

SBU PRESIDENT TO TRUSTEES: 'I BELIEVE OUR GREATEST DAYS ARE AHEAD'

BOLIVAR, Mo. — SBU President Dr. Rick Melson presented a “State of the University” address during the fall SBU Board of Trustees meeting Tuesday, Oct. 19, providing a current picture of enrollment trends at the university as well as optimism for the future and exciting highlights at SBU.

One of the highlights is growth of the University’s endowment to \$45 million, up from \$34 million a year ago. With financial gifts of more than \$5.7 million, Fiscal Year 2021 is the third-largest fundraising year since 2010. In addition to endowment growth and strong giving, the University’s external debt continues to be reduced.

Dr. Melson shared enrollment and retention trends for the University, including headwinds for colleges and universities in the Midwest, noting a drop in total student enrollment from 3,039 in Fall 2020 to 2,709 in Fall 2021 and a decline of traditional-age college students in the region. Freshman to sophomore retention increased to 67.62 percent for students entering in Fall 2020, up from 64.53 percent for Fall 2019.

“Like other institutions in the Midwest and across the nation, we experienced the effects of the global pandemic, demographic shifts and other factors in our overall enrollment,” Dr. Melson said. “We are optimistic about the future and excited about the new programs and opportunities at SBU as we stand unapologetically for the Word of God as a Christ-Centered, caring academic community preparing and equipping servant leaders to impact the world for Christ.”

- Dr. Melson also outlined these highlights of what is happening at SBU:
SBU has been named one of the nation’s Colleges of Distinction, a Christian College of Distinction and one of 11 Missouri Colleges of Distinction. The University’s business, education and nursing programs also are recognized by Colleges of Distinction.
- New majors include Global Education and Cybersecurity Management, with a new minor in Agriculture. The Master of Business Administration now has a Christian Ministry concentration available, and the Master of Arts in Christian Ministry now has six concentrations, one of them being in Business Administration. “Collaboration is taking place and synergies are happening across campus as academic departments are working collaboratively to create new programs and vocational opportunities for students,” Dr. Melson said.
- The Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) granted accreditation to SBU’s Cybersecurity degree program. Eight institutions in the country received this accreditation for a bachelor’s-level cybersecurity degree. Only one other evangelical Christian university in the country has the accreditation.
- The University is planning to send students throughout the United States on mission trips during the WinterFest term in January and Spring Break in March and several international mission trips are planned for summer of 2022.
- SBU Athletics received the James R. Spalding Overall Sportsmanship Award from the Great Lakes Valley Conference. “Our student-athletes are demonstrating Christ-like character and servant leadership on and off the court, on and off the pitch, and on and off the field,” Dr. Melson said. “I am proud of our student-athletes and grateful for the recognition of their Christ-like sportsmanship by the GLVC.”
- A renewed emphasis on spiritual life and discipleship is taking place on the SBU campus, chapels are being revitalized, and a student-led revival, The Awakening, is taking place Nov. 5-7 in Pike Auditorium in the Mabee Chapel.

"I'm thrilled to be here," Dr. Melson said. "God has been so kind to call us to SBU, and we are so honored to be here to lead SBU for such a time as this. As I said on my very first day, let us rise to the challenges before us, take hold of the opportunities that await us, and partner together to lead SBU to its greatest days ahead — for God's glory and our greatest joy."

Board business

Board chair Dr. Eddie Bumpers recognized five trustees whose terms are ending: Todd Decker, Mark Berry, Kevin Farr, Rebecca Randles and Wayne Hutchins. Dr. Bumpers also informed the board of Danny Decker's resignation as a trustee.

The board adopted the revised Fiscal Year 2022 budget, accepted the Fiscal Year 2021 audit from the external auditing company BKD and approved 2022-23 tuition, room and board, and fees.

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