

Baylor's Truett Seminary considering Virginia merger

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Baylor University officials are exploring a merger of George W. Truett Theological Seminary with an evangelical seminary about five miles from the White House, said Todd Still, Truett dean and university interim provost.

Still said if the proposed plan is approved, Truett would take over operation of the John Leland Center for Theological Studies in Arlington, Virginia. The Leland name would be preserved on the Truett extension, which could happen as early as fall of this year.

Still said he presented a report on the ongoing conversations with Leland at the February Baylor board of regents meeting. The plan could be approved at the board's meeting in May.

"We anticipate that if this merger occurs, it will require the executive team of our university getting comfortable with this idea," Still said. "So this then might be presented to the regents, who then would need to approve it."

Still said conversations regarding a possible collaboration began with the Leland Center in the late 1990s when a former Truett dean spoke at a convocation. With Ken Starr's presidency beginning in 2010, Still said Baylor officials wondered how Baylor might better engage in Washington, D.C.

In September of last year, the desires of both schools became clearer, and the prospects began to be explored.

Leland President Mark Olson said that while Baylor and Truett have more resources than Leland, his seminary brings much to the table, such as international faculty and a diverse student body.

"About 60 percent of students are minorities," Olson said. "I think Baylor likes that. They are already moving strongly in that direction."

He also cited Baylor's "tremendous" academic reputation, along with the local presence of former Baylor football player and 2011 Heisman Trophy winner Robert Griffin III. Griffin has spent the past three seasons on the Washington Redskins, though the team's general manager recently said Griffin is not likely to be with the team next season.

"Sports teams are the easiest ways for national universities to really make a big splash," Olson said. "Baylor has done that."

Olson said Truett would likely propose a "49 percent merger," which means a student admitted to Leland or Truett could take 49 percent of class credits at the other location toward a degree.

He said because both Truett and Baylor are up for re-accreditation in spring of 2017, the schools may not want to be in a full merger process during that time.

Leland will discuss the matter at board of trustees meetings in March and June. Olson said that while the proposal will come from Baylor, he hopes a deal can be struck, especially because of the similarities between the institutions.

"Both schools are Baptist," he said. "Both evangelical with a religious connotation. They have a strong commitment to authority of Scripture and a personal relationship with Jesus Christ."