

## **Baylor University's Christian Mission & Identity** **Frequently Asked Questions**

Developed for Office Coordinators, Undergraduate Program Directors,  
Associate Deans, Directors, Academic Advisors, Admissions Counselors,  
and  
Prospective and Incoming Freshmen and Transfers  
in the College of Arts & Sciences

### **Classroom**

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**1. Is a Christian perspective taught in all classes?**

There are two ways to answer this. On the one hand, since all Baylor faculty members are Christian (or Jewish) it is natural that their lived spiritual experience and religious identity informs their teaching. On the other hand, there is no such thing as “Christian mathematics” or “Christian biology.” At a major research university like Baylor, faculty employ methodologies (i.e., scientific, logical, historical, literary, artistic) that are common to major research universities worldwide irrespective of any religious identities.

**2. Do faculty and students pray in the classroom?**

Yes, sometimes. Prayerful expressions and acts of reverence are common in offices, classrooms, committee meetings, lectures, and departmental or college-wide occasions each semester.

**3. I'm not a Christian. Would my presence and opinion be as valued as Christians in a classroom?**

Absolutely! Baylor affirms religious liberty for everyone and that means all members of the Baylor family are valued and heard. Your presence and perspective are important in the education process since diversity in the classroom makes it more interesting, dynamic, and ultimately, more informative. Many, if not most, classrooms at Baylor will have students enrolled who do not identify with Christianity.

**4. Besides taking the two required courses in Religion, how can I pursue academic studies of Christianity as an undergraduate?**

The obvious answer is that you can major or minor in Religion. But, regardless of your major, you can still take elective courses from departments of art, English, classics, history, sociology, modern languages and cultures, philosophy, religion, theatre, and others that explore Christianity and its ethos from multiple disciplinary perspectives. Consider courses such as: *ART 4365: Italian Renaissance Art History*, *ENG 3372: The Oxford Christians*, *HIS 3362: History of Religion in America*, *LAT 3397: Medieval Latin Religious Drama*, *SOC 3309: Religion and Society*, or *SPA 2322: Spanish for Christian Ministry*. In addition, Baylor provides many public lectures and conferences on Christian topics each semester that students are welcome to attend.

**5. How can I do research on topics in Christianity?**

Most upper-level courses in the humanities and social sciences require research or writing on topics often selected by the student. For example, a student taking a history course of the *History of Texas* might choose to do a research paper on the Spanish Missions of San Antonio. A student in *The Sociology of Race* might write about a Catholic approach to racial justice.

**6. Why is the theory of evolution taught at Baylor University?**

The science we teach and the science we research are all about understanding our world. As Christians, we believe that we have a biblical mandate to understand God's world. We are supposed to be stewards and caretakers of the world that we inherited. Evolution, a foundational principle of modern biology, is supported by overwhelming scientific evidence and is accepted by the vast majority of scientists. In the College of Arts and Sciences, we do not teach alternative hypotheses or philosophically deduced theories that cannot be tested rigorously. Furthermore, in our Scripture classes in the Department of Religion we explore many ways to interpret and understand the creation accounts in Genesis other than a literal approach. Knowing how our world has changed (evolved) can inspire us to marvel how the Creator may have shaped our universe, our planet, and our bodies over time.

**7. Do faculty teach Christian virtues in the classroom?**

Yes. All students at Baylor are required to take a core curriculum taught within a community of Christian scholars that enables them to acquire the knowledge, skills, and virtues needed to uncover and recognize truth, to deepen their faith, to live virtuously, to strengthen their communities, and to affect the world in transformative ways. The virtues we teach are moral (e.g., justice), intellectual (e.g., rigor, integrity), and spiritual (e.g., hope, love).

**8. Will my faith be challenged in the classroom?**

Socrates said that “the unexamined life is not worth living” since intellectual, moral, and spiritual transformation does not come without challenge and testing. Your faculty have walked the road of intellectual inquiry and exploration before you as Christian scholars committed to the discovery of truth. They are there to both challenge and support you in this exciting academic journey. Jesus said, “You will know the truth and the truth will set you free.”

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**Curriculum**

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**1. Why are non-Christians required to take REL 1310: Christian Scriptures and REL 1350: Christian Heritage?**

Many foundational texts of the Western intellectual tradition are found in the classics of Christianity. In a period when the curriculums of many universities have become highly specialized and narrow, the principal undergraduate educational focus at Baylor remains liberal education. Traditionally, liberal education has been understood to fill an important gap between high school and professional training. Such an education exposes the student to “the best that has been thought and said” in their own culture and in world cultures. Familiarity with the Psalms, Job, the Sermon on the Mount, the “Confessions” of Augustine, the “Institutes” of Calvin, and King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” is an essential component of the education required to equip America’s civic, political, business, and ecclesial leaders of the twenty-first century. A broad curriculum which transmits and analyzes the best of human achievements in the humanities, the sciences, and the arts remains a cornerstone of the Baylor curriculum.

**2. Are the required common core courses REL 1310: Christian Scriptures and REL 1350: Christian Heritage taught from a Baptist perspective?**

No. While most of the faculty members in the Department of Religion are Baptists, students in these freshman-level courses learn to appropriate critically informed strategies for the interpretation of the Bible that are not dependent upon denominational faith commitments.

**3. I hear that Christian Scriptures and Christian Heritage are not easy courses. Why is that?**

Liberal education skills such as critical thinking and moral reasoning required in these courses are taught by scholars respected in their academic disciplines. Biblical scholars, theologians, ethicists, and church historians who teach Scriptures and Heritage employ time-worn and cutting-edge methodologies germane to the academy. You would expect a thorough intellectual engagement in other courses in the humanities such as history, literature, or philosophy, why would you expect anything different from religious studies? The rigorous academic study of religion is vital to understanding the human condition both ancient and modern. Scriptures and Heritage are not devotional classes though they can be and often are transformative for students.

