

# BELHAVEN UNIVERSITY

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*Our Standard is Christ*



*An Important Letter to Alumni and Friends  
from Dr. Roger Parrott, President*

During the last chapel service of the fall semester I had the honor to share with the campus that on January 1, Belhaven College will change its name to Belhaven University.

After extensive study of the issues related to this change, including enthusiastic feedback from alumni and faculty/staff as well as current and prospective students, the Board of Trustees has unanimously voted to change our name.

The name change does not change who we are or shift our mission, focus, or priorities. Rather, the change of our name to University more accurately describes who we have become. More specifically, the name university best identifies us because:

- Belhaven currently serves 3,000 students on four physical campuses, plus a fast growing online campus. We had the largest enrollment growth percentage of any private college this fall with an increase of 15.4%, and I anticipate we will grow to 3,500 to 4,000 students in the next three years.
- We attract students from 44 states and 20 countries. We offer 27 major areas of study, with a student to faculty ratio of 12:1. Eighty-five percent of our full-time faculty have their terminal degree.
- Among those studying with us are 500 graduate students in six master programs, with a further expansion of the graduate offerings on the near horizon. While we do not currently offer doctoral programs, the name change prepares us to move to this level eventually (there are 52 southern schools named university that do not offer a doctorate).
- Belhaven is academically structured around four schools—Business, Education, Arts and Sciences, and Fine Arts—as well as our Honors College. Many in Christian higher education consider Belhaven to be a leading school in the scholarship of worldview curriculum. Nine of our departments are engaged in ongoing discipline-specific research.

- We have gained national distinction in the arts as one of only 30 schools accredited in all four of the arts—music, theatre, visual art, and dance—while most other schools working at that level are major state universities, such as Ohio State, Florida, Cal State, and Southern Mississippi. We are the only Christian college in the U.S. offering a Bachelor of Fine Arts in creative writing and one of only 26 undergraduate institutions offering such a degree.
- For ten years Belhaven has been named to *America's 100 Best College Buys*. Our Business School was selected as one of the top Christian business colleges in the country by *Business Reform Magazine* and received special recognition as an editor's pick for "most biblical curriculum and focus." *The Templeton Guide: Colleges That Encourage Character Development* has recognized Belhaven for leadership in the field of student character development for spiritual growth programs.

The name "university" comes from the Latin phrase for "a community of teachers and scholars." Measuring Belhaven to this benchmark, we clearly qualify. A "university" also comes out of the tradition of learning centered around a unifying truth—Belhaven is deeply grounded in our shared commitment to unifying biblical Truth.

Interestingly, there are no official criteria for why a school would be called a university rather than a college, but we have used the following six benchmarks in making this evaluation: (1) breadth of programs, (2) academic depth and quality, (3) reach and influence, (4) organization and complexity, (5) enrollment growth, and (6) graduate offerings and scholarship. For all six criteria, Belhaven measures up.

While there is not a required standard to be named a university, perceptions indicate there is a decided difference in the minds of today's students between a college and a university. The findings of our research demonstrated:





- Over 80% of students assume there is a difference between a university and a college, and when asked to name the qualities between the two they list as most important (1) number of undergraduate academic majors, (2) academic quality, (3) number of graduate students, (4) size of the student body. Interestingly, there are only four schools in the south larger than Belhaven that continue to use the name “college” rather than “university” (while 67 schools smaller than Belhaven use university in their name).
- Over 50% of students say that the name university or college will make a difference in which school they will consider attending, and the same percentage of students believe that graduating from a university will help them in the job market.
- A large number of students assume that a college is a two-year school, and a university is a four-year school. Many community colleges around the country are dropping the name “community,” which adds to this confusion.
- Unfortunately, most of the for-profit trade schools have changed their name to college. Internationally, a “college” is a high school in most cultures, and a “university” signifies advanced education.
- While the university name is not dominate among the private schools in Mississippi (although Belhaven has as many graduate students as Delta State University, and many more than Alcorn State University, Mississippi Valley State University, and Mississippi University for Women), we recruit students nationally—where university would be the standard for a school of our size and stature. In the markets of Florida, Texas, and Tennessee where we have branch campuses, the name university is most common for schools of our size and breadth.
- In our survey of over 1,000 alumni, students, and staff, only a small percentage thought the name change would be negative: Students 5%, Alumni 11%, Faculty and Staff 3%. Seventy-seven percent of students recommended making the change in January or sooner. I was surprised at the number of seniors who wrote and asked that we change the name before they graduate.

