

OKLAHOMA BAPTIST UNIVERSITY

Inaugural Address
David Wesley Whitlock
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This inaugural address is a conflation of influences from a variety of scholars and authors whose writings and conversations have significantly influenced my philosophy and perspectives of Christian higher education. The language used in this address is reflective of these influences. Among the influences that are apparent in this address include Arthur Holmes, David Dockery, Bob R. Agee, James Burtchaell, George Marsden, and Michael Beatty. I am also indebted to the writings of J. M. Gaskin relative to the history of OBU and Oklahoma Baptists.

THE OBU STORY

Thank you Oklahoma Baptist University for welcoming me into the OBU Family. Aside from Jesus redeeming me, and from the love of my wife and sons and family, serving at OBU is one of the greatest honors I have been given, and one for which I will always be grateful and humbled.

To my family, and especially Dana, OBU's Campus Mom, thank you for your support. When Dana married me, she certainly never expected to serve as a university First Lady, but she has risen to the occasion. And her mother is a prime example of the old adage that behind every successful man is a surprised mother-in-law.

You have heard me say several times since my arrival that I knew after visiting the campus for the first time fifteen years ago that I wanted to serve at OBU. Although I assumed I would serve here in a capacity different than my current role, I knew then that I wanted to be a part of the OBU Story. And what a story it is.

In 1906, Baptists from two conventions, Oklahoma Territory Baptist Convention, and the Baptist General Convention of Indian Territory met in Shawnee at First Baptist Church to become one convention—the Baptist General Convention of Oklahoma. At the very first meeting of this new Convention, those Baptist pioneers, anticipating statehood for Oklahoma in 1907, appointed an educational commission to establish a Baptist university in the new state. They had a vision for a university that would inspire and equip generations of leaders to serve the state, the nation, and the world.

Those Baptist pioneers saw beyond the need for training only pastors and missionaries, thus they did not establish a seminary or Bible school, as noble an enterprise as that may have been. Instead they envisioned a co-educational

university that would be grounded in the liberal arts, which would prepare students to integrate their Christian faith and disciplines as educators, doctors, lawyers, artists, musicians, missionaries, pastors, entrepreneurs, writers, poets, actors, and economists. Their lofty vision was realized as Oklahoma Baptist University was founded in 1910 on Bison Hill.

The OBU Story is the story of men like W. P. Blake and G. Lee Phelps who knelt in prayer on the very wind-swept hill on which we stand today. Those men like countless other men and women, bathed and birthed this university with prayer.

The OBU Story is the story of administrators like our first president, James Milton Carroll, who had accumulated a large natural history collection, primarily of bird specimens. That collection is part of the University of Oklahoma's natural history holdings. President Carroll sold his prized collection, the last worldly assets he owned, to OU in order to pay off the debts of OBU.

The OBU Story is the story of faculty like Rhetta May Dorland, elected chairman of the department of public speaking and dramatic arts in the College of Fine Arts in 1919. Dorland built the communication and drama department at OBU and used her talents to benefit the church. She once made national news in the *New York City Sun*, which reported that Mrs. Dorland required student preachers to record their sermons so they "could catch the faults in their style." For 37 years, this remarkable woman invested her life in the students of OBU.

The OBU Story is the story of Berta Spooner, executive secretary of the Oklahoma Woman's Missionary Union. Spooner encouraged WMU members to join together to build a beautiful home for OBU female students. In 1928, after the Baptist women sold countless eggs in fundraisers across the state, WMU Dormitory was dedicated.

The OBU Story is the story of Dr. John Wesley Raley, who tirelessly served OBU, transforming the campus and leading with vision, clarity, and dignity. OBU bears the handprints of this remarkable man who served as president for 28 years.

The OBU Story is the story of a young African boy who watched his two brothers die of sickle cell anemia in Nigeria, and vowed to find a treatment for the deadly disease. Enrolling in 1961, Sunday O. Fadulu graduated from OBU in 1964. He finished his doctorate at OU, and is now a noted microbiologist and medical researcher. Dr. Fadulu also holds a patent for the treatment of sickle cell anemia.

The OBU Story is the story of Dr. Mike Hunkapiller, a 1970 OBU graduate whose company developed the gene mapping equipment that has enabled completion of the revolutionary Human Genome Project.

