CONGREGATIONAL ECOSCAN:

CULTURAL IDENTITY OF NEW ORLEANS BAPTIST THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

A Paper

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# **Introduction**

The New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary (NOBTS), established in 1917, serves as a key institution for theological education within both New Orleans and the Southern Baptist Convention. Located in New Orleans, Louisiana, it embodies a unique ministry context shaped by historical events, cultural diversity, and ecclesiastical networks. This assignment employs a network ecoscan to analyze the seminary's formational ecosystem, focusing on ecological analysis, cultural identity, and group dynamics. Utilizing resources from the Studying Congregations website, this paper diagrams internal and external connections, identifies patterns of influence on spiritual formation, and provides an analytical overview. The analysis references multiple sources to explore how worship practices, artifacts, demographics, and relational dynamics contribute to the seminary's ecological health[[1]](#footnote-1)

# **Ecological Analysis**

The ecological analysis of NOBTS draws from the interconnected systems influencing the ministry's growth and sustainability.[[2]](#footnote-2) At NOBTS, this manifests in a nested structure: the seminary's core (faculty, students, and staff) is embedded within the broader Southern Baptist network and the multicultural fabric of New Orleans. To drill down even further, the undergraduate students even have “houses” similar to those in the Harry Potter universe, but that are named after distinguished Christians.

Key connections include partnerships with local churches and missions organizations, such as the North American Mission Board (NAMB), which provide resources for student fieldwork and evangelism training.[[3]](#footnote-3) Disconnections arise from post-Hurricane Katrina recovery efforts, where physical infrastructure damage led to temporary relocations and strained community ties, though these have fostered resilience. Ecological impacts on growth are evident in enrollment fluctuations; for instance, the seminary's emphasis on online programs post-2020 has expanded its reach but diluted on-campus communal formation.

**Diagram of Connections:**

NOBTS Core (Students, Faculty, Staff)

├── Internal Nested Connections (Directly shaping daily formation and community life)

│ ├── Worship Services & Chapels (Weekly gatherings for spiritual renewal and communal bonding)

│ ├── Academic Programs (e.g., MDiv, PhD; Core curriculum fostering theological depth and practical skills)

│ └── Student Groups (e.g., Fellowship of Christian Students; Peer-led initiatives for support and extracurricular engagement)

└── External Networks (Broader influences providing resources, accountability, and outreach opportunities)

 ├── Southern Baptist Convention (Funding, Doctrine; Ensures alignment with denominational standards and financial support)

 ├── Local New Orleans Churches (Internships; Hands-on ministry experience integrating theory with practice)

 └── Global Missions (IMB Partnerships; Opportunities for international exposure and missional training)

This text-based diagram represents the seminary's ecosystem as a hierarchical tree, where the "NOBTS Core" serves as the central hub. The branches illustrate nested connections: internal elements are sub-components that operate within the seminary's immediate environment, promoting cohesion and daily formation. External networks extend outward, depicting influences from wider ecclesiastical and community systems. Solid lines (represented by ├── and └──) indicate strong, active linkages that facilitate resource flow and growth, such as funding from the Southern Baptist Convention or internships in local churches. Weaker or potential disconnections (not visually dashed here but implied in gaps) could include sporadic global mission engagements due to logistical challenges—prices, politics, safety, interest, publicity, etc. This structure highlights how internal connections nurture personal and communal development, while external ones drive expansion and adaptability, aligning with ecological patterns of influence on spiritual formation.[[4]](#footnote-4)

# **Cultural Identity**

NOBTS's cultural identity is deeply rooted in Baptist traditions infused with the vibrant, resilient spirit of New Orleans. Worship and service practices center on twice weekly chapel services featuring expository preaching, hymnody, and contemporary worship music, reflecting a blend of traditional and modern elements.[[5]](#footnote-5) Rituals include annual convocations, graduation ceremonies, and commissioning services that emphasize calling to ministry, while activities like mission trips and community outreach celebrate evangelical outreach. These practices foster a sense of communal identity tied to spiritual formation.

Artifacts and structures include the historic Leavell Chapel, symbolizing post-Katrina rebuilding and resilience, with its layout promoting communal gathering. Stories of survival during hurricanes underscore a narrative of divine providence, embedded in the seminary's history from its founding amid World War I to its role in modern disaster relief. Symbols such as the seminary seal (featuring a Bible and lamp) represent enlightenment through scripture, and language often employs biblical metaphors in communications. Views prioritize conservative theology, with an emphasis on inerrancy and missions.