In our surveys I asked for comments, and we received 600 comments and emails. I’ve read and considered every one. Some misperceptions came through those comments that are important to address:

- Becoming a university does not make us a public institution. The name change does not impact tuition rates, class sizes, or our hiring standards.
- We did not consider “University of Belhaven” phrasing because that normally describes a state or city—plus, there are advantages to remain in the “B”s in the alphabetical listing of schools.
- Several suggested “Belhaven Christian University,” but we believe our identifier—Our Standard is Christ—along with the new name, more sharply defines us. Today’s culture has redefined the word Christian to have a much broader meaning than the biblically committed worldview we are teaching at Belhaven.
- Students were appropriately concerned for school spirit and losing our “we are BC” cheer. But BU has worked for Boston University, Bucknell, Brown, and Belmont, and we can make it work, too. Interestingly, many alumni from the era of the 1970’s reminded me that their cheer was “BU”—and now we really are BU.
- The level of athletics is not a determiner of whether a school is a university or a college—I was sent Boston College and Boston University football schedules to show me “college” could play a tougher conference, although in enrollment and academics BU is the stronger of the two. We are moving to the Southern States Athletic Conference next fall, and the majority of those schools are named university.
- Concerns have been raised about the cost of changing the name. After a careful analysis, we found the cost of the change is surprisingly low. Most of our communication is done electronically—and our web team will begin making that change easily. We stockpile very little published material, having on

hand only a six month supply of admission material we'll use up by adding "university" stickers to them. In addition, our catalogue is online and not printed, we have only a small supply of stationary since few write letters (although we'll need business cards for some), and I'm hopeful friends will make gifts for the cost of new signs on the campus. Our athletic uniforms only say "Belhaven" and thus do not need to be changed. Even the alma mater does not use the word "college."

- What about all those college shirts in the bookstore? This is a good question I've been getting often. Well, we are going to have our regular end of the semester sale, so I'd encourage buying up that stuff, holding it for 40 years, and selling it on eBay at a huge profit! The bookstore will begin to have "university" shirts in the store in January.

We all cherish the small campus feel of Belhaven. This will not change with the change of our name. Our traditional age student program could grow by only about another 20% or until we run out of space. We can only house about another 100 students on campus in double rooms, and I don't see a new residence hall on the near horizon. The unique nature of Belhaven allows us to broaden our offerings but not dramatically change the nature of our traditional student program, because most of our growth comes through our branch campuses, online, and in graduate programs.

This change of name is the next natural progression in our 127 year history. As I look back, this will be the tenth significant step in the development of the school:

1. Founded as a finishing school: "Belhaven College for Young Ladies"
2. Became a Presbyterian college
3. Moved to the current location
4. Admitted men and added athletics
5. Became purposeful about ethnic diversity
6. Added graduate programs and our Worldview curriculum
7. Established multiple campuses
8. Developed nationally recognized Arts programs and started football
9. Launched online degrees and international partnerships
10. Renamed Belhaven University

God's hand has been on this school through all the years. I'm thankful for those who have gone before us to create such a wonderful place for students to prepare for the Lord's best in their lives and to become grounded in our motto: To Serve, Not To Be Served.

With this name change, I pledge to you our commitment to stay the course that God has laid out for us. Nothing will change our faithfulness to Christ and to quality education. We are called to graduate students well prepared for success in the marketplace, with lives built on a Christ-centered worldview.

We close our chapel each week by praying in unison that great scripture from 1 Corinthians 2:9, because it is applicable to every chapel topic. And as I made this announcement, our prayer was:

No eye has seen,  
No ear has heard,  
No mind has conceived,  
What God has prepared for Belhaven University



P.S. One important question has been raised, asking, "how does this change impact the academic credentials of our alumni?" There is no change. Beginning with May 2010 graduation, diplomas and transcripts will be under the new university name. Many alumni may want to name Belhaven in their resume as "Belhaven University (formerly Belhaven College)." In the past 6 years, 78 colleges have changed to university, so this is not a new issue and we have a pattern to follow.

We are offering all alumni the opportunity to receive a Belhaven University diploma. Alumni do not need to trade in their old diplomas, but may have both and display the one of their choice. Normally we charge \$50 for a new diploma, but we are offering these free to alumni if ordered before April 1. All alumni are receiving a response card to make this request.