

**Testimony of D. Michael Lindsay, Ph.D.
President and Professor of Sociology, Taylor University**

Prepared for the
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

United States Senate
Washington, D.C.

Hearing on “The State of Higher Education”

May 21, 2025

SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY ON THE STATE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

American higher education is facing a profound crisis of public trust. Formerly viewed as a transformative force for good in society, many institutions have drifted from the foundational values that once inspired the public's confidence and investment. This drift has led to declining trust in higher education among students, families, and the American people - an erosion driven not only by bloated costs and inaccessibility, but by moral ambiguity, hostility to dissenting viewpoints, and a fundamental loss of purpose. At its worst, higher education has alienated the very people it was meant to serve, offering credentials without conviction and dialogue without direction. But at its best, higher education cultivates both character and competence, preparing students to serve and lead with wisdom that goes beyond mere knowledge.

This formation requires more than academic rigor; it demands moral clarity, institutional transparency, and a holistic commitment to the development of students. Institutions that have remained rooted in their mission and are committed to moral clarity are experiencing significant momentum. At a number of faith-based institutions of higher education, we have seen remarkable growth over the past five years, even as national trends have plummeted. Families are seeking institutions that remain true to their purpose and live out their values transparently. We have seen this firsthand at Taylor University, where our foundational beliefs are not merely a footnote – they are the driving force behind every decision we make.

This clarity of identity leads to more than enrollment growth. It fosters a student-focused environment, where learning takes place beyond just the classroom, and academic excellence is inseparable from moral formation. The result is generations of students who excel in the classroom and graduate equipped for lives of service, leadership, and purpose.

Affordability remains a pressing concern for families across the country, but there are models that address this well. While many institutions have struggled amidst rising costs and declining enrollment, a growing number of faith-based institutions have grown without sacrificing quality. Strategic fiscal responsibility, paired with philanthropic generosity and mission-driven stewardship, allow mission-based educational models to remain both excellent and affordable.

Beyond affordability, institutions like Taylor are playing an increasingly important role in the renewal of their communities. From downtown revitalization efforts to business incubators and expanded community health services, faith-based campuses are catalysts for community and regional transformation. These projects are grounded not merely in civic obligation, but in the deep conviction that the mission of higher education institutions must include the flourishing of the communities they call home.

American higher education still holds enormous promise. But it will only reclaim the public's trust if it pairs academic excellence with moral formation and holistic student learning with community impact. Institutions that do this well are not just preparing students for the workforce. They are shaping the future of our country.

The Problem: Moral Rot in Too Many Universities

It is no secret that higher education is experiencing a crisis of trust in America today. Confidence levels in our institutions of higher education have fallen precipitously over the last decade, and recent events have rightfully hastened this decline.¹ American higher education is at a hinge moment, and leaders must decide which direction their institutions will take – continued relativism and ethical equivocation around the most pressing moral issues of the day, or a path of moral clarity.

For many years, an unspoken social contract existed between our nation's citizens and institutions of higher learning.² It was generally understood that higher education was a force for good in the life of young people, preparing them not only to be economically productive, but more importantly, to be imbued with moral character that would equip them to lead their communities, their professions, and the nation. For decades, this understanding was the foundation of a thriving, vibrant ecosystem of American education, driving our country to new heights and generating critical new knowledge and leaders who could provide a sense of purpose and mission to their people. Given the evidence before them, families and taxpayers saw higher education as a worthy cause, one that would pay dividends for their children.

Today we are in a different place. Many Americans no longer see higher education as a force for good in the lives of their sons and daughters, or as something that will set them on a path toward flourishing. From repeated “cancelling” and shouting down of campus speakers with opposing viewpoints to college presidents’ unwillingness to acknowledge genocide as contrary to their institutional codes of conduct,³ it’s understandable why so many Americans hold higher education in low regard.

Forces that had for years been gnawing away from the inside at American higher education burst into the open following October 7, 2023. When Hamas committed some of the most egregious acts of violence seen this century, certain institutional leaders could not bring themselves to describe this atrocity as the terrorism it clearly represented, much less condemn or meaningfully counteract the antisemitic actions taking place on their campuses.

When moral relativism becomes the norm in higher education, confusion and chaos follow. Truth has been exchanged for a set of personal preferences rather than a set of moral convictions that

¹ Jones, J. M. (2024, July 8). *U.S. Confidence in Higher Education Now Closely Divided*. Gallup. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/646880/confidence-higher-education-closely-divided.aspx>

² Allen, D. (2025). *American and its Universities Need a New Social Contract*. The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/04/stem-academia-universities-citizenship-civics/682384/>

³ Zahneis, M. (2023). *Penn’s President Resigns After Remarks at Congressional Hearing Prompted a Backlash*. The Chronicle of Higher Education. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/penns-president-resigns-after-remarks-at-congressional-hearing-prompted-a-backlash>

guide our lives and direct our actions. Parents have become frustrated at the political and cultural agendas being weaponized against their children in the classroom, so it is not surprising that people have come to think that many institutions cannot provide students with the necessary instruction to pursue a life of purpose or to make it possible for others to do the same. Institutions that have divorced the cultivation of knowledge from the cultivation of wisdom have violated the unspoken social contract between the academy and the American people.

