



Too Comfortable

DAVID COLLINS

Eight years ago I accepted a faculty position at Brigham Young University–Idaho. Having transitioned from two tenure-track positions at Weber State University and Colorado State University–Pueblo, I was confident this new teaching appointment would provide a better future. In Colorado, the pay was poor, the work was hard, and there was very little community in the community. Employee benefits and retirement plans were marginal. Crime rate was high and teen pregnancies were far too frequent. The quality of the public schools was below average, and I worried for my family’s future. During the summers, I sought research employment to maintain progress towards tenure and to support my family. If employment was not found, I worked summers regardless, writing grant proposals and conducting research with graduate and undergraduate students without compensation. Occasionally, I would teach a summer class for adjunct faculty pay, but opportunities were limited. If I did not qualify for merit pay and faculty promotion, my salary would only increase 2-3% per year. However, at Weber State University I never received a salary increase due to state-wide cutbacks. Qualification

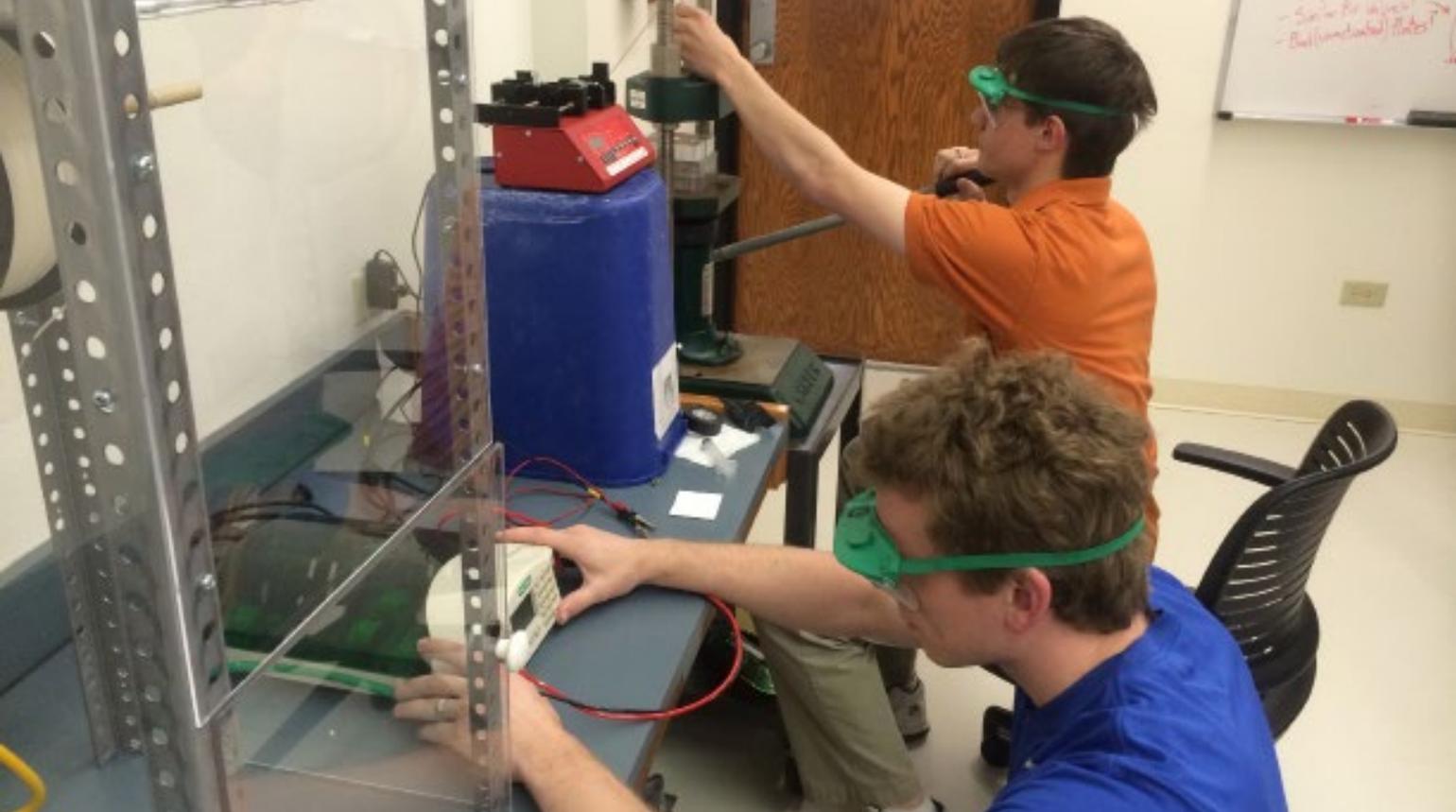
for merit pay and promotion was based upon performance in teaching, service, and research.