Demographically, NOBTS serves a diverse student body: for the 2023-2024 academic year, approximately 2,266 students, with about 66.4% White, 10.1% African American, 4.41% Hispanic, and 2.29% Asian/International.[[6]](#footnote-6) Internal cultures reflect Southern Baptist homogeneity, while external influences from New Orleans' Creole and African American communities introduce multicultural elements. Family groups are prominent, with many students attending as couples or with children, supported by on-campus housing, family-oriented events, and a homeschool cooperative.[[7]](#footnote-7) Patterns of influence reveal how cultural artifacts reinforce identity amid demographic shifts, promoting inclusivity while maintaining doctrinal core.

# **Group Dynamics**

Group dynamics at NOBTS involve interpersonal and structural interactions that shape formation. Small groups, such as discipleship cohorts and faculty-led seminars, facilitate deep connections, encouraging accountability and growth.[[8]](#footnote-8) Dynamics are hierarchical yet collaborative, with faculty as mentors and students as active participants. Differences of opinion arise in theological debates, but resolution through dialogue aligns with Baptist polity emphasizing congregational autonomy.

Networks extend to alumni associations and denominational conventions, influencing members via mentorship and job placements. Disconnections occur in online cohorts, where virtual interactions may lack the depth of in-person dynamics, impacting ecological growth.[[9]](#footnote-9)

**Diagram of Group Dynamics:**

Core Group (Faculty-Student Interactions; Central hub for knowledge transfer and relational building)

├── Positive Dynamics (Elements enhancing cohesion and growth)

│ ├── Mentorship Links (Faculty to Students; Personalized guidance fostering professional and spiritual development)

│ └── Peer Support (Student Cohorts; Horizontal relationships for mutual encouragement and accountability)

└── Challenges (Potential barriers to full ecological integration)

 ├── Online Disconnections (Virtual vs. In-Person; Reduced relational depth in digital formats)

 └── Theological Tensions (Debate Resolution Paths; Conflicts arising from diverse viewpoints, resolved through dialogue)

This diagram uses a tree structure to map group dynamics, with the "Core Group" as the foundational node representing primary interactions between faculty and students. Positive dynamics branch leftward, detailing supportive elements like mentorship (vertical, authority-based links) and peer support (horizontal, egalitarian ties), which promote accountability and communal growth. Challenges branch rightward, identifying hurdles such as online disconnections (where virtual platforms limit emotional bonds) and theological tensions (ideological clashes navigated via structured resolution). The lines (├── and └──) symbolize directional flows of influence: from core to positives for reinforcement, and to challenges for areas needing attention. Overall, this visualization underscores patterns where shared faith commitments strengthen cohesion, while addressing challenges ensures sustainable group formation within the seminary's ecosystem.

# **Conclusion**

In summary, the ecoscan of NOBTS reveals a robust yet adaptive ministry ecosystem. Ecological analysis shows strong nested connections driving growth, cultural identity integrates historical resilience with diverse demographics, and group dynamics foster formative relationships despite occasional disconnections. Patterns indicate that external cultural influences from New Orleans enhance missional adaptability, while internal Baptist traditions provide stability. Future implications include leveraging demographic diversity for broader outreach, ensuring ecological sustainability amid changing educational landscapes.

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1. Nancy T. Ammerman et al., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "Congregational Ecology Toolkit," Studying Congregations, accessed July 23, 2025, <http://studyingcongregations.org/resources/ecology>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, "Student Population," College Tuition Compare, accessed July 23, 2025, <https://www.collegetuitioncompare.com/edu/159948/new-orleans-baptist-theological-seminary/enrollment/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. R. Stephen Warner, *A Church of Our Own: Disestablishment and Diversity in American Religion* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, "Worship and Campus Life," accessed July 23, 2025, <https://www.nobts.edu/campus-life/worship.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. "Student Population," College Tuition Compare; see also "New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary," Data USA, accessed July 23, 2025, <https://datausa.io/profile/university/new-orleans-baptist-theological-seminary>. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. "Congregational Ecology Toolkit," Studying Congregations. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Warner, *A Church of Our Own*. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)