Thankfully, this isn't the case everywhere. To see a wonderful counterexample, I would invite you to visit my home campus in Upland, Indiana. At Taylor University, you will not see glum faces, experience a culture of outrage, or endure ongoing student protests. Rather, you will find warm and friendly people building an active, vibrant campus culture with a joy and energy that flows from all corners of campus. Taylor is a member of the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCCU), a group of over 180 institutions that support a coherent approach to education in which the development of the mind, body, spirit, and emotions are woven together in the quest not just for knowledge, but for wisdom. We believe that education that instructs merely the mind without deepening the soul builds intellectual strength without the moral courage to use it for the common good.

Taylor students experience something notably different throughout their four years with us. We aspire to be a University that develops servant-leaders, preparing young people to carry, in the words of our mission statement, "Christ's redemptive love, grace, and truth to a world in need." This is the cornerstone of all we do at Taylor, and it is maintained by a set of community covenants that every student, trustee, and member of our faculty and staff affirm and live by. We call these our five Foundational Documents, and they are much more than an honor code. They represent a set of shared commitments to one another as an extended family. What's more, at Taylor, we do not hide these convictions from the world; rather, we see them as key to our institutional identity. Accordingly, when families visit our campus admissions office, they find in the reception room a copy of our Foundational Documents on every table for their review. These statements aren't as important as the Bible, and they are not perfect or inclusive of everything we aspire to do at Taylor, but they provide shared understandings that shape the contours of our moral vision as a community. They explain who we are, what we aspire to become, and how we pursue that vision. I wish every institution of higher learning would be similarly explicit about their core beliefs, convictions, and tacit expectations. Colleges and universities need to be transparent about their identity so that families can more effectively assess whether the institution is the right fit for their student.

We clarified Taylor's Foundational Documents several years ago, and now our faculty and staff annually reaffirm their commitment to these shared theological understandings, which also shape our everyday protocols and principles. The response since has been nothing short of extraordinary. Our enrollment and fundraising have surged, and our campus has become a place of thriving. Employee engagement is at its highest levels in years, and external recognitions have validated our internal assessments that things are heading in the right direction. This past year,

the Princeton Review ranked the Taylor campus number three in the country for happiest students, number eleven for best run universities, and number twenty-five for most-loved colleges.⁴

The shared moral commitments on campus have made it easier for us to build the kind of culture that draws people who share our beliefs. Visitors routinely comment on the positive energy and genuine care for others that they see flowing through the campus every day. From the moment students arrive on campus during Welcome Weekend, they begin building relationships that will last a lifetime, whether through a small-group fellowship, a residence hall gathering, a mentoring relationship with a faculty member, or participation on an intramural team. Because we are located in the Indiana cornfields, our students have to find community and make memories with one another on campus. As a result, our students are exceptionally engaged, with the eighth highest intramural sports participation rate in the country⁴ and a countless number of leadership opportunities.

This tight campus community is remarkably countercultural these days. As Robert Putnam famously described twenty-five years ago in *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Americans have long been withdrawing from social and civic engagement with one another, with disastrous effects for our communities and democracy.⁵ The rise of social media only accelerated many of his findings, which are supercharged across most college campuses today. Without a shared moral framework or opportunities to form closer ties, students struggle to engage meaningfully with one another, particularly when faced with contentious or challenging issues. In the absence of this ethical cohesion and in the clutches of moral relativism that has become so pervasive in wider American culture, students see one another and their beliefs as enemies to be conquered, not as opportunities for constructive dialogue. At Taylor and other places like it, we find things to be different. Thanks to a common moral grounding, students vigorously debate important ideas, but they navigate these issues within a shared framework. Moreover, they do so from a higher degree of self-awareness, knowing that all of us are in need of God's redemption, so none of us is more righteous than those with whom we disagree. As theologian Miroslav Volf wrote in *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*,⁶ just as Christians have received salvation through reconciliation to God, so also must we extend a reconciling spirit toward others, embracing our enemies in an analogous love as that which God has offered to us. This is a radical approach to campus life, one in which we are called not merely to tolerance or

⁴ The Princeton Review. (2025). *Taylor University (TU)*. <https://www.princetonreview.com/college/taylor-university-1022635>

⁵ Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster.

⁶ Volf, M. (1996). *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation*. Abingdon Press.

inclusion, but to love and forgiveness. We fall short of that ideal every day at Taylor, but it's a precept that constitutes our very identity as an institution.

The Need: Growth and Innovation to Combat Decay

As students and families long for an educational experience that provides more than mere intellectual formation in the midst of this broader crisis of trust, a number of faith-based institutions are experiencing a remarkable and countercyclical period of growth. This diverges from the general decline in the U.S. college-bound population that is associated with the looming 'demographic cliff.'⁷ Yet, there are notable exceptions whereby institutions are increasing market share through missional definition and clear communication.

