Staff Changes at Austin Grad Point to the Future

Austin Grad is a community of scholars and students seeking to know, understand, practice and pass on the faith.

Austin Grad is reorganizing the Office of Development and Public Relations with a view to expanding the classes and degrees offered. On October 12, 2009, Cynthia Agnell assumed recruiting and public relations duties for the school. In January 2010, Neil Haney will become the Director of Development.

Haney is a well respected Development Officer, serving at Scott & White Hospital for more than thirty-two years. After his retirement in December, 2008, he continued with Scott & White as a part-time consultant. Haney has a proven track record, and over the years he has acquired experience in every aspect of non-profit development. He has directed four multi-million-dollar campaigns, served as a major gift officer, and coordinated planned giving.

Haney holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Education from Abilene Christian University and a Master of Science Degree in Psychology and Rehabilitation Counseling from Oklahoma State University.

Appointed to the Board of Trustees of Austin Grad in 2001, Haney has served as Vice-Chairman since 2005. Although he resigned from the Board in order to accept the new position, Haney brings a first-hand understanding of Austin Grad's mission and vision to his role as Director of Development.

Speaking of his new position, he says, "I am deeply honored to be invited to become a part of the Austin Grad development program. Financial support has never been more important than it is now. I am confident that with the continued support of our loyal friends, and new ones, Austin Grad will reach new heights in equipping men and women for greater service in God's kingdom."

Haney and his wife, Marsha Hoppe Haney, live in Temple, Texas, where he serves as an elder at Western Hills Church of Christ. Neil and Marsha have a daughter, a son, two grandsons and two granddaughters.

Cynthia Agnell joins the staff at Austin Grad after more than twenty years in real estate marketing and management. Cynthia holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Texas Tech University and a Master of Arts in Theological Studies from Austin Grad. Since the completion of the Master's degree, she has volunteered as project assistant on Timeless...
Staff Changes

Ancient Psalms for the Church Today and as Chairperson of the Associates for Austin Grad. She continues both of these projects in addition to her new duties in Recruiting and Public Relations.

Her experience as an Austin Grad student and volunteer enables Cynthia to speak about the school, its mission, and the quality of instruction from a personal perspective. In talking about the school, Cynthia says, "I believe that I received an exceptional education at Austin Grad and that I am better equipped for kingdom service. I want everyone to know about the extraordinary opportunities available here."

In addition to her work at Austin Grad, Cynthia serves on the Board of Directors of Come before Winter, Inc., and coordinates the women’s ministry at Westover Hills Church of Christ. She also teaches women’s Bible classes and speaks at retreats and women’s events around Central Texas. Cynthia and her husband Bill have two sons and a daughter-in-law.

In reference to these staff changes, President Stan Reid said, "With the addition of Cynthia and Neil to our staff, I believe we are positioned to make some very big strides at Austin Grad. I recognize that we must be patient and realistic. However, these changes are generating the confidence and energy needed to address the challenges ahead of us."


Gordon contends that the sermons of today fail to nourish the average Christian. He attributes this failure to a societal shift from language-based media to electronically-based media which results in preachers who are unable to read critically or write concisely. Because Johnny can’t read and Johnny can’t write, Johnny can’t preach. Gordon not only does a fine job of articulating the problem, but he offers a solution that is available to every preacher committed to a quality message. This book is highly recommended.


Hart describes Atheist Delusions as an historical essay intended to present a “particular understanding of the effect of Christianity upon the development of Western civilization." For Hart the advent of Christianity changed the world in a way that can’t be explained by the assumptions that underlie present-day atheistic arguments. This book provides an excellent historical perspective on Christianity.


After a devastating loss, re-establishing a disciplined prayer life may be the most difficult step to recovery. Hamilton has adapted the daily offices from The Book of Common Prayer for use in times of grief. The seven-day schedule of prayers and Psalm reading gently leads those who grieve to recover the language of prayer.
An Interview with Hugh Gainey

Tell me how you first became involved with Austin Grad?

My father-in-law, Claude Hocott, was a very generous supporter of the school. Elaine, my wife, and I typically came to Austin to visit with Claude and Judy on the weekend of the school’s annual meeting. Those meetings were similar to Friends’ Day and they were such a pleasant experience that we began to really look forward to those weekends of family, UT football, and hearing the students and faculty speak about the school. This was in the mid-1980s.