The OBU Story is the story of a young boy who enrolled here at the age of 14 and finished his B.S. degree after being mentored by OBU's Dr. Albert Chen. Dr. Branson Stephens completed his Ph.D. a few years later and now works at Princeton in the lab once occupied by Einstein.

The OBU Story is the story of hundreds of missionaries serving all over the world. The world's largest mission sending agency in the world is the Southern Baptist International Mission Board, and the IMB reports that OBU is the number one sending institution in the world for missionaries.

The OBU Story is a story of each student, employee, and faculty member who has selflessly sacrificed to see the vision of those early Oklahoma pioneers realized—the story of Dr. Bob Agee, Dr. Rowena Strickland, and Uncle Jimmy Owens, among so many others.

The OBU Story is a story that attests to the truth that a love of God and a love of learning are complimentary, that all truth is God's truth, and that a biblical worldview provides the unifying factor in a distinctively Christian university.

MISSION AND COMMITMENTS

As we reflect upon our shared mission and the stories of OBU, it is with a profound appreciation of our history that I accept these symbols of leadership.

I am deeply humbled by the privilege to serve here with dedicated employees, a world-class faculty, and on a campus that rivals the most beautiful of universities. What a privilege to work in such a Kingdom enterprise. How blessed to work at an institution that views higher education as an expression of our commitment to the Great Commission and the Great Commandment.

As a Great Commission university, we are about sending out disciples of Christ ready to engage the world and share the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their respective disciplines and areas of expertise. Although a distinctively Christian university is not a church, a Christian university *is* the intellectual arm of the Church's ministry. As such, OBU views as part of its mission the preparation of disciples for successful leadership and service for the Kingdom. We therefore attend to the spiritual, physical, and social development of our students.

As a Great Commandment University, we are reminded of Jesus' response in **Matthew 22:37**, to the Pharisees who asked what commandment was the greatest. Jesus answered, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind."

As a Christian university, we address the heart and soul, while rigorously embracing intellectual pursuits. Dr. Agee has often called us to the stewardship of experience, to use our minds and education in our service. At OBU, we take seriously our Lord's commandment to love Him with heart and soul, and we strive for the improvement of the mind in pursuit of truth. What we do at OBU

matters. A life devoted to Christ and committed to the OBU mission, vision, and values is a life that matters.

Our mission, vision, values, and our constituency determine our identity as an institution. Crucial components for shaping the identity of OBU as a distinctively Christian and confessionally Baptist liberal arts university include:

- *Christ-Centeredness*: We will continue in our faithfulness to the person and work of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible and as historically understood and believed by the Church.
- *Biblical Fidelity*: We are committed to our belief in the Bible as the inspired Word of God, authoritative, trustworthy, and without error.
- *Shared Mission*: We share our mission with and are accountable to Oklahoma Baptists.
- *Academic Excellence and Faith Integration*: Academic excellence is expressed within a liberal arts curriculum that teaches and equips students to think Christianly and serve faithfully.

An OBU education is a distinctively Christian education and as such is a rigorous academic experience taught from a Christian worldview. A biblical Christian worldview addresses the major questions of life including where we came from, why we are here, why the world is the way it is, and what happens after death. Such a worldview holds that God was “in the beginning,” that all things were created by Him. A biblical worldview holds that humanity, made in the image of God, rebelled and sinned resulting in the Fall of creation. Yet, God so loved the world He sent His Son to redeem us that we might be in relationship with Him and find our purpose in glorifying Him. And finally, a biblical worldview holds that after physical death, there is judgment for those who reject Him but life eternal for those who trust Him.

I am convinced that Christian higher education taught from a biblical worldview is best expressed within a liberal arts context in which we transform students’ lives spiritually, intellectually, and physically. A liberal arts curriculum recognizes that education must be more than simply moving through a set of courses that prepares one for a vocation. The liberal arts are essential because they are foundational to true learning, quality living, and service to Christ. The liberal arts celebrate who we are as humanity made in the image of God.

Although liberal arts are foundational to an OBU education, as agents of transformation for Christ, we recognize that many employment opportunities and service areas are increasingly found in professional arenas, including preparation for study in ministry, law, science, medicine and nursing, education, business, technology, and public service. These are important areas, but they too are best taught on the foundation of the liberal arts.

OBU's model of liberal arts education is most differentiated from secular models in the area of faith integration. We follow Augustine's approach, *credo ut intelligam*, meaning that faith is a precondition of genuine knowledge rather than a mere capstone to a body of knowledge. Genuine Christian faith is the basis of genuine knowledge, and faith and learning must be integrated rather than seen or taught as if they were two separate spheres of reality.