Dozens of faith-based institutions experienced a significant increase in enrollment this past year, including Taylor University. Indeed, over the past four years, Taylor has seen more than a 60% increase in the size of our incoming freshmen classes, without changing our admissions standards. For the first time in twenty-five years, we have implemented a waitlist for the incoming class due to the sheer volume of demand we are experiencing.

During this same time frame, our freshman retention rate has averaged over 90%. And this has not come at the cost of quality, as Taylor's average high school GPA among incoming freshmen over the past five years is 3.88. When families explain why they chose Taylor, they talk about the University's moral clarity and the whole-person educational experience we offer. It turns out that American families want to know what an institution stands for – its values and commitments. As we have been more explicit about our institutional identity, more families have chosen to send their sons and daughters to Taylor.

Other institutions in our peer group, like Grace College and Cedarville University, have seen similar growth.⁸ These patterns underscore a broader trend: enrollment decline among private secular colleges has been six times greater than decline at religiously affiliated colleges. Moreover, many Christian institutions have grown by double-digits. For three years in a row, Taylor has welcomed our largest incoming classes each fall. It appears that in an era where trust in higher education is eroding, families are increasingly turning to institutions that integrate academic excellence with moral formation, community, and purpose.

Those universities that have innovated academic offerings and developed co-curricular programs that appeal to more students and align with institutional identities have grown. We have seen this from coast to coast, from George Fox University in Oregon to Southeastern University in

⁷ Lane, P., Falkenstern, C., & Bransberger, P. (2024). *Knocking at the College Door: Projections of High School Graduates*. Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. <https://www.wiche.edu/knocking>

⁸ McClellan, H. V. (2025, January 3). *Christian Colleges Continue to See Enrollment Growth*. Christianity Today. <https://www.christianitytoday.com/2025/01/christian-colleges-continue-enrollment-growth-record/>

Florida. Colleges and universities affiliated with the Assemblies of God have seen enrollment grow by one-third over the last decade. Students at these kinds of institutions are thriving in multiple dimensions because of their time on campus, and recent research confirms how powerful these kinds of inputs are toward long-term wellbeing.

Harvard University epidemiologist Tyler VanderWeele and his collaborator, Byron Johnson of Baylor University, just released the first wave of findings from their path-breaking Global Flourishing Study, which measures how people are thriving in 22 nations around the world.⁹ Their research, which has been featured everywhere – from *The Atlantic*¹⁰ to *The New York Times*¹¹ – affirms a very simple reality that has been intuitive to the world of Christian higher education for centuries: when individuals live in an authentic religious community with one another, they tend to flourish. According to the research that involved 200,000 participants, those who practice their faith in community report higher-than-average scores in all areas of human flourishing.¹² This includes measures of personal happiness, sense of meaning, deep relationships, physical and mental health, character and virtue, as well as financial and material stability. I imagine all of us in higher education aspire to build campus communities where our students can flourish for the rest of their lives. Yet so few campuses seem to be doing this well. Is there a possible way forward?

The Opportunity: Becoming More Student-Focused

For decades, American higher education has been lured by the siren sounds of federal research dollars as many institutions sought to emulate places like Harvard and Stanford out of a desire to enjoy similar prestige and prominence. The faculty-oriented culture of institutions like these is hard to replicate without significant resources, and the American public started to resent the ivory tower mentality that continues to permeate many university cultures. Yet, we don't have to abandon our whole orientation to move in the right direction. Might the solution entail an intentional shift toward a more student-focused approach on our campuses? This is not about treating students as consumers to be served or regarding higher learning as a mere transaction to be completed. Rather, a student-focused university culture is one in which the faculty and

⁹ Global Flourishing Study. (2025). *Unlocking the Insights Behind Flourishing*.

<https://globalflourishingstudy.com/featured-insights/>

¹⁰ Brooks, B. C. (2025). *Why Are Young People Everywhere So Unhappy?* The Atlantic.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2025/05/young-people-global-unhappiness/682632/>

¹¹ Caron, C. (2025). *A Global Flourishing Study Finds That Young Adults, Well, Aren't*. The New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/30/well/mind/happiness-flourishing-young-adult-study.html>

¹² Marshall, P. (2025). *Largest Longitudinal Study of Human Flourishing Ever Shows Religion's Importance*.

Providence. <https://providencemag.com/2025/05/largest-longitudinal-study-of-human-flourishing-ever-shows-religions-importance/>

administration regularly ask themselves, “What is best for our students’ long-term flourishing?” when allocating resources, adding programs, or pursuing opportunities.

Rooted in the rich tradition of the liberal arts and in a classical vision of forming the whole person, Taylor’s approach prioritizes the development of character and community for students. Historian Bruce Kimball contrasts the modern research university’s approach of what he calls “the liberal-free ideal” with a liberal arts tradition whereby education is not merely about knowledge acquisition or novel discovery, but rather is focused on preparing students for lives marked by service, leadership, and moral courage.¹³ At Taylor, we leave the liberal-free ideal for other kinds of places and embrace a liberal arts approach to learning and to life. We believe this better serves our students and prepares them for a lifetime of service and leadership.

