

## WHAT WE ARE ASKED TO DO

*Fenton Broadhead—Academic Vice President*

*Editor's note: Fenton spoke with Scott Samuelson on 24 April 2008.*

Scott: As you have begun your duties as our new academic vice president, what principles and practices have you felt inclined to emphasize?

Fenton: I have felt that we need to focus our effort in three areas:  
aligning our academic resources,  
deepening our learning model experiences,  
expanding the learning community.

We have been moving forward with a number of imperatives, programs, and changes. In order for us to progress with these changes we are making, we need to provide and align our resources. This entails reorganizing a few areas. We have asked faculty to work on foundations, online courses, the learning model and process. We have to examine all of our resources and decide how to best help our faculty. We have to orient faculty on what resources are available and provide assistance with the use of those resources.

The second area of focus is to deepen our learning model experiences. The learning model isn't something that is completely new or something that is hard to understand. There are five core principles that need to serve as a foundation. As we study and contemplate the principles, promptings will come to us on how we can deepen our use of the principles of the learning model. It would be beneficial for every faculty member to review the principles and find ways to integrate the learning model into all of your work. As a follow up to the learning model, we have the learning process. The learning process that comes from the model has three basic steps. The first being preparation, the second is teaching one another, and the third is ponder/prove. Many have used parts of the model and process in their teaching. We need to take the best of what we have used and put it with what we continue to learn and understand.

If you add outcomes to preparation, teaching one another, ponder and prove, you have the basic design of the learning process. The architecture of linking these four areas together becomes the important challenge in creating an effective learning and teaching environment. Our direction is to link

these four steps. Each of us should develop two or three key points in each of the areas.

The third area of emphasis is the expansion and development of the learning community. I remember Elder Bednar's statement that we have an opportunity to create something at BYU–Idaho, and with this we have a responsibility to provide an inspired learning and teaching environment. My hope is that we can become part of a team where we apply the fifth principle of the learning model. This is that we will love, serve, and teach one another. Our ability to help each other develop in the learning process will be the same concept as students teaching students. Faculty teaching faculty will bless our university. I envision the time when we visit each other's classrooms to see what we can learn. We will have a feeling of being part of something much larger than each one of us. Continuous improvement and the full investment of each one of us is most important in our development.

In summary with respect to this question:

- We need to align and use our resources effectively.
- We need to deepen our understanding and application of the learning model.
- We need to continue to develop and improve our learning community.

Scott: We have been taught that Brigham Young University–Idaho has a prophetic destiny that goes along with the development of the Church and Kingdom. How do you see the academic branch relating to the prophetic destiny of the university and the Church?

Fenton: It is apparent to me that the better students prepare themselves, and the better the faculty help prepare students—in academics, in leadership, and in spirituality—the easier it is for the Lord to use them in the future. A very qualified student with deep skills can be used anywhere by the Lord. Part of the destiny and growth of the Kingdom lies in the help we give to prepare excellent students. I think all of the Church's institutions of higher learning are growing and changing in some ways. We should not think we are better than the others. That mentality is very dangerous. When we get away from competition, we can say that we are doing the best we can with the resources we have, and we are producing sharp, solid young men or

young women who will be a credit to this institution and a credit to the Church. All of the sudden we help all rise to new levels.

In the business world, for example, companies will hire people, and if those employees cannot produce or rise to a new level, the company fires them. By contrast, we are in the business of helping the children of our Father in Heaven and assisting them all to improve. We exist to help all of those who come to us to be better than they were. When we succeed, it makes it easy for the Lord to place them where he needs them. Then the Church grows. Our graduates go to work with people who are not members of the Church, and our graduates bless the lives of all they meet. If our students ever think that they can make it solely on ability to associate and communicate with people, they have missed an important part of the picture. They need to have competency in their particular academic field. They need to be able to write. They need to be able to speak. They need to have quantitative skills. The better the quality of the graduate, the easier it is for the Lord to place them or help use them as an instrument and the more they'll bless the Church throughout the world.

Our work with the learning model complements the on-going emphasis in the Church on improving teaching and learning. Look at the Worldwide Leadership Training broadcast, *Teaching, No Greater Call*, and *Preach My Gospel*. I feel that our biggest challenge is to make sure we do not make the learning process so complicated that we think that man was made for the learning model. No, the learning model was made as a tool for all of us. Think of President Hinckley's comment about non-members coming into the Church; we say we want them to come and bring the best of their religion and we will add to it. Larry Thurgood suggested that when we think of applying that principle to the learning model, we want faculty to bring the best of what they are doing and then let the principles of the learning model add a little more to it. If we start trying to push or make the learning model look like a big program, then people resist. But if we help them understand that the learning model is a restatement of simple principles and processes that have been taken from things they are already doing, then they start to rise because they realize they are already doing some of this. We ought to

demystify the learning model with the idea that it is basically simple.

I want to mention that another way we can bless the world is to develop better online courses and find other ways of teaching people using electronic resources. I hesitate to say some of this because somebody may think that we are trying to play a role greater than it is. But I can see the blessing of what we learn about online teaching to blessing members of the Church throughout the world. For instance, could you ever see the day that somebody in South America could take an accounting cluster online—not even a full degree. How that could bless them in their workplace. Or imagine a mother in Japan taking three or four courses on family and child development. How that could bless them. We could serve some who can never set foot on this campus. I think that BYU, BYU–Hawaii, and BYU–Idaho could put our resources together without increasing cost, making education better and simpler, and make sure we help meet some of the learning needs of the people in the world.

Scott: I have often felt that the quality of a student’s experience in a class is directly proportional to a teacher’s increasing knowledge. What do you see as being some of the factors that would help faculty to learn and grow?