What was your first impression of the school?

My first impression was vision. The Board of Trustees, the faculty, and the administration envisioned the school as an outstanding seminary that would train ministers and lay people to serve the church. Claude articulated the mission and vision of the school in such a way that one couldn’t help but be impressed by what was happening here.

Why have you continued to support Austin Grad instead of larger schools?

I have a Bachelor’s degree from the University of Texas and an MBA from the University of Houston, but the lion’s share of our support goes to Austin Grad for two reasons. First, the need is so much greater at Austin Grad. The second reason is the mission of the school and the unique niche it fills in God’s Kingdom. Academically and administratively, Austin Grad doesn’t take a back seat to any school. More importantly, this highly-credentialed faculty and capable administration make nurturing the faith of students a priority.

In addition to financial support, what other ways do you support the school?

Over the years, I’ve served in many ways—from chief cook and bottle washer, to writer, to volunteer photographer, to financial consultant. Most recently I served as interim Director of Development, but my Austin Grad business card just reads “Hugh Gainey, Volunteer.”

These activities give you an opportunity to interact with the faculty, staff and students. How have you been blessed by those interactions?

There are so many ways. I’ve been blessed by conversations with the faculty and by working with my close friend and mentor, Jack Wright, who asked me to come and help him when I retired. But mostly I am blessed to be a part of a close community of fellow workers with a kingdom mission. And I get to have lunch with them. Some of our students’ stories are very inspiring.

What do you wish other people knew about Austin Grad?

I wish more people knew about Austin Grad; we are still a well-kept secret. I wish everyone knew about the mission of the school, the quality of the faculty, the vision of the administration, and the heart the students have for kingdom service.

What would Austin Grad look like if every supporter convinced one other person to support the school financially?

That is a wonderful thought. Doubling our donor base would go a long way toward rebuilding our endowment fund and developing the Master’s of Divinity program.

As a supporter of Austin Grad, how would you describe yourself? Do you think you are typical of the school’s supporters?

Elaine and I have been blessed all of our lives. I had a job I loved and was well compensated. As a result we have been able to support Austin Grad for many years. We probably aren’t typical supporters; I’m not sure there is a “typical” supporter. Austin Grad supporters are diverse; some can endow chairs and some can give ten dollars a month, but they are all important. Each one helps make it possible for the school to equip men and women for service in the church.

Reasons I Audit Classes at Austin Grad

David Jones began auditing Austin Grad classes in 2002. To date he has completed twenty-six classes. When asked why he audits so many classes, he offered the following reasons:

I enjoy the discussion with knowledgeable professors who stimulate critical thinking.

In the classes I am exposed to a world of ideas beyond my normal experience.

I am introduced to books and articles that I would never discover on my own.

I learn more and more about the Bible.

I gain a greater understanding of language, history, and philosophy.

I am better equipped to teach Bible classes.

The classes teach me to think about my faith and what I believe.
Scholarship for the Church

Some have inquired about the subtitle, “Scholarship for the Church,” which first appeared on a recent issue of Christian Studies. Some background is necessary to explain the subtitle. Fifty years ago, the consistent emphasis of devout Christian college teachers was that education would resolve the divisive and destructive quarrels plaguing Restoration churches. The underlying assumption—reasonable at the time—was that “education is a rising tide that will lift all boats.” So numerous first-generation college graduates went on to do graduate work in various fields, including religion.

New publications of the time reflected and promoted this vision of an educational panacea. I recently re-read an article published in a journal founded in this era. The article was titled “The Basic Structure of Tillich’s Ontology” (1971). I was struck with how irrelevant it was to the life of the church, and how extremely unlikely it was that any reader might receive personal edification or spiritual insight from the article. I was also reminded of how much I had shared that confidence in education four decades ago. On reflection, I felt culpable for having authored the Tillich article.

Not only was the almost “messianic confidence” in education misplaced; it also evoked a strong reaction among young ministers of the time who are now middle-aged. In reaction to what they perceived as “sophistry and arid intellectualism,” many embraced popular church-growth strategies, such as “entertainment worship,” that are now commonplace in American churches.