A decade ago, I was hosted in Beijing by a senior official with China’s Ministry of Education. I was surprised to learn that, despite his senior role in Chinese higher education, he had chosen to send his daughters to American liberal arts colleges. He referred to the liberal arts tradition as the “genius” of American higher education, one that privileges breadth over depth, especially at the undergraduate level. He noted that research breakthroughs and creative solutions emerge not from the “core” of academic disciplines, but rather on the periphery of given fields. A liberal arts education, he noted, exposes students to learning across disciplinary boundaries; that formative kind of education prepares students to think across domains of knowledge, integrating insights from multiple fields of inquiry.

He noted that many Chinese institutions of higher learning prioritize depth in particular fields following an educational model found in places like Germany and France. He observed that even in the “hard” sciences, where deep expertise is often preferred to broad understanding, the wider academy outside of the U.S. had not produced as many breakthroughs as had come through American higher education. To prove his point, he compared the number of Chinese and American Nobel laureates. Indeed, in the 124-year history of the Nobel Prizes, there have been only 8 Nobel laureates from China across all categories, and only 3 in the sciences. By contrast, the United States has produced over 420 Nobel laureates, with nearly 300 awarded in physics, chemistry, and medicine.¹⁴

This disparity highlights the brilliance of our approach in America – namely, rigid specialization that is so common in “liberal-free” ideal frameworks (even for highly technical or applied fields) limits the kind of intellectual cross-pollination and personal formation that drives true innovation and creative breakthrough. By contrast, a student-focused, whole-person approach fosters curiosity, interdisciplinary thinking, and moral imagination – all conditions which empower

¹³ Kimball, B. A. (1995). *Orators & Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education* (Expanded ed.). College Entrance Examination Board.

¹⁴ World Population Review. (2025). *Nobel Prizes by Country 2025*. Retrieved May 17, 2025, from <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/nobel-prizes-by-country>

graduates to explore, create, and lead in ways that make lasting contributions to their industries and communities.

Kara Gordon-Warren, a senior executive at a major foodservice distributor and a Taylor graduate, exemplifies this model, as a business leader whose vocational success is matched by a commitment to community impact, one that was nurtured during her years on campus. Kara's example reflects the enduring value of a liberal arts education, one that is rooted in character and service. She attributes her business acumen and professional versatility throughout her career to the educational foundation that Taylor provided, enabling her to adapt to diverse roles and leadership challenges with ease. Indeed, in my own scholarly research, I found that over seven in ten top American leaders earned a liberal arts undergraduate degree; the liberal arts approach to learning prepares young people to think across fields, to collaborate with others, and to pursue a higher purpose in their learning.¹⁵

At Taylor University, student development is not ancillary to intellectual growth. It is the University's *raison d'être*, a central calling we share to form servant-leaders through intentional, whole-person education. At thriving institutions, every facet of campus life is designed to cultivate personal maturity, vocational discernment, and ethical character. At the United States Military Academy at West Point, where leadership formation is embedded in every dimension of student life – from physical training to cadet leadership opportunities to service-based clubs – student development happens not just in the classroom, but in residential, relational, and formative environments beyond the classroom.

America has benefitted greatly from the novel breakthroughs in science and medicine driven by research at our top universities. At the same time, scholarly achievements must be tethered to moral reflection. As Albert Einstein declared, “The most important endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions.”¹⁶ Accordingly, universities today need to recapture a commitment to ethical and moral reflection in teaching and research. In so doing, the entire sector can move toward a more student-centered approach.

Faculty at student-centered institutions regularly hold class sessions in their homes over coffee. Staff members counsel students on big decisions; some even officiate at their wedding ceremonies. Institutions like Taylor provide a place for students to find mentors, best friends, and even spouses, developing relationships that last a lifetime. This is a key way in which colleges and universities advance the public good – by creating positive communities and collaborative networks that benefit their graduates for decades. This can happen in a variety of educational settings, but it often occurs in campus contexts where students and faculty know one another by name, where residence life supports the holistic development of students and where experiential

¹⁵ Lindsay, D. M. (2014). *View from the Top: An Inside Look at How People in Power See and Shape the World*. Wiley.

¹⁶ Einstein, A. (1981). *Albert Einstein: The Human Side* (H. Dukas & B. Hoffmann, Eds.). Princeton University Press.

learning opportunities (like research projects with a faculty member) happen regularly. At too many places these days, student life is focused on risk mitigation and regulatory compliance. But student life can be about so much more.

A student-focused approach makes the difference. And the federal financial aid programs are a key to that student focus. At Taylor, we rely on the federal Pell Grants program, as well as Federal Work-Study and SEOG, to help needy families afford the cost of a degree. While Taylor contributes substantial institutional resources to student financial aid packages, these programs are a cornerstone of access to higher education for many of our students. In turn, this access allows us to play a key role in the development of the next generation of our nation's leaders.