For me, BYU–Idaho was an oasis. My salary was significantly better, and I was guaranteed a substantial increase each year without merit pay or promotion. Summer employment was available for everyone. There were no research requirements, and I could attend conferences without presenting. Continuing Faculty Status (CFS) was four years (it is now three) instead of six or seven for tenure. If CFS problems arose, I would be informed in a timely fashion so corrections could be made, but virtually all faculty hired would receive CFS. Retirement and health benefits were significantly better, and I was even given a pension plan! I could park on campus for free and was advised to work 45 hours per week. How could I say no? My Colorado colleagues jokingly asked how to become a Mormon.

Teaching evaluations became more important than with former employments, but opportunities were available to help (e.g., Brown Bags, Spori Summit, and Faculty Conferences). I attended as many activities as I could.

Despite the non-ideal circumstances, I needed to actively contribute to my discipline.

Because I recognized excellent teaching as a hallmark of BYU–Idaho, and I wanted to contribute, teaching activities quickly consumed my time. In fact, I was advised not to participate in additional professional activities due to potential interference with teaching. Reading discipline-specific literature in order to stay current in my field became a low priority. Resources (time, space, and money) were not available to conduct research. Publishing and proposal writing were not required. There were no awards for doing anything beyond teaching and, quite frankly, I lacked time and motivation. Besides, my salary would



increase regardless. I began to wonder if my lackadaisical attitude would compromise my professional future. What if things didn't work out at BYU–Idaho? Would I be qualified for another tenure-track position?

Despite the non-ideal circumstances, I needed to actively contribute to my discipline. Becoming too comfortable would not benefit anybody. If I focused only on teaching, I was concerned I would not adequately represent a professional within my discipline. I needed to participate in professional activities associated with teaching, service, and research; the same three areas required by faculty at other universities. I did not know how, but I needed to try.

Profession-ALL Development

The hardest part of life is knowing when it is and when it is not about me. The older I get, the more I realize it is less about me. Professional development activities indirectly benefit my family (securing my job), the students, the department, the college, the University, and my discipline. More importantly, faculty professional development can directly support student professional development if students are included. I made the mistake

of publishing my first article at BYU–Idaho without involving students. All subsequent publications have now included student coauthors.

Teaching

It was easy to justify allocating time to lecture preparation, course development, course modification, test writing, office hours, review sessions, and grading. Time was spent developing chemistry laboratories, incorporating the iPad and Apple TV into the classroom, utilizing hybrid teaching methods, experimenting with a “flipped” classroom, creating instructional videos, employing classroom response systems, implementing online homework, and developing novel Excel laboratory templates. I was given release time to establish three new required chemistry courses (CHEM 391, 420, and 421), and like most, each semester was something new. In fact, I have spent more time doing these types of activities at BYU–Idaho than at previous teaching appointments.

I hoped to also formally share my teaching ideas and activities with others. As well as publishing forensic science pedagogical material, I have been fortunate to publish two peer-reviewed articles in the Journal of

I made the mistake of publishing my first article at BYU–Idaho without involving students. All subsequent publications have now included student coauthors.

Chemical Education, “The Unit Cell: Marbles, Magnets, and Stacking Arrangements” and “The Journal of Kitchen Chemistry: A Tool for Instructing the Preparation of a Chemistry Journal Article.” Because most faculty at BYU–Idaho teach three equivalent semesters, it is challenging to find time to formally contribute teaching success with those in our professions. I am greatly inspired by the teaching innovations of faculty at BYU–Idaho, especially those that go unnoticed.