A growing number of “church growth defectors” see these popular strategies as harmful, diluting biblical faith at a time when Christians need to be fully equipped to recognize and resist the gods of the age. By emphasizing “Scholarship for the Church,” Christian Studies endeavors to equip its readers to view the modern world with Christian discernment.

— Michael Weed

Development and Advisory Council Established

Plans are underway for a Development and Advisory Council at Austin Grad. The council will advise the school in the planning of future programs. In addition to advice, members of the council will generate new financial support for the school.

The Development and Advisory Council will provide a broad group of supporters willing to share their knowledge, experience, and influence to promote the school and guide future programs. Additionally, members of the council will be advocates for the school, speaking on Austin Grad’s behalf to individuals, churches, and organizations.

Initial leadership of the council includes Jack Wright of Austin ac, Chairman; Fred Woavor of La Grange as Vice-Chairman, and Newton Ward of Houston as Secretary. By-laws for the group are completed and invitations to serve on the council are in process. If you know someone whose experience and influence would bless Austin Grad, please contact Jack Wright at wright@austingrad.edu

“Our school is currently positioned to do more good Kingdom work. However, accomplishing this would stretch our current human and financial resources beyond what can be borne. God has always provided what has been needed for Austin Grad to continue its mission. I am convinced that the Council’s work will be a tremendous asset as we strive to reach our vision for greater service at Austin Grad.”

—Stan Reid, President
For Vinicio Montesdeoca the greatest thing about being a student in the MATS program at Austin Grad is the daily study of God's word in community with Christians from another culture.

Vinicio left his hometown of Cuenca, a city of about 350,000 people in southern Ecuador, and came to Texas in August of this year. He graduated Catholic University of Cuenca with a Bachelor's degree in Engineering. He also earned a Bachelor's degree in Theology from Universidad Técnica Particular de Loja. He learned about Austin Grad from Dane Boyles. Boyles, who served as a missionary in Cuenca from 1992 to 1997, is an adjunct faculty member at Austin Grad.

By coming to Austin Graduate School of Theology, Vinicio hopes to learn more of God's word and to grow spiritually. In the Austin Grad community of faculty, staff, and students, Vinicio recognizes men and women who have deep, sustaining relationships with God and with other Christians. Although English is his second language and American friendships seem different from friendships in Ecuador, Vinicio hopes to learn from these men and women. He wants to benefit from their wisdom and experience and to learn new ways to nurture his relationship with God.

In Ecuador, Vinicio worked as Dean of Students and taught Bible and Theology at Cuenca Theological Institute. In his home congregation he served as a volunteer youth minister and preached occasionally. While he is at Austin Grad, he worships with the Spanish-speaking church in Leander.

When one asks about his life in Texas, Vinicio replies that it is good. He explains, "Church is good for me. I preach every Sunday and teach every Wednesday. Preaching and teaching the Bible is my life. The culture is different but my work in the church here reminds me of home. The members in Leander are eager to learn and to develop relationships."

Vinicio's hardest cultural adjustment involves food. He readily admits that Tex-Mex food, which is served at the weekly church devotional and fellowship meal, is much too spicy for his Ecuadorian taste buds. "But," he says, "the church loves me. They prepare separate food for me." In listening to Vinicio, it is easy to see that he loves this church as well.

Vinicio has not made plans beyond graduate school. Perhaps he will go back to Ecuador, teach in the university, and spread the gospel. He is waiting for God's direction. Right now he says, "I am enjoying this time at Austin Grad and living in the moment."
With Grateful
appreciation.

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From the president

One of our graduate students, Sergio Longoria, told his story to about 75 guests at our recent Friends’ Day gathering. It exemplified Austin Grad as a unique school with an exceptional student body.

Sergio described himself as having grown up in Mexico in a family that was “Catholic by birth and atheist on purpose.” Although very gifted academically, he became a college dropout. It was with surprise and a good deal of interest that he watched his parents become Christians. In time, Sergio also became a Christian.

He eventually came to the United States and served in the military. He went back to college and earned degrees, including one in engineering. About his current work as an engineer, Sergio said that he “sometimes works on military bases no one has heard of and on ships that don’t exist.”