We must start by creating meaningful opportunities for students to lead. In the most recent national HERI College Senior Survey, 65% of Taylor students reported participating in formal leadership training on campus, compared to just 41% at peer institutions. Institutions need to create more leadership opportunities on campus because this is an investment that pays dividends for a lifetime. According to our most recent internal alumni survey results, 83% of Taylor alumni agreed that the University contributed to their lifelong engagement in service to society. Six in ten reported volunteering at least monthly with churches, nonprofits, or community agencies, far exceeding national volunteerism benchmarks.¹⁷

This anecdotal evidence supports the broader findings from the landmark work by Alexander Astin and colleagues at UCLA, who have tracked over 22,000 students and found that participation in service-learning significantly increases long-term commitment to civic engagement and volunteerism.¹⁸ They conclude that service experiences in college not only foster leadership and social responsibility but also predict sustained involvement in service-oriented careers and community life long after graduation. John Molineux, a 2002 Taylor graduate and founder of Love Justice International, exemplifies a life marked by service over self, leading an organization that has intercepted more than 84,000 people across dozens of countries to prevent them from being trafficked. Indeed, his commitment reflects Albert Schweitzer's conviction that "the only ones among you who will be really happy are those who will have sought and found how to serve."¹⁹

Students like John are grown in precisely this type of academic ecosystem where students can pursue big questions and worthy dreams. Indeed, these kinds of students can be found on every college campus. But are we providing an environment where these are, in fact, being pursued?

¹⁷ Ray, J. (2025). *Global Generosity: World Felt Less Charitable in 2024*.
<https://news.gallup.com/poll/657200/global-generosity-world-felt-less-charitable-2024.aspx>

¹⁸ Astin, A. W., Vogelgesang, L. J., Ikeda, E. K., & Yee, J. A. (2000). *How Service Learning Affects Students*. Higher Education Research Institute, UCLA. <https://heri.ucla.edu/PDFs/HSLAS/HSLAS.PDF>

¹⁹ Schweitzer, A. (1935). *The Meaning of Ideals in Life*. The Silcoatian, New Series No. 25, 781–786.

Nearly nine in ten (87%) of CCCU students report that they are challenged to think deeply about complex issues from a faith perspective on their campuses. A similar measure (85%) report that they have developed the ability to think critically and analytically.²⁰ The ability to think deeply and critically leads to success in a variety of career outcomes, and our graduates are no exception. Taylor's most recent data indicates a 98% graduate success rate (compared to an 86% average from the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)), a 92% graduate excellence rate (compared to a 59% NACE average), a 96% acceptance rate into medical schools²¹ and law schools,²² all of which places us among the highest in the Midwest.²³ Whether entering medicine, business, education, or the arts, Taylor students leave not only academically prepared but spiritually anchored and vocationally equipped to lead with excellence and humility.

Year after year, we graduate high-performing, servant-minded students who go on to make a meaningful difference. Dr. Colleen Kraft stands as a compelling exemplar of the value and reach of a Taylor education. A 1998 Taylor graduate, Dr. Kraft studied Biology Pre-Med and was a Leadership Scholar on campus. Following Taylor, Dr. Kraft earned her medical degree and has worked over 20 years at Emory University Hospital. An infectious disease physician and researcher, Dr. Kraft played a pivotal role in helping develop the protocols for handling the first Ebola patient in the United States, as well as helping develop national protocols for the COVID-19 pandemic. She recently served as the president of the American Society for Microbiology, leading one of the largest life science societies in the world. She credits the formative, purpose-driven education she received at Taylor for preparing her to serve professionally for the benefit of society. We all need many more graduates like her.

In response to growing consumer demands for customization and personalization in higher education, we have sought to embrace academic innovation, developing programs aligned with market needs, emerging industry trends, and key state and national priorities. Just in the last year, Taylor has established or developed a myriad of academic programs and initiatives. Our region, like many other rural areas, suffers from a dire shortage of healthcare professionals, and we have

²⁰ Council for Christian Colleges & Universities. (2024). *The Case for Christian Higher Education*.
https://www.cccu.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/CCCU_Case-for-CHE_Digital_FINAL.pdf

²¹ Taylor University (2024). *Pre-Med Curriculum*.
<https://www.taylor.edu/academics/programs/special-programs/pre-med>

²² Taylor University. (2025). *Politics & Law Major*.
<https://www.taylor.edu/academics/degrees/politics-law>

Taylor University. (2024). *Calling and Career Office: Annual Report*.
https://www.taylor.edu/_docs/about/offices/cco-annual-report.pdf

worked toward addressing this gap. As a result, we recently launched a School of Nursing and are in the process of establishing a Physician Assistant Studies graduate program. Like so many other independent colleges, we are driven to meet market demand through academic innovation and reinvention.

