

California University to Close after 154 Years due to Pandemic

Holy Names University to close, but students have the option to continue studies at Dominican University of California

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EINPresswire.com/ -- Oakland's 154-year old [Holy Names University](#) (HNU) has struggled to remain open as it faced rising operational costs, declining enrollment, and an increased need for institutional scholarships. Both COVID-19 and an economic downturn disproportionately impacted HNU students. The college announced today it will cease operations in May 2023 after the completion of the spring semester.



Holy Names University Students will have option to transfer to Dominican University in Marin County, Calif.

HNU has worked tirelessly to find pathways to help continue its mission, but was forced by financial circumstances to cancel its NCAA sports programs as of the end of spring season, issue WARN ACT notices to staff beginning December 1, and give layoff notices to 32 employees effective at the end of January/early February.

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Steven Borg, HNU Board Chair

“We have been doing our best to find a partner to keep the university functioning and continue HNU’s mission,” said HNU Board Chair Steven Borg. “While we’ve had interest in long-term collaboration from potential partners, we do not have the type of interest that would sustain HNU in

continuing to offer its own programs and services, so we are forced to make the difficult decision to close and designate a transfer institution in the best interest of our students.”

“First and foremost, ensuring HNU students will be able to continue their academic path forward

is our top priority,” Borg added. “We are also doing everything in our power to support our faculty and staff during this period of uncertainty.”

HNU students who can complete their degree requirements by the end of the spring semester or are currently progressing in HNU’s graduate nursing programs will be able to graduate from HNU.

HNU and [Dominican University](#) of California have formalized an agreement by which academic programs at HNU will transfer seamlessly to Dominican after the spring term and accreditation body approvals. Students will have the option to continue their studies at Dominican and complete their degree requirements on-schedule. Where possible, Dominican will also ensure that members of HNU’s faculty and staff are considered for similar roles on its San Rafael campus.

Working together, HNU and Dominican will be announcing specific pathways for students to complete their degrees at Dominican. HNU is in discussions with other institutions on sustaining the Kodály Music Program. The Raskob Learning Institute and Day School will either operate independently or in partnership with a new institution after this school year.

In the Fall 2022 semester there were 520 undergraduates and 423 graduate students currently enrolled at HNU. This number for spring 2023 has significantly declined as students struggle to make tuition payments or are uncertain about the university’s future. Currently 449 students total are registered for the Spring 2023 semester.

“Like many colleges and universities nationally, HNU has faced many headwinds including increasing operational costs, declining numbers of high school graduates nationally and economic shifts leading to declining enrollment. HNU had a strong 5-year strategic business plan and secured long-term financing, but the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated and exacerbated existing challenges, and disproportionately impacted the students HNU serves, many from under-resourced communities or who are first-generation college students,” Borg said.

“Increasingly college costs have become a challenge for many students and their families. HNU, which extends significant institutional aid, is dependent upon tuition and residence hall revenue. After extensive analysis, the Board of Trustees determined in November 2021 that finding a merger partner was the surest way to sustain the University mission,” Borg added.



The Board of Trustees has been focused on that work for a year, but after a national search there was limited interest, as other colleges and universities deal with similar issues, but also, as Borg explained “there is not only \$49 million in debt on HNU’s property, but as a 65-year old campus the costs of deferred maintenance and compliance upgrades could be over \$200 million. That is a large undertaking for any college or university.”

Though the opportunity to preserve HNU did not materialize, Dominican has agreed to serve as HNU’s designated transfer institution, providing a home for continuing students and some faculty and staff. HNU students who are not able to finish their degree requirements by the end of spring semester will receive a detailed transfer plan to make the transition of academic programs and students as smooth as possible to Dominican or elsewhere.

Borg said the agreement with Dominican is historic in its nature to make sure HNU students graduate. HNU is also developing transfer pathways with other educational institutions to accept students from HNU. During the spring semester, HNU will provide students with detailed and organized information on these institutions to supplement research that the students may wish to do on their own.

“The financial situation of the university changed dramatically this fall,” Borg shared. “It was a herculean effort to find a path to the spring semester and allow HNU an orderly end. This included the procurement of additional financial resources, and collaboration with Dominican. I am so grateful to members of the University cabinet, staff, and faculty; our advisors; and my fellow Trustees.”

He noted there are still some hurdles and agreements that need to be finalized in the coming weeks to solidify the university’s pathway to May 2023 graduation and close.

What Comes Next

“HNU ceasing operation following the spring semester is a wrenching decision informed by immutable financial realities. The University recognizes this decision will impact far more than our students, staff, faculty, and alumni. Altered, too, will be the lives of thousands of family members, friends, community partners, alumni, local businesses, and supporters of HNU. We are focused on supporting our students through this transition. It is important that we be transparent and provide sufficient notice to mitigate adverse impact on our students and allow them time to plan continuation of their studies,” Borg said.

Statement from Dominican University

“The missions and degree offerings of our two institutions are beautifully aligned,” said Dominican University of California President Nicola Pitchford. “And our student populations are similar—Dominican has demonstrated success in supporting students of all backgrounds, so we

know we are well prepared to help Holy Names students thrive. We look forward to inviting Holy Names University's continuing students to a new, vibrant and inclusive home in San Rafael."

Statement of Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary

The U.S.-Ontario Province Leadership Team of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, the sponsoring member of the University, made the following statement:

"The Sisters of the Holy Names are immensely proud of the 154-year history and legacy of Holy Names University. We are deeply saddened that the University will need to cease operations and that future generations will not experience its inspiring mission and values. Our hearts and prayers are with current HNU students, faculty, staff, alumni, and all who are a part of this beloved institution.

"This is a painful moment for all of us, including the University's Board of Trustees, who have been entrusted with leadership and fiduciary responsibility. We know that they have worked tirelessly and with the highest integrity, loyalty, expertise, and commitment to the HNU mission. They have done their due diligence and explored every other alternative available. In the name of all of the Sisters, we thank them for their extraordinary efforts on behalf of Holy Names University."

Statement of Bishop Michael Barber

Bishop Michael Barber, leader of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Oakland noted:

"I am saddened by the closure of Holy Names University. This unfortunate situation is occurring at small colleges throughout the United States. I fully support the actions of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary, the HNU Board, its chair and president, who have kept me and my advisors apprised of the difficult situation they face.

"The tremendous commitment of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary to Holy Names University and the Bay Area leaves a lasting legacy. For more than 150 years, the Sisters have been helping spread the message of the gospel and have brought mercy to action in Oakland and our community. Holy Names has educated generations of new leaders who have and continue to contribute to the vibrancy of our community.

"I pray for all who are impacted by this news, and I pray that the spirit of mercy and generosity exhibited by the Sisters and Holy Names University continues for many generations."

History

Holy Names University is a fully accredited, Roman Catholic, co-educational university. Founded by the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary in 1868, HNU offers a liberal arts and

professional education to prepare a diverse student body for productive lives of leadership and service.

The university was originally established as the Convent of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart in 1868 by six members of the Sisters of the Holy Names, a teaching order from Quebec, Canada. The original site of the convent was on the shores of Lake Merritt. In 1957 the school moved to its present location in the Oakland Hills.

HNU consistently ranks highly in the West Region of the U.S. News and World Report for Campus Ethnic Diversity and as a Top Performer on Social Mobility.

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