Wanting to deepen his knowledge of the Bible and to grow in his Christian faith, Sergio began looking for a seminary. During a web search he discovered Austin Graduate School of Theology and he enrolled as a part-time graduate student. Sergio’s practice of the faith is expanding as his knowledge of the Bible and the Christian faith grows.

For example, being shy by nature, Sergio told us that he always avoided occasions at work when people would express psychic, emotional, or spiritual hurt. However, since taking classes at Austin Grad, Sergio has found himself drawn to minister carefully and compassionately to his co-workers in a secular environment.

In addition, Sergio is finding that his ministry in his local church is expanding as more opportunities to teach, preach, and minister come his way. Students like Sergio give our faculty and staff reason to get up in the morning, make the drive through Austin traffic, and give their all to this great kingdom work at Austin Grad. I am blessed to be a part of this team and work with such wonderful students.

Countless stories like Sergio’s can be told about the good being done in the church and in the world by our students and alumni. Austin Grad is forever thankful to God and its friends for this opportunity to fulfill such an important ministry.

— Stan Reid, President

Planned Giving

Planned Giving options are designed to help individuals and couples redirect money that would otherwise be taken in taxes to institutions of their choice. Planned Gifts can take the form of a will, trust, insurance policy, retirement plan or a life-income gift. Please see your financial advisor concerning how you may benefit from these options.
David Worley Library Receives Special Donation
19th century hymnal found in box of old books

In July of this year, the family of Martha Jean Hicks donated a book collection to the David Worley Library at Austin Grad. Mrs. Hicks was the granddaughter of G.H.P. Showalter, a co-founder of the University of Texas Bible Chair, now Austin Graduate School of Theology. Several books in the collection are quite old, but one is of particular significance. Tucked into one of the boxes was a small, well-preserved volume with “Christian Hymn Book” on the spine. Inscribed on the inside cover is the name “Josiah J. Showalter,” and the date “1853.” On closer examination, the work proved to be a collection of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for the Christian church compiled by A. Campbell, W. Scott, B.W. Stone, and J.T. Johnson.

“It is an incredible discovery,” said Todd Hall, AGST Librarian. “A second edition of this work, in such excellent condition, printed at Bethany, and compiled by all of the major leaders of the Restoration movement is very rare. One can only wonder where this book has been and what history it has seen.”

Although the book cannot “speak” of what it has seen, it does give the twenty-first century reader a glimpse into the theology and worship practice of the Restoration leaders. The title, Christian Hymn Book, shows their desire for the unified worship of all followers of Christ. For Austin Grad, the book provides another connection between the history of the school and the history of the Restoration movement.

The library plans to display the book along with other important historical works. Noting that artifacts of the Restoration movement are rare, Hall called this book “a very special donation, one that we want to share with future generations.”

Ways You Can Support Austin Grad

- Pray for the faculty, staff and students.
- Join the Associates for Austin Grad.
- Volunteer to help with an AGST event.
- Keep your congregation supplied with brochures for potential students.
- Tell all your friends about the “best-kept educational secret in the state”
- Encourage your congregation to include Austin Grad in the annual budget.
- Contact your employer to see if he or she will match your contribution.
- Bring a friend or two and audit a class.
- Recommend Austin Grad to a potential student.

Bookstore Bulletin

Clip this coupon and bring it to the Austin Grad Bookstore for 10% off your purchase. Coupon cannot be used for current textbooks.

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Faculty Insight

Christianity entered history as a Jewish sect (cf. Acts 24:5) which recognized in Jesus' death and resurrection God's decisive saving intervention in the life of the world, the fulfillment of his promises in Scripture to bless all nations through Abraham and his descendants. Conflict wasn't absent from the church in those early days, but it arose over the conduct appropriate to this saving message, not the core convictions of the gospel.

Our earliest evidence for Christian faith and life in this period comes from Paul, whose letters teach that the gospel of Jesus the Messiah's death and resurrection "according to the Scriptures" was common to all those recognized as apostles of the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:11) and to Christians throughout Judea (Galatians 1:23); Paul's report of controversy with Peter and other Jewish Christians in Antioch assumes the saving significance of Jesus' death and resurrection as a conviction common to all the Jewish Christians involved in the dispute (Galatians 2:14–21). Paul's letter to the Romans presupposes that the Roman church, though not founded by Paul, agreed with him that Jesus' death and resurrection are foundational. This emerges with particular clarity in his treatment of the baptismal rite (Romans 6:3–4).