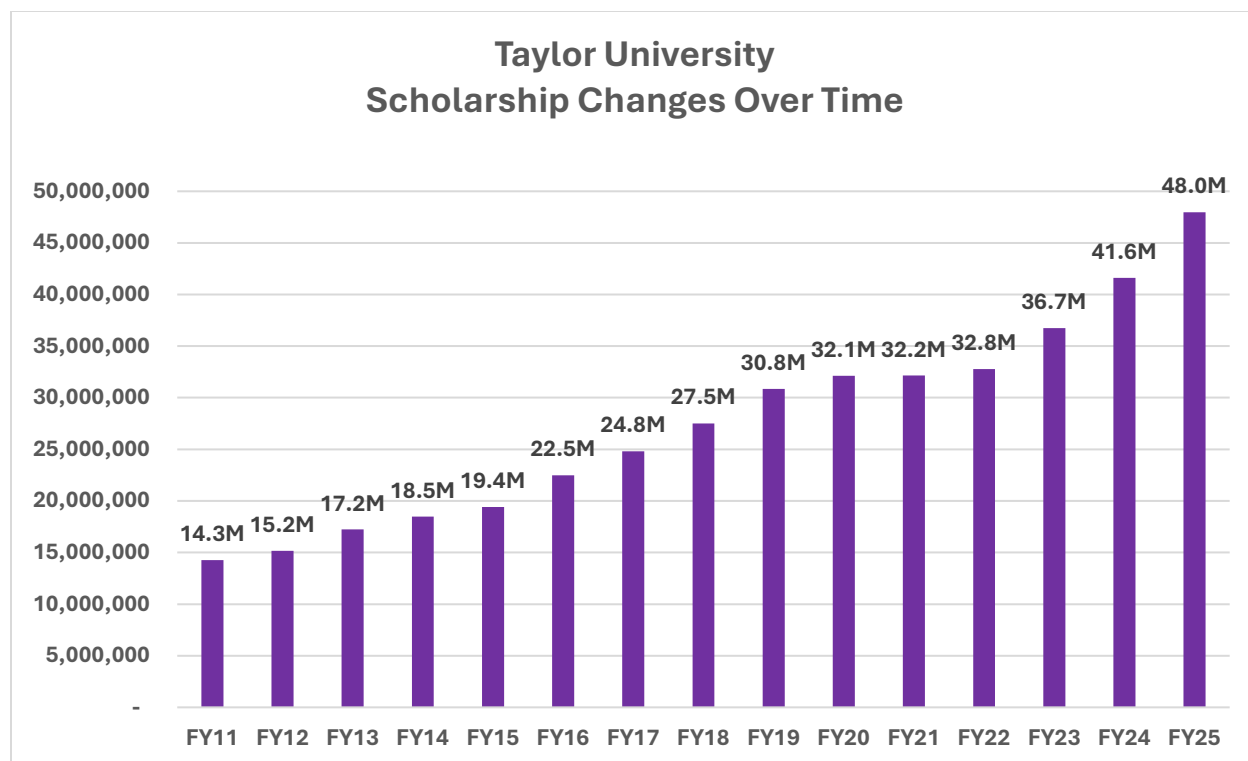
Additionally, a few years ago, we developed a program called the Invitation Clinic whereby Taylor undergraduates work with community members to prevent diabetes and chronic illness through health and wellness coaching. In just five years, the clinic has served over 300 community members, logged more than 6,400 patient contact hours, and achieved astounding and lasting health outcomes – an average of 17-pound weight loss per participant, significant improvements in A1c levels among prediabetic individuals, and meaningful increases in daily activity.

Operating out of our on-campus fitness facilities, this program allows student trainers to design and implement individualized exercise plans for clients. Outcomes from these programs meet or exceed CDC diabetes prevention benchmarks and demonstrate the power of student-led intervention. Hundreds of our students have received hands-on clinical experience as undergraduates, and we have done all of this with less than \$400,000 in external funding. The Invitation Clinic is not only transforming lives but also positioning Taylor as a leader in rural health innovation. This is one of many ways in which our student-focused culture at Taylor is creating opportunity and growth for our graduates and our community.

The Calling: Expanding Access and Affordability

A student-focused education of the type offered by Taylor is transformational, but it also must remain within financial reach. Too many of America's colleges and universities have become unaffordable for large segments of the country. But it does not have to be this way. Americans are a generous people, and our nation's leaders established a number of smart policies at the federal and state levels that have galvanized unprecedented generosity, to the benefit of many deserving students. And indeed, the wealth generated by the graduates of many of our nation's top universities makes possible the incredible generosity we see in America. Coupled with individual philanthropy, the compact between institutions of higher education and the federal government has helped keep a college degree within reach for millions of American students for decades. This partnership is critical for student and institutional success.

Thanks to our generous supporters, Taylor's average net cost for undergraduates (adjusted for inflation) has dropped 24% since 2010, and our average undergraduate net tuition has seen a similar trend. Our total annual scholarships awarded to students have more than tripled over the same time – from \$14 million in 2010 to \$48 million today.



