

An open letter to the Louisiana Baptist Convention, all Louisiana Baptists, Louisiana College alumni, current and former students, faculty, and staff, and friends of Louisiana College.

As Louisiana College alumni, former students, faculty members, and staff from across the decades, we are concerned and deeply disappointed at the condition in which our beloved school now finds itself. Never before has she faced such challenges as these:

- a second year of warning status by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and facing possible probation and loss of accreditation
- a neglected physical plant that requires over \$50 million in repairs and reconstruction
- the failed launch of a law school, medical school, and film school
- the loss of future funding from its largest donor in history
- a growing loss of respect around the state of Louisiana and among Baptists across the country

A recent commentary in The Town Talk would have you believe that all of these and more are signs of a growing and vibrant college with visionary leadership. We believe the facts clearly state otherwise. We encourage you to examine the claims, consider the facts, and decide for yourself.

1. **CLAIM:** LC did not have the financial strains that it has today, because it did not have a nearly doubled student body for which to provide classroom space, parking, faculty and housing.

FACT: The undergraduate student body has not doubled. From the fall of 2005 through the fall of 2011, LC's undergraduate enrollment has increased from 1,005 students to 1,149 – an increase of 144 students or an average of less than 25 students per year. (Source: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter>) Approximately 80% of LC's recent growth in total enrollment has been from graduate students.

FACT: We know that \$2.7 million was spent on building remediation in Shreveport as reported in LC's 990 for 2011-2012. The college has not made public how much money was spent on the law school, medical school, film school, and other projects at the expense of the infrastructure.

2. **CLAIM:** LC did not find it as difficult to keep dormitories in best repair, because it did not have to build another dormitory in addition to one just recently finished to house the great influx of students.

FACT: The campus buildings (not just the dormitories) were in disrepair BEFORE the new dorms were needed. The September 2010 ARAMARK study cited over \$28,000,000 in

repairs that were critically needed over the next three years. Good stewardship would entail being sure your existing house is in order before building an addition.

3. **CLAIM:** LC was not as strained to maintain the highest quality of professors in every discipline, because it did not have to more than double the number of faculty required to accommodate the enlarged student body.

FACT: Enrollment has not doubled. As stated above, undergraduate enrollment increased by 144 students from the fall of 2005 through the fall of 2011.

FACT: Effective planning includes not expanding services beyond the financial capacity of an institution. Asking faculty to receive inadequate incomes and benefits is not fair to the faculty or their families. Is it a wise decision to hire low-quality faculty members? What is the correlation between number of faculty and the quality of that faculty?

4. **CLAIM:** In the past, LC did not fall behind in its schedule to enlarge its educational offerings, such as a medical school, a law school and a film school, because it did not attempt such ambitious projects.

FACT: LC was too ambitious and failed to do due diligence in its planning. Poor stewardship and poor planning (or lack of planning) leads to the situation in which LC now finds itself.

5. **CLAIM:** LC did not previously achieve highly significant new educational programs, such as a divinity school, a master of arts in teaching program, and a collegiate high school, because previous presidents made no attempt to institute such initiatives.

FACT: Previous presidents were more focused on ensuring the school was on a stable footing financially and academically than on growing the school beyond what it can support both physically and fiscally.

FACT: LC received the Divinity School because of the generous donations of the Caskey family and the leadership of Dr. Charles Quarles. It was not something that Dr. Aguiard initiated. Dr. Quarles has now left Louisiana College and the Caskey family funding has been withdrawn.

6. **CLAIM:** Students did not fill the auditorium for chapel and go away highly praising the impressions chapel made on them, because they were so bored with the offerings presented to them.

FACT: Chapel has been a requirement for students for many years. Attendance is not optional.

FACT: Dr. Aguiard's antics in chapel have become a laughing stock – not something worthy of high praise.

7. **CLAIM:** The faculty did not pass resolutions defending the president against his detractors because they were too busy trying to explain away the decline in the student body.

FACT: The faculty gave a “no confidence” vote when Dr. Aguiard was announced as the new president. Many of the best, most-tenured, and most-respected professors chose to leave.

FACT: Overall, the college did not experience a decline in enrollment. From 1985-2005, enrollment was basically flat, averaging 1,033 undergraduate students. From 2005-20011, enrollment averaged 1,026 undergraduate students – less than the average for the prior ten years. (Source: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter>)

8. **CLAIM:** LC did not have to endure the public criticism of a few defecting former students and former faculty members, because it did not demand the high moral and doctrinal standards that it upholds today.