Fenton: One of the challenges of the last few years is that we have had a lot of change. Sometimes we feel so consumed by doing new things that we haven’t learned how to use our resources efficiently. I return to my theme of using resources. Sure, with the new calendar we are teaching fewer weeks now, but maybe we do not need all of the knowledge delivered that we had in the past. We need to get in to our subject deeply, and faculty stimulate their own learning by helping students find that depth. We need to be able to define outcomes and find ways to achieve them without delivering volumes of knowledge that may not relate. We can help students think about preparation outside of class and also to work more efficiently.

By developing outcomes for courses, the faculty develop added perception and depth. Faculty have actually got to become better at time management by learning to decide what is most important. Faculty must keep asking, “What are the outcomes for the class, and what are the best ways that we can use to arrive there?” In the past we have built

from recall to understanding to application and expansion. But I think we should consider teaching application first and *then* encourage understanding and recall. Think about your own learning experience: having to complete a task or learn how to fix or do something causes an instant drive or desire for knowledge and understanding. Naturally, there has to be recall and understanding, but faculty have to understand that application and expansion will create faster learning and retention than starting with recall and understanding. You start with your outcomes.

I just came from a University Forum today given by the vice president over research at Utah State University. He did an excellent job talking about ideas, inventions, and innovation. At his institution they have students doing both undergraduate and graduate research. You can image a faculty mentoring students in research projects. That process stimulates and renews the faculty because they have to stay ahead and are involved in research that benefits our students. It is stimulating and builds students.

I believe one of my major responsibilities is showing faculty that we are in this learning process together; we help each other and move forward. I think that foundations has been a good stimulus. I can think of a faculty member who is not trained primarily in science. I would love to have that person teach a science or social science foundations class because he has a lot to offer. Teaching foundations would be a stimulus to him that would develop him academically. So if we can use our resources, help students do things that faculty do not need to do, help faculty develop better ways of delivering, and learn how to be facilitators, faculty will become excited. They know the project better. They know the case study better. I think that is part of faculty developing depth. We never wanted our faculty to think that they would go away from continual development.

Scott: If it were possible to have all faculty in an informal setting without the distance of a huge meeting, what would you say to us? What appeal might you make to the faculty of BYU–Idaho?

Fenton: I think some of it will seem rather simple, but the first thing I'd say is, Look, we are in this together, and we are very blessed that we have an opportunity to work here and we have to

continually improve. We are in our eternal progression, and we have to take full investment in what we are doing. We are not trying to make one look better than the other, but to help and teach and learn with each other. Let us make each other feel good about what we are doing. We faculty need to realize that those taking care of the custodial or the audio-visual responsibility are also together with us in this. We are not striving for recognition or trying to ascend. Let us exercise the principle that we love, serve, and teach one another.

Second, we need to evaluate how we use our resources, and we need to align them. We do not necessarily need more money to do things better. We need to work smarter, and we need to figure out what we need and what we do not need. Let us each ask how we can take some responsibility of improving what we are doing, but yet at the same time realize that it is not about always asking for more money. Sure, we need certain equipment items or personnel, but we do not have to grow expenditures the way the world does.

Third, we have to learn how to work in councils. If we were sitting here informally, you would tell me what you think we need in your area or what is taking place or we would identify a problem. You would give me your input, and you would trust me that I am listening to understand you, and you trust that in the end I take the information and we make the best decision we can based on counseling, studying, and praying (Doctrine and Covenants 9:7-9). We do not fully understand councils in the church and in education. We tend to call everything a council, so it becomes a buzzword. It's not a council unless we are sincerely taking input, discussing, giving feedback, going back and forth on important issues. Then we realize in the end somebody will have to make a decision. That is important. We need to be very transparent and honest with each other: honest on budgets, honest in counsel. That is a key.

Fourth, my next appeal is that I hope that faculty can visualize the possibilities in the learning model. I hope you can simplify it and make it yours. We need to realize that all teachers have to have design and structure in teaching. We cannot just wing it. We have to have measurements, so we can tell if we are getting better or if our methods are more effective to students.

I want faculty to understand that they are doing great things. We emphasize the learning model principles so we have a common structure and true principles, so we can help one another improve. If we are all over the place with every aspect of teaching, it is hard to help teachers improve. In the learning model we have identified basic design and delivery methods. Within those reference points you've got complete freedom to do a lot of things. I hope faculty will understand this concept rather than thinking that the Learning model is a mandated program. The learning model is a guide that allows us to have a house of order for training, for evaluation, and for improvement.

Fifth, I think the other thing I would mention is that we need to understand that this is a learning community, and the better we treat each other and the more we share, the more we are going to continuously get better. Do not worry about being a star. I think it is important that I just want to learn how to teach better. It is all about learning. Remember the Prophet Joseph Smith's injunction that we should increase our knowledge in all areas.

I envision an attitude that we can slip into each other's classes just for the sake of observing good teaching, and our fellow teachers feel good about having us come that day because the visit is not an evaluation—it is a friend wanting to learn. I hope we can get our faculty to the point of believing that we are going to each others' class today because we want to see what we can learn about something he or she is doing in teaching. And could you imagine what would happen if we ever got to that point? Most of the time now when we visit, it is an evaluation, but we have got to make this natural to where we share and welcome each other's visits.

Or maybe I want to learn how to make pottery, so I just go to the class because I want to learn something new. Or I go to a history class because they are covering a certain area of interest to me and it would be helpful to learn something in that particular area. Let us have a learning community where we know that we are going to continually improve, where we feel natural with each other, where we are fully invested in what we are doing.

Last, I want faculty and staff to feel my appreciation for all that they do. They are good—in fact they provide many

excellent learning opportunities and we will all become better together.

That is what I would say to the faculty if we were in an informal, comfortable setting just chatting. ☺