To make this possible, we have needed extraordinary philanthropy, and as we have made the case about why supporting Taylor students is a worthwhile investment, our donors have responded in remarkable ways. Before 2020, Taylor had never raised more than \$25 million in a single year, but in the last two years alone, we have raised nearly \$250 million. This remarkable generosity is part of our *Life to the Full* campaign, the largest fundraising effort for a school like Taylor. We endeavor to raise \$500 million through this effort, with the largest amounts going to benefit our students (through additional scholarship monies) and our friends and neighbors (through the Main Street Mile Initiative, which is described below). While these remarkable results come from many major gifts, 87% of the gifts have been under \$1,000, and so far, we have received more than 16,000 gifts in this worthy undertaking. Similar results can be seen at other thriving faith-based schools like Baylor and Villanova where unprecedented generosity has directly impacted access and affordability. Institutional endowments are a critical component to student success for independent colleges and universities, like Taylor, which do not rely on direct state appropriations.

This also contributes to wider dimensions of institutional thriving, including strong financial footing that allows schools to weather demographic challenges and industry headwinds. Last year, for the first time in Taylor's history, we received a perfect 10.0 score on the Composite Financial Index. Taylor has the highest possible rating of 3.0 on the Federal Responsibility Composite Score, as noted by the Department of Education. Just a few days ago, S&P upgraded Taylor's credit rating to "A with Stable Outlook." S&P especially noted Taylor's success in fundraising, strong enrollment numbers, and healthy annual operating surpluses. As a Christian

university, we attribute these good results to divine blessing, first and foremost, but they also reflect strategic decisions made by the University to live into our unique heritage and identity as a student-focused institution. This has required strategic investment and wise stewardship when resources were more modest (as was the case in our recent past) and fiscal responsibility as we have been able to leverage additional sources of financial, social, and human capital for our students. Many of our sister institutions within the CCCU have done much the same. For every dollar a CCCU student receives in federal grant aid, our institutions contribute five dollars in institutional aid, demonstrating a deep commitment to both affordability and accountability.²⁴

At a time when too many universities have become financially bloated, overleveraged, and (in some cases) overstaffed, my colleagues and I have sought to be good stewards of public and donor dollars. We have invested resources for maximum impact, prioritizing the needs of our students over palatial buildings or unnecessary staff. These investments have paid significant dividends not only in the lives of our students but also in the communities in which our graduates serve.

Anwar Smith grew up in a rough part of Chicago and came to Taylor to study Christian Ministries. As captain of Taylor's football team, Anwar developed strong leadership skills and a sense of personal calling that his life would entail a return to his home neighborhood, serving kids who would not get the chance to study at a place like Taylor. He could never have attended Taylor were it not for generous support provided by a federal Pell grant (that last year benefited 323 Taylor students) or federal student loans (which benefited hundreds more). Investing in Anwar has made a big difference in his life and in the work he is doing through community transformation as the Executive Director of GRIP, an outreach organization that mentors and equips hundreds of urban youth every year.

Like many of our graduates, Anwar decided to forego a lucrative salary in the private sector to mentor at-risk children. Like many of his classmates, he pursued a vocation that prioritizes human flourishing over personal comfort and wealth, but his efforts are making a huge difference. Indeed, organizations like his provide much-needed social service support at a fraction of what it would cost if it were channeled only through government-run programs. This is why educational policy must not penalize colleges whose graduates choose service over self when evaluating the outcomes of the very education that compelled them to undertake such noble callings. Particularly within Christian higher education, where 38% of students are first-generation college students and where one in three students are Pell Grant recipients, our institutions are not just expanding access, we are cultivating purpose-driven leaders who choose lives of service over material success. After all, the author Frederick Buechner reminds us that

²⁴ Council for Christian Colleges & Universities. (2017). *Building the Common Good: The National Impact of Council for Christian Colleges & Universities (CCCU) Institutions*. <https://www.cccu.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/CCCU-National-Impact-Final-Report-12.12.17.pdf>

the individual's highest calling is the place "where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."²⁵

We realize, however, that federal monies and institutional scholarships are not the only way to increase college affordability. Like so many other institutions, Taylor has institutional skin-in-the-game. Following a pilot program this past year, Taylor is launching the *Good Work* initiative. This program will transform on-campus employment opportunities into professional and vocational development catalysts for hundreds of students each year. The premise is simple: pay students more than minimum wage for on-campus jobs and combine it with strategic programming and intentional professional development. Through this, students will have more dollars to defray their educational expenses (thereby taking on less educational debt), and they will develop professional skills that will make them more equipped for the workplace following graduation. Generous donors are helping us launch the program, but we expect that, as the program grows, a number of students will take on responsibilities that might otherwise require additional staff hires. The institutional savings will fund the higher hourly wages for our students and help them better afford Taylor and secure better jobs when they graduate.

We caught a vision for this after visiting College of the Ozarks in Missouri a few years back and learning about other work-based colleges. There, student work assignments on campus help defray educational expenses and provide much-needed professional development for students while helping institutions accomplish everyday activities as part of running the institution. At Taylor, we have already seen the success of this approach with our top student leadership cohort, the Presidential Fellows program, and we expect it will expand as we help our students develop more skills in communication, customer service, negotiation, problem-solving, and time management. We hope to incubate this idea at Taylor for a few years, but if it is successful, we hope to offer a national model for reducing student debt burdens while equipping graduates with the skills necessary for personal and professional thriving.

