

THE FUTURE OF STUDENT WORK IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

by

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This past year I have had the opportunity to lead a study of the future of student work in Texas. I traveled the state listening to pastors, directors of missions, college minister, B.S.U. directors, laymen and laywomen, and college students as we talked about the future of student work. The following article is a synopsis of what I learned as I listened to Texas Baptist talk about a ministry they love very much.

As I listened to what Texas Baptist were saying when asked about student work, four areas of concern kept recurring. One area was communication. This area of concern manifested itself throughout the entire study. Another area was cooperation. People wanted to be a part of the team. A third area was money. This included everything from salaries and benefits to building maintenance. A fourth area was personnel. This included everything from supervision to hiring and firing. I will attempt to take each area of concern and expand on what I heard and what can be done to implement changes to meet the expectations of Texas Baptists.

The need for better communication surfaced throughout the study. The B.S.U. story needs to be told. Time and time again I heard people say that they were supportive of B.S.U. but they did not have a clue what was happening on the campus. The responsibility of communicating the story must be shared by both local and state personnel. Creative ideas using videos, state papers, special mailings, and state meetings need to be examined in order to communicate the B.S. U. story to as broad an audience as possible. Students who are active in B.S.U. need to be active members of local Baptist churches. Every opportunity for them to be visible and vocal in their church must be utilized. If student work is to become a high priority for Baptists, they must know what is going on and be willing to support the programs. Better communication can become an effective tool to

elevate student work to a top priority rather than just another Baptist program.

The need for more cooperation was expressed many times during the course of the study. The idea of being part of the team and working together with churches, associations, and the state convention to reach the campus for Christ was very appealing to Texas Baptists. IF student work is going to continue to develop and nature in the minds of Baptist leadership, territorialism and turfism must diminish. Traditionally Baptists will support programs when they have ownership. The key to ownership is cooperation.

There were several suggestions made to improve and develop cooperative relationships. Local B.S.U. directors could include pastors, college ministers, and the student work committee in calendar planning. State student work staff members could develop cooperative agreements with Directors of Missions and the student work committee. Listening sessions could be initiated by the state student work staff. These sessions could be held on a regional basis and all interested parties would be welcome to attend. The agenda would be open to any subject related to student work. With a little creative thinking and planning, the spirit of cooperation could become a vital part of the fabric of student work.

The subject of money always brought some interesting discussion. The financial reality of the 90's is not always a pleasant subject. The reality is that cooperative funds are not increasing and they are not expected to increase for the next several years. Health care costs for employees continues to increase along with cost of living expenses. The cost of providing and maintaining B.S.U. centers increases every year. As building age, more air conditioners, heating systems, and roof must be replaced. With the same amount of money or perhaps even less money available, some hard decisions are going to have to be made if student work is going to survive financial crisis.

In the future, personnel decisions will have to include more people. It will no longer be acceptable for these decisions to be made in a centralized office and passed on the local student work committees. Directors of missions, local committees, and state student work personnel will need to work together in the hiring or firing process of BSU directors. As long as the local budget is coming from the

association, they must be a vital part of the process which determines who the BSU director will be. Supervision and accountability are areas of great concern and should be negotiated between the local committee and the state personnel. An agreement should be reached that is acceptable to all parties. It will take work and lots of give and take to learn to work together. The future of Student Work depends on Baptists learning to work together.

Student Work will survive into the next century. It will have a different look than it has today. Financial resources will be more limited and there will be less full time BSU directors and more Part-time and intern directors doing the work. More churches will be involved in campus ministry. BSU centers may become expendable as budgets become smaller. Change will be the name of the game in the future. As long as God remains in charge and college students remain as the primary focus of the ministry, student work will be successful and effective.