FACT: LC has always demanded high moral and doctrinal standards.

FACT: The criticism is significantly more than “a few defecting former students and former faculty members”. We have yet to meet anyone familiar with the situation (whether intimately familiar or familiar through press coverage, discussion with current/former students, faculty, staff, etc.) who is either excited or encouraged by the situation. To the contrary, alumni are extremely disappointed with what has happened to their beloved LC and are concerned regarding its future.

FACT: If this claim were true, we would expect to see endowment increasing at LC. Unfortunately, just the opposite is true. Of 7 comparable private Baptists colleges in the South, LC is the only one whose endowment has decreased since 2005. (Source: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter>) Bellhaven, Carson-Newman, Gardner-Webb, Mars Hill, Mississippi College, Ouachita Baptist, and Union have all seen gains of 20% or more in that time (their average is 28.3%). LC's endowment has decreased 2.6% in that same period. Since 2002, the average endowment at those schools has increased 70%. LC's has only increased 17%.

FACT: “Defecting students” are not “few.” Only 60% of LC's students return after their first year. (Source: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter>) LC's retention rate is tied for last among the 8 schools listed above at 60%. 40% of the students who enroll in a given year do not return the following year.

9. **CLAIM:** The community should remember that LC is a private Christian college, owned and supported by the Louisiana Baptist Convention and Baptist churches. It is obligated to please Louisiana Baptists, not the general public and a secular newspaper. The LBC contributes \$3.5 million dollars a year to the support of LC out of its \$22 million budget. Observers not privileged to full information need to refrain from trying to decide for Louisiana Baptists what kind of president we want to lead our college.

FACT: The support for Louisiana College by the “man/woman in the pew” is not nearly as strong as some would like the public to believe. As the major funding source for the college, they are entitled to the facts. If the Board of Trustees listens to the Baptists of the state of Louisiana – and truly provides them with “full information” – they will find that many Louisiana Baptists, as well as alumni from both within Louisiana and out of state are appalled and deeply saddened at the current state of Louisiana College. Many alumni are no longer encouraging their students to attend Louisiana College because of the three-ring circus that it has become.

FACT: “Observers not privileged to full information” is a result of the lack of credible information from the college. On the other hand, when observers who love LC as they knew it hear and read numerous reports from students, faculty, and the public media that point toward a dismal situation at LC they cannot in good conscience stand by without comment or protest.

No amount of spin can cover the lack of planning and the fiduciary irresponsibility that led to the current situation at Louisiana College. In Luke 14, Jesus asks those who were following him, "For which of you, desiring to build a tower, does not first sit down and count the cost, whether he has enough to complete it? Otherwise, when he has laid a foundation and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish.'"

Jesus was talking about the cost of following him. To illustrate the care they should take in deciding whether or not to follow him, he invoked a basic principle as true today as it was then - before you act, count the cost.

The facts make it abundantly clear that those charged with the care and keeping of Louisiana College have failed to do the appropriate due diligence and planning before embarking on projects such as the law school, film school, and medical school that, while worthy goals for any institution of higher learning, were ill-advised without the appropriate planning and finances in

place. To embark on such initiatives while simultaneously ignoring millions of dollars in repairs that were critically needed to the physical plant is unconscionable.

It would be easy to point the finger at the Board of Trustees for the current situation, but blame is not our priority. Prayerful consideration reveals two undeniable facts:

1. Those of us who have an interest in the long term success of Louisiana College have been silent for too long. We have heard the rumblings of problems but have ignored it as the complaining of a few disgruntled souls. It is now apparent that is not the case.
2. The Board of Trustees is composed of honorable men and women. They are a mixture of pastors and business people entrusted by Louisiana Baptists with the care and safekeeping of LC. We are convinced that, when provided with all of the information necessary, they will make the right decisions.

This leads to two conclusions. First, as alumni, former students, faculty, and staff, and friends of Louisiana College, we call upon our fellow stakeholders to be more involved in the affairs of our school. We commit ourselves to this as well. Second, we urge the Board of Trustees to commit themselves to requiring full disclosure from the Administration and those who influence the Board regarding both the current and future direction of LC. Louisiana College has been a great institution in the past. She can and should be even greater in the future.

We call upon all Louisiana Baptists, Louisiana College alumni, current and former students, faculty, staff, and friends to join us in encouraging the Louisiana Baptist Convention and the Board of Trustees to restore not only solid academic standing and fiduciary responsibility but also integrity, dignity, and honor to Louisiana College.

Respectfully,

Friends of the College