The Goal: Communities that Thrive

At many schools like Taylor, we have built a thriving college not as an end in itself, but because our faith compels us to give back to our communities and a world in need. We don't hide behind ivy-covered walls; we roll up our sleeves and serve alongside our neighbors.

Taylor is one of 364 institutions recognized by the Carnegie Foundation and American Council on Education with the Community Engagement classification,²⁶ evidenced by the good work of programs such as the Invitation Clinic and students who write grant proposals for local nonprofits as part of their coursework, who submitted nearly \$450,000 worth of such proposals

²⁵ Buechner, F. (1973). *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*. Harper & Row.

²⁶ Carnegie Classifications of Institutions of Higher Education (2025). *The Elective Classification for Community Engagement*. <https://carnegieclassifications.acenet.edu/elective-classifications/community-engagement/>

this academic year alone. This is a good group of worthy institutions. With this context, we launched last year the Main Street Mile Initiative, a community and economic development program that entails over \$100 million in public and private investment over five years. This amazing program was catalyzed by a \$30 million grant through the Lilly Endowment's College and Community Collaboration initiative, a pioneering program that awarded over \$300 million for university-based efforts around community and economic development.

The Main Street Mile Initiative will result in some truly incredible outcomes for our community over the next several years. We will add over 100 new units of housing to our community and more than 10,000 square feet of business and commercial space in our downtown, helping to launch 16 new enterprises and create dozens of jobs in our small community, aided by the more than \$1 million in seed funding we plan to distribute for entrepreneurial ventures. A new collegiate inn and destination restaurant will capture hospitality spending from the more than 152,000 visitors expected in Upland each year, strengthening the local economy. We will add more than 5,000 square feet of new sidewalks and five miles of trails to our community, as well as double the size of our local public library, which, despite ranking in the bottom 10 in funding per capita for Indiana's public libraries, still manages to rank in the top 25 for highest circulation per capita."²⁷

Taken together, these projects will push Taylor's economic impact in our economic growth zone to exceed nine figures by 2028. We are undertaking this noble cause after observing the good work of economic development spurred by major universities like Princeton and Purdue, as well as equally important ventures at smaller institutions like Colby, Colgate, and Sewanee. Universities across America have come to realize that we are not removed from our local communities but remain rooted in them. Indeed, higher education does not have to mean higher walls, and at Taylor, we are working to break them down every day.

²⁷ Indiana State Libraries (2023). *2023 Statistics*. <https://www.in.gov/library/services-for-libraries/plstats/2023-statistics/>

MAIN STREET MILE INITIATIVE OUTCOMES



OVER \$100 MILLION

in total public and private investment



Taylor's economic impact in our economic growth zone will exceed

NINE FIGURES

by December 2028



15% GROWTH

of nonstudent population in Upland



MORE THAN 5,000 SQ FT

of new sidewalk and more than five miles of new trails

WELCOME

152,000+

VISITORS AND GUESTS annually to our community



ADD OVER 10,000 SQ FT

of available business and retail space (none currently available)

\$1.97 MILLION

additional annual increase of tax revenue in our county

LAUNCH

16

new enterprises in Upland

DISTRIBUTE MORE THAN

\$1 MILLION

of seed funding for new ventures



ATTRACTING AND RETAINING

a talented workforce



CATALYZING ENTREPRENEURIAL ENERGY

in our community



REVITALIZING OUR COMMUNITY'S STANDING

within the broader region



DRAMATICALLY IMPROVING

opportunities for current and future residents



ENHANCING COLLABORATION

among community stakeholders

OVER 100

units of new housing in Upland

ADD 656

seats through a new public event space

2,000 SQ FT

expansion of local public library (effectively doubling current space)

CONCLUSION

Restoring public trust in higher education will not come through louder rhetoric or shinier facilities, but through the enduring strength of institutions that stand for something clear and compelling. When a university refuses to compromise on truth and teaches students to pursue wisdom rather than relativism, it becomes a place not of confusion, but of formation. That kind of moral rootedness creates the conditions for growth – drawing students, faculty, families, and donors who are hungry for something deeper than prestige. But formation cannot be outsourced; it must be carried out through deeply relational, student-centered academic environments that prioritize service, character formation, and leadership development as much as academic achievement. And for such an education to matter, it must be both accessible and affordable, requiring bold generosity, smart policy, and institutional discipline to ensure that purpose-driven learning is not reserved for the privileged few.

Ultimately, the value of this kind of education is revealed not through faculty research or capital projects, but in the lives of transformed students and the flourishing communities they go on to serve. Despite some of the troubling trends we have seen in recent years, many of us have been transformed by our own college experience and believe American higher education remains the global gold standard. Scripture reminds us that the one who has been blessed with much is also responsible for much. We must renew our focus on moral purpose, student formation, and tangible societal impact. With courageous vision and principled investment, American higher education can reclaim its place as more than merely a knowledge producer, but as a nation-shaper, a community-builder, and the world's most powerful force for human flourishing.