With this understanding of Christian higher education, my vision is to lead OBU to be a distinctively Christian university that prepares students, through the integration of faith and discipline, to be transformative servant leaders and agents of change in their families, churches, workplaces, and ultimately to influence the world.

With the outstanding faculty, curriculum, students and employees we have, OBU is positioned to be the premier Baptist university and nationally recognized as among the top tier of distinctively Christian universities.

My goal is for OBU to be known for its vibrant spiritual life, for its commitment to academic scholarship and Christian worldview, and for its nationally recognized faculty scholars and successful alumni.

As a community of scholars, OBU will demonstrate how the highest academic standards are consistent with the high and noble calling God places on His own, and how faith not only informs but also redeems and transforms culture, economics, sciences, arts, and professions.

Our guiding vision for OBU will emphasize the love of God and the love of learning, faith and inquiry, service, teaching and scholarship. These marks must be simultaneously affirmed as we build a university where students are introduced to an understanding and appreciation of God, His creation, His grace, and to humanity's place of privilege and responsibility in God's world.

I pray that the hallmarks of my presidency will be a continuance of OBU's rich tradition of academic excellence, a dedication to faith integration, a passion for reaching and making OBU accessible to our constituents, and a commitment to strengthening the ties between Oklahoma Baptists and their university.

VISION

I pray that I will be a faithful steward during my tenure on Bison Hill and am convinced that God has great things in store for OBU. One of my favorite verses is **Jeremiah 29:11**: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

The future of OBU is bright. God has great and wonderful plans for us—plans to give us hope and a future. He has entrusted each of us—charged each of us—with a sacred responsibility. Ours is a noble calling and this our time to exercise our stewardship and our role in the story that is the OBU Story.

Dream with me of a beautiful campus that incorporates the most advanced technologies and instructional tools available. Imagine a renovated library and learning center with an expanded student success center, study areas, and learning resources.

Envision with me a campus master plan. This master plan incorporates new avenues of apartment style student housing, a campus that incorporates environmental stewardship and sustainability with new facilities for housing our nursing program, our theology and ministry programs, and expanded venues for our music and performance programs.

Imagine with me a robust program for achieving our mission of engaging a diverse world. In an increasingly global society, students need to understand intercultural and geopolitical issues. Our students must be educated in a way that broadens their horizons. In all disciplines, a sound grasp and appreciation for international issues and cultural sensitivity is obligatory.

Students who travel internationally are forever changed and regardless of where they eventually serve and labor, the world will be forever on their minds. Incorporating international engagement, missional focus, and service-oriented perspectives are appropriate expressions of our liberal arts academic mission.

I challenge every college and academic program to be proactive in ensuring that students are prepared to serve and lead in an ever-increasing global environment. I challenge every academic college to work with our Avery T. Willis Center for Global Outreach to implement at least one international, cross-cultural experience for their students that integrates missional or service-oriented projects.

Imagine with me the establishment of OBU Centers for Excellence. These centers will capitalize on deep wells in which the university has garnered national, regional and statewide reputations. Among other activities, the centers would provide online resources and offer conferences and institutes featuring nationally and internationally renowned experts. Some of the potential centers envisioned include:

- **Center for Faith Integration:** This center would be at the heart of the OBU mission, providing faculty, staff, and student development activities that promote and lead the effort of integrating faith and discipline; the center would sponsor workshops and summer institutes featuring speakers of national prominence.
- **Center for Excellence in Teacher Education:** With a focus on teachers and students preparing for careers as teachers, this center would host an online journal featuring research that benefits teacher education programs and home school educators nationwide. It would also host yearly seminars and other outreach activities that bring Oklahoma teachers to the OBU campus.

- **Center for Sports and Recreation Leadership:** This center, with initial funding from the BGCO already secured, will become the premier resource for sports and recreation leaders and will work closely with Lifeway Christian Resources.
- **Baptist Center:** This center would incorporate a “Pastors School” each summer for OBU students, Oklahoma Baptist pastors and families, as well as OBU alumni, featuring workshops, and activities on the OBU campus specifically designed to minister to ministers. Working with the BGCO and other entities, a speakers series featuring outstanding Christian leaders would be offered for ministers and current students.

