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Baylor frustrates alumni in efforts to take over group

Officials say it's about efficiency, but members say it's controlling dissent.

BY HOLLY K. HACKER
Dallas Morning News

First, Baylor University stopped giving money to the independent Baylor Alumni Association.

Then it purged the association from the university's Web site, e-mail service and toll-free phone line.

Now Baylor leaders want the group to dissolve itself and become part of the Baptist university in Waco.

University regents and other top officials say they're just trying to bring all alumni outreach efforts in-house for the sake of quality and efficiency, a setup that most other private universities have adopted. Association leaders suspect a more sinister intent.

"The regents' proposal to the Baylor Alumni Association has very little to do with best practices and everything to do with message control," said Bryan Fonville, a 2009 Baylor graduate from Garland

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There is no reason whatsoever to alienate one of the most important parts of the university."

PRESTON EDWARDS
Baylor graduate of San Antonio

BAYLOR

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and a former student body president who sits on the alumni group's board of directors.

In San Antonio, at least two alumni members were confused and frustrated by the university's decision.

"Frankly, I can't imagine why they're doing this," said Babs Baugh, a past alumni association president.

Baugh, who attended Baylor from 1960 to 1963 but finished her degree elsewhere, said she never received official word that the university had shut off the association's funding.

Instead, she and other alumni learned about the decision after discovering everything else the university had cut, such as the alumni's Baylor.edu e-mail addresses and a link to the association from the university's Web site.

"I think it's very sad for

alumni on a presidential search committee.

Last month, Baylor leaders asked the alumni association to dissolve itself and become part of the university. "Baylor needs a vibrant, nonpolitical, supportive alumni organization communicating with its alumni around the world. . . . Our goal is not to silence anyone."

But the same document proposes consolidating the Baylor Line and the university's in-house magazine into one, "with Baylor maintaining editorial control."

David Lacy, the alumni association president, said his board is deciding how to respond to Baylor's request.

"We contend that we are absolutely supportive of Baylor University. We also contend that some of the articles, although factual, address situations that are uncomfortable but need to be told to keep our alumni informed," Lacy said.

Baylor and the alumni group have had a rocky

relationship for years.

In 2002, then-Baylor President Robert Sloan hired away the alumni association's director and half of the group's staff to work on alumni outreach. Lacy said Sloan also stopped subsidizing the Baylor Line, a loss of about \$150,000 a year. Baylor also started an in-house alternative to the Baylor Line, called Baylor Magazine.

At the time, Sloan told the Wall Street Journal that he thought the Baylor Line's coverage of his controversial presidency had strayed too much from "the university's story."

Lacy said the university later agreed to pay the alumni group about \$250,000 a year to host banquets, homecoming events and other services, but that contract was phased out under a new Baylor president, John Lilley. The university is now led by an interim president, David Garland.

Since 2008, "we haven't gotten a penny for any

services" from the university, Lacy said.

Stone, the board of regents chairman, said university leaders studied other schools and found that most handle alumni operations in-house.

"We are trying to do things better, more strategically, more professionally. Clearly, as we have studied this, it's demonstrably important to have all your alumni engagement organized in one place."

And removing the alumni group from Baylor's Web site, e-mail system and toll-free number this summer?

Stone said the moves were planned simply as part of operating as two distinct entities and should not have come as a surprise.

"All along the way, we've been transitioning because you couldn't just do it overnight," he said.

Express-News Staff Writer
Vannia Davila contributed to this report.