The earliest dissent from this teaching of the apostles appears only around AD 100, with the schismatic teachers that John opposed in his letters and those that Ignatius of Antioch argued against about AD 115. Then, in AD 130, Basilides of Alexandria elaborated a theory that Jesus evaded death on the cross, and the Gospel according to Thomas (ca. AD 140 or later) taught that eternal life comes through Jesus' sayings, with no interest in his death and resurrection. All these teachers and others who came after denied the saving significance of Jesus' physical death and bodily resurrection and set themselves in opposition to the apostolic consensus and to post-apostolic teachers like Ignatius, Polycarp, and Justin Martyr who maintained this fundamental Christian conviction.

The Christian churches of the first century found the basis of their unity in the identity granted them by baptism into the death and resurrection of Christ. Christians who seek to recover the fellowship of the apostolic age must seek nothing less.

—Adapted from Folly to Gentiles: Jesus' Death and Resurrection in the First Christian Century (forthcoming), by Jeffrey Peterson, Jack C. and Ruth Wright Professor of New Testament.

Things That Matter Makes an Impact

*Things That Matter* is a guide to the Christian faith that is making a world-wide impact. While it was originally written in Russian, over the past twenty years the book has been translated into several languages including Hindi, French, Nepalese and English. The English version is especially popular in Prescott, Arizona where the Mt. Vernon Church of Christ has given hundreds of copies to viewers of their weekly television program "What Do the Scriptures Say?"

Mike Scott, pulpit minister for the Mt. Vernon congregation, reports that approximately ten copies are given away each week and about sixty percent of the recipients enroll in a Bible correspondence course. Mike says, "Your little book is so clear, so concise, and so easy to read. It's just what people today need to give them an introduction to the Lord and His Kingdom."

If you would like to order copies of *Things That Matter* for use in your congregation or in outreach to your community, please e-mail christianstudiespress@austingrad.edu.
From the Development Office

Report on 2008-2009 Annual Campaign

Our fundraising goal for the past fiscal year was an ambitious one: $440,000. Although giving was 13% below our objective, we are extremely grateful for the continued generosity of our supporters even in difficult economic times.

New Fundraising Initiatives

In June 2009, Austin Grad hosted the first in a series of dinners designed to introduce the school to potential supporters around the state. In Fort Worth, fifty guests heard the story of what we do, the lives we touch, and our financial needs. On November 5, forty guests joined us in Houston to hear enthusiastic alumni Allan Stanglin and Matt Soper tell our story. Dinners are planned for San Antonio, Austin, and Dallas in 2010, as well as other presentations in smaller cities. We are constantly reminded that AGST is not well known, even in Church of Christ circles. This is one way we seek to improve our visibility and make new friends.

The University Avenue Church of Christ recently approved a $10,000 challenge grant for Austin Grad. The grant will be used to match new or increased donations from other congregations in 2010.

Honor Someone Special

Pay for a Day of Instruction

Making a one-time gift of $300 or committing to give $300 over a period of up to one year allows you to honor an individual or group. Instruction on a day you select will be provided in recognition of the individual or group of your choice. They will be notified about your gift and a notice acknowledging the honoree will be placed in our reception area on the specified day.

Pay for a Week of Instruction

Pay for a Week of instruction is also an option. A week of instruction costs $2,100. As with Pay for a Day, Pay for a Week can be either a one-time donation or a commitment over a one-year period. Acknowledgement is the same as described above in the Pay for a Day section.

Remember

Many companies match employee gifts. Check with your human resources department to learn if your company is a matching gift company.
How to Give to Austin Grad

At AGST, donations are the lifeblood of our ministry. From our website, click the Donate Online icon to contribute through secure online credit card processing. We also welcome checks, money orders or credit card numbers mailed to our physical address, and accept credit cards over the phone at 1-866-AUS-GRAD (287-4723), or (512) 476-2772.

NOTE: Many corporations match charitable giving. Be sure to specify if your gift is eligible for corporate matching!