Imagine with me the establishment of a University Press. This self-supporting enterprise would establish a mission statement focused on publishing works that advance scholarship and bring recognition to authors and to OBU. A particular publishing focus will be for texts and other works that promote faith integration, as well as books of general interest to Christian audiences.

Dream with me of a student research and creative arts program. First-hand experience in mentored research significantly enhances the undergraduate experience. Students benefit greatly from the opportunities to engage one-on-one with a faculty member toward a common scholastic or artistic goal. Such a program would give students opportunities to share their research and creative works at annual conferences and arts festivals.

Dream with me of a capital campaign that increases OBU’s endowment to four times its annual budget over the next 15-20 years, and establishes:

- Endowments for student scholarships including instituting a scholarship program specifically designed for students who are members of Oklahoma Baptist churches;
- An endowed faculty development program for continued education, and professional and scholarly activities;
- At least one endowed professorship or chair in every academic department;
- An endowed missions program, with the goal of assisting students and faculty financially with international travel;
- Endowment of the first-year experience program for entering freshmen with funds for student enrichment activities;

Dream with me of national championship sports teams with 100% graduation rates. A competitive athletics program, in addition to its educational and character-building goals, plays a crucial role in promoting school spirit, tradition, campus unity and excitement. These qualities attract new students and help current students feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the university.

Imagine with me a strategic planning process that drives the budget, with our priorities being employee compensation and student learning. Our employees are our most valuable asset and critical to student learning. We must reward our employees' excellent work and commitment to the OBU mission.

Imagine with me advancing the salary and compensation packages of our faculty to the top quartile of our CCCU and IABCU sister institutions. While students are often called the lifeblood of a university, faculty are most certainly the heart of our mission. Everything we do in fulfilling our mission revolves around student learning and the interaction between our faculty and students.

We are committed to a faculty absolutely devoted to our mission and to the integration of faith and discipline, and who are among the best compensated among distinctively Christian universities.

CONCLUSION

One hundred years ago, our founders may only have imagined the OBU campus of today. Could they have imagined the beautiful campus that is OBU? Could they have imagined a faculty of over 100? Could they have imagined our programs in telecommunications and media, our programs in computer information sciences? Could they have imagined then that more Southern Baptist missionaries would have been produced by OBU than any other university in the world?

What will our next 100 years look like? Can you imagine checking into your dorms with fingerprint or voice recognition? Can you imagine our best and brightest faculty teaching students around the world as their lectures and their holographic images are broadcast live and life-sized in classrooms from Europe to Africa, from the Middle East to South America?

Imagine Dr. Brad Jett's holographic image being sent from the Wood Science Building in three dimensions to a classroom in Latvia as he teaches and interacts live with students.

Imagine Dr. Bobby Kelly's holographic image being sent from Montgomery to a village in West Africa as he teaches students and young pastors preparing for ministry to their home countries.

Imagine Dr. Pam Robinson preparing education majors in classrooms in South America, Dr. Kristin Todd teaching Music History and Dr. Carol Humphrey teaching Western Civ to students in Athens, Dr. Bill Hagen teaching literature and Dr. Kaylene Barbe teaching communications to students on four continents simultaneously.

We cannot dream of the programs and disciplines that may exist in the next hundred years. We cannot imagine the technologies that do not yet exist but that will be commonplace in the next century of higher education.

But this we know. OBU will be there, leading the way with the best faculty, the greatest students, and with a commitment to continue its rich traditions of academic excellence and faith integration. OBU will be there, educating students and continuing the OBU Story.

OBU will be there, faithful to its founders' vision of a great university preparing students to change the world, to serve Christ and His church, and to serve with distinction in their fields of expertise.

OBU will be there, still committed to the Great Commission and to the Great Commandment.

OBU will be there, transforming lives and preparing students to pursue academic excellence, integrate faith with all areas of knowledge, engage a diverse world, and live lives worthy of the high calling of God in Jesus Christ.

The OBU Story continues, and I pray that history records our time on Bison Hill as a time of faithfulness to OBU's mission, vision, and values.

Please pray with me.

Father, what a grand and blessed place this is and I am eternally grateful to You for allowing me to be a part of the OBU Story. Bless this, Your University, and keep us focused on our mission. Grant me wisdom and discernment, patience, and lovingkindness. In the name of Jesus, and for His sake, amen.

Thank you and may God bless OBU.