**4. Is Chapel a graduation requirement?**

Yes. This co-curricular experience is the oldest tradition at Baylor and two semesters are a requirement for all students. Baylor offers a variety of experiences designed to connect with student interests, vocations, needs, communities, and passions. For instance, some chapels are large and all-inclusive, while others may focus on a particular major in ways in which faith intersects with that vocation. Christian teaching and practices are central to every chapel section.

**5. As a non-Christian, may I be exempt from the Chapel requirement?**

No, but there are a variety of chapel options. Staff in the Office of Spiritual Life, as well as academic advisors, are available to help students from other religious traditions or students with no religious identities discern which chapel section will be most helpful for them.

**6. Besides Chapel are their other requirements in which faith formation is an objective?**

All new students take a one-hour course called New Student Experience in which they explore how faith informs the academic life.

**7. Are courses on non-Christian religions taught at Baylor?**

Yes. The Department of Religion offers courses on Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other religions. The Christian faculty who teach these courses often invite guest speakers who have a spiritual home in these great traditions.

### **Faculty-Staff**

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**1. If I want to learn more about Christianity or church life in Waco, may I talk to a faculty or staff member?**

Absolutely. The Christian hospitality of our faculty and staff shines through our classrooms, halls, and offices to our diverse student body.

**2. Would a faculty or staff member be willing to guide me to life as a Christian?**

Yes. Many faculty are available and willing to meet with students outside of class not only to discuss academic issues but to explore life callings and existential challenges, matters of life and death, religion and morality. Students, faculty, and staff, whether they meet in offices, dining halls, or on benches across the campus, participate in conversations that engage the mind and spirit. Keep in mind that faculty and staff come from many different Christian and Jewish backgrounds.

**3. Can I be a part of a faculty-led or staff-led Baylor mission trip or Bible study?**

Yes. Some faculty and staff live on campus in residential halls where they interact with students throughout the day in many ways, including through Bible studies, prayer, fellowship meals, and spiritual direction. Faculty and staff also lead students on mission trips each year throughout the world.

**4. Are all faculty and staff at Baylor Christians?**

All full-time faculty are either Christian or Jewish.

**5. Are all Christian denominations represented at Baylor among the faculty or does the University seek to hire only certain types of Christians?**

While Baylor is the world's largest Baptist university and while many students, faculty, and staff are Baptists, and another significant number of the Baylor family have roots in the free-church traditions of the Christian faith, the University does not seek to hire Christians from any particular denomination. The lone exception is in the Department of Religion and Truett Seminary where a significant majority are Baptist. It should also be noted that the Baptist General Convention of Texas appoints one-fourth of the members of Baylor's Board of Regents. And all the presidents of Baylor University have been members of Waco Baptist churches.

**6. Are faculty required to sign a statement of faith?**

No, since Baptists are non-creedal, an assent to doctrine has never played a role in hiring practices during Baylor's 150-plus-year history. During the interview process, faculty are asked about their spiritual journey and how their faith informs their service, teaching, and research. Baylor attracts outstanding Christian and Jewish scholars from all over the nation, indeed the world, who wish to teach at a university where their entire selves—including their religious commitments—are deeply valued.

## Students

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### 1. What kind of Christians attend Baylor?

All kinds. While approximately 20% of students are Baptist, approximately 15% non-denominational Christian, and approximately 15% Catholic, dozens of Christian denominations are represented. Furthermore, our international students who are Christian come from all corners of the globe and represent their churches in the Caribbean, South America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia.

### 2. Do you have to be a Christian to attend Baylor?

No. Students from almost all the world's religious traditions are represented at Baylor. Historically, the two largest non-Christian groups of students are Hindus and Muslims. Some Baylor students have no religious affiliation.

### 3. Why doesn't Baylor have a worship service on Sundays?

The University encourages students to become involved in local churches in Central Texas. Some students serve in ministerial roles as pastors, youth ministers, song leaders, or ministry interns. Some volunteer as Sunday School teachers or as members of the choir or worship team.

### 4. Are people of all faiths welcome at Baylor?

Yes. While a very large percentage of students (and all faculty and staff are Christian or Jewish), Baylor is made a better place to learn and study due to the diversity of its student body, including its religious diversity.

### 5. May Muslims meet to pray on campus?

Yes. The University makes spaces for prayer, reflection, and solitude available across the campus for students of any faith or no faith at all.

### 6. Will someone try to convert me to their faith if I come to Baylor?

Perhaps. In America, freedom of religious expression is a right and for many Christians "witnessing" or proselytizing is a religious duty. This is true for some of the other religions on campus also. But you should not expect to be hassled or condemned by students, faculty, or staff because of your religious identity or non-identity. You should expect that your affiliations and beliefs will be respected in the classroom, the residence halls, and student life activities. Neither the classroom nor course objectives are typical venues for proselytizing to the Christian faith. Still, faculty are willing to listen and guide students who express interest in Christian discipleship.

### 7. Does Baylor have a statement on Christian morality? What about sexuality?

Baylor has an Honor Code, a Student Conduct Code, and a Sexual Conduct Code, all informed by the Baptist Faith and Message Statement (1963), and which are expected to be followed by all students, faculty, and staff no matter their religious affiliation or lack thereof.

### For Further Questions, Clarifications, or Guidance:

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