

# Baylor Drowning in Denial and Deception

From the distant hill of discernment, Baylor University looks like a valley flooded with denial and deception.

While the school's former basketball coach Dave Bliss offered the most visible example of the ethic of deny and deceive, the problem engulfs the Baylor village, afflicting both those casting stones at the university's president and those falling on their swords for him.

One Baylor faction denies the depth and substance of the opposition to President Robert Sloan. Some of his supporters claim that the problem is only a few critics, some of whom are dim-eyed tenured faculty members who are resisting change.

Other Sloan advocates discount the opposition with character attacks, accusing them of opportunistically dancing around the body of the tragically killed basketball player.

Sloan's conspiracy sponsors declare that the *Waco Tribune-Herald*, *Dallas Morning News*, *Houston Chronicle* and *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* are out to get Baylor, denying that Baylor's wounds are self-inflicted. Some of these folk have launched a defend-Baylor campaign by blaming the media.

Another Baylor faction deceives the public with broad-brushed accusations. Some have rumored for weeks that Sloan and Drayton McLane, chair of the regents, want fundamentalist pastor Ed Young on the board of regents. The rumor claims that Young would deliver both much needed funds to support the school's expensive grant vision and help to deliver the George W. Bush presidential library to Baylor.

Other critics sloppily assert that Sloan is a fundamentalist, instead of noting his

addition to the faculty of cultural right-wingers, the first cousins of fundamentalists.

Still other Sloan opponents slam his backers as young, untenured faculty members who are motivated by fear for their job security.

The twin-problems of denial and deception also swallow up the administration and the board of regents.

Blaming a coach and an athletic director for the problems in the basketball program is a way to deny administrative responsibility at the highest levels of the university.

Accusing a regent of wrongdoing without definitive proof is deceptive. The apparent failure of the regents to reprimand the president for making a false charge suggests their own denial about how detrimental such an accusation was and how this episode damaged their credibility.

The regents' leadership deafness is compounded by their moral blindness to their own conflicts of interests, which provide another egregious example of denial and deception.

When EthicsDaily.com asked about conflicts of interests, the administration took the "do not respond" approach.

EthicsDaily.com's own research found a number of conflicts of interest on the board of regents, which reach beyond the personal and professional ties to Sloan. One regent's brother is the school's vice president for finance. Another regent teaches at the school. A third regent attends the school's seminary. Other regents allegedly have adult children on the school payroll. Still others have significant financial interests in the school.

Only Regent Jim Turner, president and CEO of Dallas-based Dr Pepper/Seven Up Bottling Group, talked candidly to EthicsDaily.com. He acknowledged that his company has an exclusive 10-year contract for the school's soft drink business.

“The monies we pay Baylor personally and through the company are far greater than the financial return we get,” he said. “I would never let a contract with Baylor interfere with my fiduciary responsibilities as a board member with how the university is managed.”

Turner also spoke with the [Dallas Morning News](#), which reported that “Dr Pepper pays Baylor more than \$700,000 a year, and the company gets about \$150,000 annually from campus soda sales.”

His straight-shooting stands in contrast with the administration and other regents who would not respond to inquires about conflicts of interest.

More than one person told EthicsDaily.com that the administration’s attitude about conflicts of interest is to deny the problem with the defluctive reasoning that the regents disclose their conflicts annually and are good people who do the right thing. If this is the case, the school’s leadership deceives itself about how relational and financial pressures can cause morally good people to make morally compromised decisions.

The university does have policy statements for both regents and non-faculty employees about conflicts of interest. The non-faculty policy wisely notes, “The appearance of a conflict of interest can be as damaging or detrimental as an actual conflict of interest.”

An independent observer might reasonably wonder whether Baylor’s mess results in some measure from the tone deafness within the administration and among its regents about conflicts of interest—whether real or apparent.

The restoration of Baylor’s health depends on drying up the culture of denial and deception.

A first step toward recovery is for the regents to provide full and public disclosure of all their conflicts of interest.

A second step is for the regents to adopt an extensive policy that spells out what

constitutes conflicts of interest and the appearance of conflicts of interest.

Only then can regents take the next step of reforming the selection process for future regents, ensuring a much more diverse DNA.

Loyalty among the regents to the institution is critical. But more vital is a board of regents with the discernment to do what is right and the freedom to do so, encouraged by disclosure, policies and diversity.

As Sloan has said, “Character is not defined in times of crisis—it is revealed.”

Much of the Baptist world watches to see what character the regents will reveal.

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*Personal Note: In order to avoid my own appearance of impropriety, I need to disclose that my Ph.D. is from Baylor. I also have friends on both sides of the conflict.*