christ, so that life is understood as a stewardship divinely assigned and is intentionally lived out in service to humanity and the Kingdom of God. And in the case of Baylor, our faith is to be lived out in an academic and professional context.

How are faith and learning to be related? How does the integration of faith and learning play out across the disciplines? How does our Christian commitment influence our agenda of scholarship and creative endeavors? What are the different ways in which faith and learning can be expressed in the classroom, in research and in the life of the institution?

III – Community

Baylor’s storied traditions, its location and facilities, and our foundational assumption “that we find the highest order of personal fulfillment in working constructively for the betterment of others, and that we have an obligation to do so” help to make possible the fulfillment of our mission—to conduct our work within a caring community. Creating and sustaining a caring community is no small task. To build community, we must choose to know and understand each other, to share experiences, and to create an environment in which colleagues respect, love,

forgive and support one another. And, as the nature of these actions suggests, Baylor must forge not simply a community, but a caring community. Baylor must be a hospitable place—for those who belong, for those who visit, for our city. And, of course, our motto *Pro Texana* calls for us to be a caring community at home and abroad.

How might we continue to build the community that is Baylor University? We can build on shared experiences—not only worship fostered by our faith commitments and curricular and extra-curricular intellectual inquiries, but also athletic events, musical performances, and other cultural activities; how should such pursuits be shaped toward this end? We can also draw on our differences—the increasingly diverse backgrounds from which Baylor’s student body, faculty, and staff come—to enrich and strengthen our community; how can we best do this? How might changes in our on-campus activities—academic and otherwise—help all of us understand various cultural viewpoints, belief systems, and aesthetic perspectives that affect the world in which we live?

How should the culture of caring that we nurture at Baylor impact Waco and surrounding communities? What community-service expectations should exist for students? How should we utilize service-learning opportunities so that students understand how to use their intellectual gifts to benefit the community in which they live? What other partnerships between Baylor and institutions in the surrounding region benefit the entire community?

And finally, how should our culture of caring extend nationally and internationally? How can we couple our desire to develop a global perspective in our students with our desire to develop students who want to serve society? We are coming to the conclusion of an exciting and transformational period in the life of Baylor University, and we are embarking upon another. Many options lie ahead of us, but we are not able to take every path. So I ask you to join with the entire Baylor community to provide your best, your most creative, insights to this strategic planning process. Review our [commitments](#) , our [accomplishments](#), and documents about [trends in higher education](#) , and [share your ideas](#).