

# Seminaries act in face of financial woes

BR staff and agency writers

**S**outhern Baptist seminaries are making steep cuts to deal with economic troubles.

The head of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Ky., is predicting layoffs and tuition increases to manage a \$3 million budget shortfall. Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, is working to cut its budget by approximately 10 percent, or \$3.5 million to \$4 million.

Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary in Wake Forest implemented a hiring freeze and cut back on all unnecessary capital projects in October.

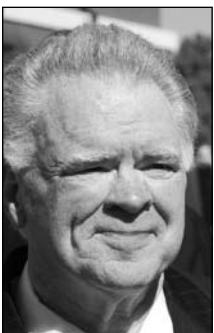
Southern president Al Mohler said in a Dec. 15 letter to the seminary community that cost-saving measures — including a hiring freeze on non-essential positions and reduced travel — have already trimmed the school's budget by \$1.7 million.

That leaves a projected \$800,000 to \$1.5 million in further reductions projected over the next several months. Mohler said that would likely mean a reduction in the seminary's workforce and increasing tuition to boost revenue.

Southwestern is "making difficult decisions in an effort to protect the institution from future financial crisis," according to a Dec. 16 news



Mohler



Patterson

release from the seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. Among reductions being made to the budget are "temporary suspension of many overseas travel programs and adjustments to campus facilities."

Southwestern president Paige Patterson said in a press release, "The administration is doing the best it can to find ways to cut spending that do not involve the release of existing faculty or the students employed by the school."

Patterson "went on to say that current economic trends would make this goal difficult to achieve," according to the news release.

Southwestern is suspending the work of its Naylor Children's Center for at least 18 months. The center is a laboratory school that provides care for preschool age children.

Woman's Missionary Union of the SBC has announced a series of measures to enable the organization to retain staff and stay focused on its mission.

During a Dec. 10 meeting at the 120-year-old organization's

Birmingham, Ala., headquarters, WMU Executive Director Wanda Lee told employees about the measures, which include budget reductions, streamlining expenses, a hiring freeze on vacant positions, a reduction on employer contributions to employee retirement plans, a freeze on merit pay increases, elimination of incentive bonuses in 2009 and the implementation of four weeks unpaid furlough for each staff member between January and August 2009.

At Southern, Mohler pledged "to do our very best to limit tuition increases" as a way to keep theological education affordable to as many ministers as possible.

Mohler attributed the shortfall to significant losses in the value of the seminary's endowed funds. He also said the school projects annual gift levels this year to be lower than usual and has been advised by denominational leaders to expect economic forces to eventually show up in reduced giving through the SBC.

Prior to the shortfall, Southern Seminary's 2008-2009 budget was \$36.95 million.

Southeastern spokesman Jason Hall said the school decided to not print the winter issue of its magazine, which is now only available on the Internet. The seminary also has cut back on how it prepares apartments after they are vacated.

The school has no immediate plans



BR photo by Dianna L. Cagle

**CHANGES** — Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary with Binkley Chapel in the background, has implemented a hiring freeze.

for layoffs.

Southeastern is also preparing for a potential drop in Cooperative Program funding.

"We're trying to plan for the worst and hope for the best," Hall said.

## Southeastern working to keep students in school

By Dianna L. Cagle

BR Assistant Managing Editor

**O**fficials at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary are trying to help their students through the economic crunch.

A recent survey of the students showed "up to a quarter of our current students are considering taking fewer classes in the spring," said Jason Hall, director of communications.

"The other thing we found is that many applicants for the spring might consider delaying starting because of their inability to sell houses, find employment, etc."

Hall said Southeastern is trying to encourage prospective students to think about alternatives if they are not able to start on campus in the spring.

"We're working with them to consider starting online while still not having the burden of moving," Hall said.

Extension centers are another option. Southeastern holds classes in Charlotte and Asheville as well as Anderson, S.C., Charleston, S.C., Richmond, Va., and Tampa, Fla.

Southeastern has already made some changes to help its economic outlook (see story above).

According to Skip Midkiff,



BR photo by Dianna L. Cagle

**CUTTING** — A dusting of snow covers the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary campus in November. Due to the financial crunch, Southeastern is making some changes.

director of financial aid and student employment services, the downturn in the economy has not resulted in a greater number of scholarship applications.

"We have had a 25 to 50 percent increase in the number of requests for emergency grants," he said.

Hall admits seminary students, in general, "are not well off to begin with."

One of the shining lights in this economic shift has been funding from the Charles B. Keese Educational Fund Inc., as well as other scholarship money available to students.

"They are a real blessing to our students," Hall said. "Every dollar is important."

Phase one of the recent capital campaign completed the building of Paige and Dorothy Patterson Hall,

begun in October 2006. The building holds classroom and office space and the L. Russ Bush Center for Faith and Culture.

The second phase of a capital campaign seeks more scholarship funding for The College at Southeastern, established in 1994, Hall said.

### Southeastern teaching personal finances

For the past four of five years, The College at Southeastern has been offering a personal finance class as an elective to its students.

"It's a class designed to help students think about the issue of stewardship from a biblical perspective," said Russell Woodbridge, professor and a former International Mission Board (IMB) missionary in Vienna, Austria, who teaches that class.

A former professional trader in Frankfurt, Germany, with Salomon Brothers, now a subsidiary of Citigroup, Woodbridge brings his time in the day-to-day financial world to his students.

Another class is being taught for one week in January at the college level, and the seminary is offering a class over Spring Break.

Woodbridge said the seminary realized the importance of teaching stewardship to their students so they could turn around and teach their congregations.

Not only does the class spend time in the Bible, but they look at how to budget; how to stay out of debt; how to make good, wise purchases especially on larger items; how to deal with finances within the church; what are retirement accounts; and they learn some practical tips for pastors.

Referring to Matt. 6:21, Woodbridge said, "what you value most is going to be reflective in your life."

He shared about how his pastor makes it a point within his family to give more to missions than to individuals, including his wife.

"If you give \$1,500 towards Christmas gifts and \$50 to Lottie Moon (Christmas Offering) ... we're not supposed to lay up our treasures on earth," Woodbridge said. "One reason that people don't give is that they can't. They are in so much debt, such disarray."

The class is important for those preparing for ministry, he said, because spiritual leaders need to lead the way in their personal finances.

Woodbridge and his family are leaving Southeastern soon for the mission field with the IMB. He is not certain who will teach this class after he leaves.

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