



A New Season, Built on a Rich Tradition of Excellence

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A longitudinal view of the restoration of the gospel and the establishment and maturation of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints shows a clear and distinct progression of seasons. These include seasons of revelation, proselytizing, gathering, consolidation, dispersion, temple building, global expansion, and hastening of the work. During each of these seasons, all church work and programs were active, but special focus was given to one or two aspects of the work.

BYU-Idaho has experienced a similar progression of seasons. We have experienced in our recent history seasons of program building, rapid curriculum changes and development, and online learning and global influence. We are now entering a season of faculty development and student experiential learning. As with the Church's progress, each season was defined by increased focus on a particular area—while still moving all aspects of the work forward. This new era will build on and continue

to advance the work of prior seasons. While BYU-Idaho (and Ricks College) has been active in developing faculty and students throughout its history, we are entering an era where faculty development and student experiential learning will progress in ways and to degrees we have never experienced before.

At BYU-Idaho, we sometimes refer to experiential learning as faculty development and mentored research (FDMR). This shorthand title is meant to include all aspects of scholarly work. It encompasses what it means to 'practice the craft' of all disciplines. These scholarly activities are a natural outgrowth of something that is very much at the heart of what we are and what we've been, as a University. Alumni of BYU-Idaho and Ricks College often describe the impact that faculty members had upon them. Many have stories of how their lives were touched by a timely and personal interaction with a faculty member. Individual and nurturing interactions of faculty with students have been a hallmark of BYU-Idaho, a central component of the Spirit of Ricks, and something we endeavor to maintain as the school grows and the student-to-faculty ratio increases.

Student mentoring, in the form of FDMR, at Ricks College from the 1960s through 1990s consisted of a few faculty who mentored students as time permitted. Institutional support for research was minimal, but the level of engagement in FDMR was significant for a junior

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college. As Ricks College became BYU-Idaho in 2001, it was commissioned to be a teaching institution focused on student learning. In the early 2000s faculty developed programs and courses generally did not pursue FDMR activities—except in the arts, where a strong earlier tradition continued. Around 2005, administrators and faculty began exploring how to take advantage of the benefits of FDMR for students and faculty while safeguarding the University’s student-and teaching-focused mission. These efforts led to steady strengthening of FDMR on campus. These developments included establishing a campus student research conference; creating the Eastern Idaho Entrepreneurial Center (E-Center); initiating funding for student research; developing a faculty professional development program that encouraged research and included funding for FDMR; forming the Southeast Idaho Research Institute (SIRI). (Today, The E-Center and SIRI have combined and are now known as the Research and Business Development Center, or RBD Center).

BYU-Idaho faculty engage in FDMR to develop themselves and their students. FDMR activities are faculty-driven and student-centered. They enhance learning and teaching, prepare students for careers and advanced education, occur both inside and outside the classroom, and build/strengthen relationships with external entities. BYU-Idaho faculty and administrators use these characteristics

to determine which FDMR activities are appropriate for BYU-Idaho.

Clearly, this type of experiential learning is not new to BYU-Idaho. Still, we often overlook the proven benefits that come from this kind of learning. The following categorized list of benefits builds on the Laursen et al. (2010) summary of previous work:

Personal & Intellectual Benefits

- Develops the individual
- Increases confidence in and motivation for learning and career preparation
- Clarifies, refines, and confirms education and career path
- Reinforces classroom learning and provides opportunities to reflect on and synthesize learning
- Increases GPA, retention (in school and in major), and rate of application to graduate school
- Introduces students to the nature of and current issues in their field
- Teaches how new knowledge / creative works are generated

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- Provides a graduate-like learning experience at the undergraduate level

Skills Development Benefits

- Improves written and oral presentation and communication skills
- Develops ability to understand and analyze the literature
- Builds skills in integrating and synthesizing ideas / information; making judgments about or discerning patterns in evidence or phenomena; applying knowledge in different situations; viewing situations from multiple perspectives; tolerating ambiguity; thinking creatively; analyzing and solving complex, real-world problems; learning on own; and taking intellectual risks
- Increases student ability to pose a question, carry out a project, and share the results with the professional community
- Develops skills in time management, leadership, persistence, and project management
- Increases familiarity and comfort with how professional activities are conducted, including discipline-specific techniques and instrumentation
- Improves ability to work independently

Professional Socialization Benefits

- Establishes collegial relationships with advisors and peers, and engages students in the larger professional community (including attending professional meetings)
- Answers employer and graduate advisor concerns about project management, ability to communicate, work in teams, etc.
- Develops a job / graduate school network and makes students more competitive

- Develops understanding of collaboration as a professional work norm

University faculty must ‘practice their craft’ in order to maintain their professional abilities, including their ability to teach students how to become professionals. Faculty that participate in FDMR benefit from:

- Increased professional development, including knowledge of current developments in their discipline
- Enhanced collaboration with other professionals, both within and outside the University
- Improved teaching ability, which results from renewed passion for the discipline and refreshed ability to understand and work through common obstacles to student learning

Although not all students and faculty experience every benefit listed above, these impressive benefits illustrate why FDMR activities are becoming a central part of BYU-Idaho. FDMR activities are worthy of the resources, efforts, and sacrifices they require.

The recent creation of the Office of Faculty Development and Mentored Research, and the new associate deans in each college, will facilitate FDMR opportunities like never before. Already, FDMR project development and support has been significantly streamlined. The new ‘30+6’ faculty load model will begin to provide faculty with opportunities to engage in meaningful professional development each day, each week. Faculty, departments, and colleges have been given additional resources to support FDMR activities. The ability of faculty and students to connect with external agencies and organizations through the Research and Business Development Center is stronger than ever. Increasingly, faculty and departments are discovering the benefits of FDMR activities for themselves and their students. As a result, more programs are formally incorporating experiential learning into their curricula.

While there is much yet to do, it is remarkable how much progress we’ve made in developing BYU-Idaho-appropriate FDMR over the last several years. Our current



FDMR activities are strong, and growing. Funding and administrative support for these activities are substantial and continues to grow. We are witnessing increased faculty scholarship and eagerly await continued growth. What a remarkable and exciting season to be a faculty member at BYU-Idaho! Our ability as faculty members to bless students has never been greater. We have access to tools, resources, and opportunities that have never been available to this extent before. ❁

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