

By Lydia Spann

Martha Lou Scott, Baylor's Associate Vice President for Student Life, is humbly interested in every person she comes into contact with, especially students.

Scott was honored in February for her 45 years of service to Baylor. During her time at the university, Scott has worn many different hats and has always been willing to do whatever asked of her.



*Photo: Baylor University*

Scott has been personally investing in students at Baylor for 45 years—and probably longer. Her potential for leadership became apparent while she was a Baylor undergraduate. Five months before she graduated in 1971, she was offered a full-time position in the Office of Women's Residence Halls. She has been serving in various capacities across student life ever since.

"I walked into the women's residence hall to say 'Merry Christmas,'" Scott said. "They had been without an office manager for a month, and they were desperate—so they offered me a job on the spot. I left with the greatest Christmas gift of all time."

In Scott's current position as the Associate Vice President for Student Life, one day never mirrors the next. From before 7:30 a.m., which she would consider late to be arriving to campus, Scott juggles reports, assessments, conversations with parents, meetings with both individuals and groups of students—sometimes laughing and celebrating, other times wiping tears—while helping others catch a vision for their lives. In all that Scott does, her calming demeanor and ability to be fully present, no matter what is going on around her, persists.

"I have never not wanted to come into work," Scott said. "I've always been anxious to get to work the next day because I never know what God has for me that day. I have a schedule, but it depends on what walks in the door that morning."

As the longest-serving staff member currently at Baylor, Scott is one of a few who have witnessed the evolution of the university and student body over the past half-century. The most noticeable changes have come with each new university president, as well as changes politically and culturally, Scott said. The most significant change over Scott's time at Baylor is the explosion of diversity in the student body. Although increasingly diverse, many of the personal qualities of the students attracted to Baylor have remained the same.

"They want to come because they are a mission fit," Scott said. "They think, 'This is a place where I can thrive in my spiritual life'... They will be receiving a degree that fulfills them in all areas of development. That's always been the case and that's true today."

Scott has impacted thousands of students on their way to leadership roles at Baylor and beyond. On many occasions, students who she has disciplined—not her favorite part of the job, yet still one she views as "a redemptive opportunity"—have connected with her years later to explain how her intervention saved them from making the same mistakes in the future, and ultimately, shaped their lives.

"I've done a little bit of everything," Scott said. "If the floor needs to be swept, give me a broom. But if the meeting needs to be lead, give me a chair. I will wear whatever hat is handed to me because that's the person I am."

The most difficult days on the job come when a student dies, whatever the cause, Scott said. She mourns for the lost potential of each and every student, she said.

"Those are the days when I increase my prayer life. You don't do a job like this without a great deal of prayer."

Scott has been personally investing in

Ron English is Baylor's Academic Success Advisor for Referrals. English connects students who may be struggling academically with the resources they need. One resource he knows he can always lean on is Scott.

"If I were one who needed to be disciplined in a loving way, I would want Dr. Scott to be at the table," English said. "She has this unique ability to both hold your feet to the fire—and own up to what you did—but also give you grace, and an opportunity to participate in your own success. Yes, the student may have messed up, but they can be redeemed."

Other staff and faculty at Baylor recognize Scott as a reliable resource for students who may be struggling, whether academically or personally.

"Sometimes as a professor, you come across a student that might be struggling a little," said Sharon Gripp, senior lecturer at Baylor. "Martha Lou Scott is the person that I turn to. I know that if I contact her, the ball won't be dropped—she will follow through with that student and she will help them to get whatever support they need. I just call her and know that that student will be taken care of."

Working in student life allows Scott to watch students grow from the beginning of their journeys at Baylor, through tests and trials, to their success beyond graduation. She is most inspired by the opportunity to witness student success on a daily basis, she said.

"It's like a metamorphosis in human lives—they have to struggle and sometimes it takes a long time, but the student who has to work at being successful at Baylor will continue to be successful for the rest of their lives," Scott said.

"I get to watch as they earn their grit. Sometimes my job is saying 'way to go,' and other times it's pulling them up out of the mire. At times they struggle mightily, but I also get to be there when they are prepared and succeed."

When Scott senses the capacity for leadership in a student, she is intentional about nurturing it in order for that leadership to "blossom." The Office of Student Life provides many opportunities for students to be in the spotlight and learn to have leadership insight, while Scott thrives in her role as cheerleader in the background.

"Scott is willing to get out of her office and put her boots on the ground and really invest in a student," English said. "I don't know others in her position who wouldn't just send someone else to do the groundwork... There's just something about her willingness to enter into a student's story. She wants to walk with students as much as possible. I think that's the picture of Christianity that Baylor strives to embody."

The next 45 years are a blank slate for Scott, who "doesn't quite know what she'll be doing in the next 45 minutes." She plans to work until it's not fun anymore or until God calls her into something else.

"I literally pinch myself some days, thinking this can't be reality," Scott said. "No one should have the privilege I have to work with the people I do."

"God has been good to me; Baylor has been good to me as well."