Service

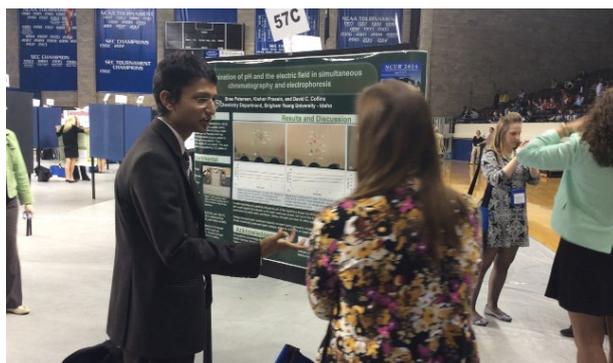
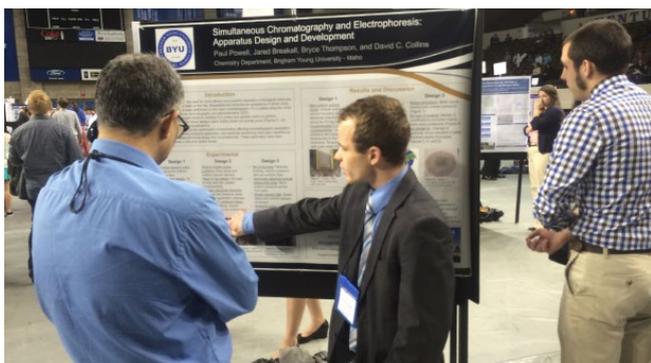
I agreed to serve as the faculty advisor for the Student Affiliate Chapter of the American Chemical Society. While serving for over six years, the society earned two “Commendable” and two “Honorable Mention” national recognitions. For several years I served as an organizer and University liaison for the “Science Adventure” (local science fair). I promoted the science fair by regularly organizing and performing science demonstrations at local schools. I also served for two years as an American Chemical Society Science Coach, earning Madison High School \$1000 for its chemistry program.

Research

Contributing to my discipline through traditional research activities was, and still is, my greatest challenge. A

significant amount of space and resources are required (in addition to time) to perform research in the sciences. I began conducting side projects with one or two students each semester, using teaching labs for space and teaching instruments with stockroom supplies for resources. Occasionally, the Chemistry Department would buy a specific chemical for our work, but usually, if we didn’t have it, we couldn’t do it. Although projects were of little significance to the scientific community, the students gained experience. Because students were not paid, it was hard to make progress. Most students would only work one semester and then present their findings at the Research and Creative Works Conference. We would virtually start over each semester. When money became available to pay the students (or perform research for credit), interest increased and a few students worked on projects for several semesters.

In an attempt to focus efforts, I acquired donated equipment from a former colleague and began researching the separation of compounds. Despite my efforts, work was slow and haphazard. I wondered if a collaborator might provide funding and offer an improved direction. I contacted several businesses and universities seeking assistance. Most were excited for the possibilities, but the logistics were too challenging. Waters Technologies Corporation was interested in



having our students develop application notes for their instruments, but Rexburg was not populated enough to meet their criteria. Young Living Essential Oils needed help collecting data for publication and volunteered to purchase a very expensive instrument for BYU–Idaho if we agreed to provide the labor. In the end funding was an issue. Finally, Matt Linford from the BYU Chemistry Department agreed to send a new diamond column used to separate compounds. We evaluated the column and presented our work locally. Matt then requested the column be returned.

I needed to try something different. I ultimately desired to establish a traditional, independent research group. I had understood proposal writing for grant money was not possible at BYU–Idaho; besides, it would tie me to a deadline and take away from teaching. In order to meet the demands of the increasing student population, I knew I needed to teach every semester, but I also wanted to conduct research every semester. My solution was to find a research area that required few resources and was manageable with a full teaching load. I decided to research an antiquated technique loosely related to my area of expertise that needed a facelift. Because the research was novel, I began sending students to regional chemistry conferences. We were initially criticized due to the archaic and rudimentary nature of the work, but the work was still innovative and, well, it was all we could afford.

Soon we were encouraged to publish. After five submissions to three different journals, our first article was accepted, “Simultaneous Chromatography and Electrophoresis: Two-Dimensional Planar Separations.” Surprisingly, our peer-reviewed article was one of four featured on the cover of an issue of *Analytical and Bioanalytical Chemistry*. Nine students were coauthors! The article was also recently cited in a review article presenting significant contributions to this area of research. In addition, one of my current students was selected to present our research in Washington, D.C. to several elected government officials. Less than 10% of all applicants were selected. Over the years, I have been blessed with students able to present at most BYU–Idaho Research and Creative Works conferences, and many regional and national conferences.

I currently mentor four to six students each semester. During the last two years, conditions have greatly improved! The administration has decided to support six hours of leave each year for professional activities; I look forward to taking advantage of this in the future. In addition, our department has been able to pay all student research assistant wages, the college has provided funds to purchase needed supplies, and the University has remodeled a room for research space. Now, other faculty in the Chemistry Department are beginning to conduct research.

I am very blessed to work at BYU–Idaho! I hope to stay until I retire. I do not wish to take advantage by becoming too comfortable. My initial intentions for contributing to my discipline through professional development may have been somewhat selfish. Continuing to develop in all areas of life, however, is less about me and more about others. I am humbled by those who spend more time making things better for others. If I want my students to work hard, I need to work hard. And, yes, supporting professional activities does require additional time. I have yet to find a remedy, but I have found great satisfaction in attempting to balance capabilities with responsibilities. ❀

