

ARCHITECTURE AND CONSTRUCTION:
BUILDING IN THE KINGDOM

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For the past nine years, faculty in BYU–Idaho’s Department of Architecture and Construction have felt like they are teaching in a living laboratory. Since the transition to BYU–Idaho, the opportunity to witness and take part in so many campus and community construction projects has been rewarding.

Excitement in the Austin Building was especially perceptible early last spring as we watched the first of the 90-foot pre-tensioned concrete columns, which form the structure of the new auditorium building, being put into place. It seemed we had watched forever as a huge hole was dynamited and excavated for the foundation of the building. And then we watched as the hole was mostly filled back in, and it seemed like weeks and months went by during which there was little outward evidence of work going on. During this time, as the work seemed to progress slowly, the footings and foundations that were to support this great structure were carefully prepared and put into place. At the same time, much planning and preparation behind the scenes was also accomplished. The installation of that first column marked a major shift in the construction process and signaled that the project was now *out of the ground* and had entered the next phase: *vertical construction*. It was exciting to watch as, over the course of one short summer and fall, the vertical construction of this building was accomplished, and the structure was *topped out*, with the roof installed, just in time to beat the cold and wind of another Rexburg winter.

When he was president of BYU–Idaho, Elder Bednar frequently used the phrase “campus construction chaos” to describe the myriad of building projects undertaken on campus to support the transition from Ricks College to BYU–Idaho. Elder Bednar also warned that the real “campus construction chaos” would not truly begin until the additions to the Hart and Manwaring Buildings were undertaken. A reason he warned us was because he had some idea of the magnitude of the projects being planned. Even he may not have known the scale to which projects would eventually evolve, as plans to expand the Hart Building were set aside in favor of an entirely new auditorium building four times larger than the originally planned expansion.¹ Watching that spectacular new building rise out of the ground, we have all been impressed by the scale of what we see.

Likewise, watching the construction project that we call BYU–Idaho rise out of the ground these past nine years, we have also been impressed

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by the scope and scale of the university being formed. The construction of the auditorium building seems like an appropriate metaphor for BYU-Idaho as a disciple preparation center, and the role of the architecture and construction department within it, preparing students to become part of the workforce and the larger society away from the campus. I will begin this discussion with a brief history of the architecture and construction program.

The Ricks College Construction Management Program closely mirrored the first two years of the four-year construction management program at BYU Provo. There was an expectation at the beginning of the construction management program at Ricks College that students who desired to complete a four-year degree would be able to transfer to Provo and finish the final two years of study there. Rapid growth of the program in Provo made that original expectation difficult to realize. Because of the growth in the program at Provo, and the reality that many more students wanted into its program than could be served, Provo implemented an enrollment cap. This cap made it increasingly difficult for our graduates to transfer. By the time of the transition in 2000, we were able to transfer only a few students per year to Provo. The remainder of the graduates either went to work in the industry or transferred to construction and architecture programs at other universities.

Neither of those options was completely satisfactory. Students who tried to transfer to other universities found that it was difficult to get credit for many of our classes and frequently found they were repeating an extra year or two of coursework. Graduates with four-year degrees in construction management were in significant demand, but graduates of two-year schools appeared to be less so. Even when we were able to place our graduates, they were usually hired at salaries that were significantly less than those with four-year degrees. As a faculty, we tried hard to encourage construction companies to visit our campus and interview our students. Brother Garth Jensen and I, along with our students, would attend the career fair sponsored by the Student Chapters of the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) at their international builders' show. Brother Jensen and I would put on our suits and ties and tell our students that we were going tracting as we visited with employers to encourage them to attend our semi-annual campus career fair. While we were able to place an occasional student, we were never able to entice a single employer to visit our campus. The transition changed all that in a way that seemed magical. Almost from the day of the announcement by President Hinckley of the creation of BYU-Idaho, employers began to take an increased interest in students in our program, and also began to express a desire to visit our campus. This had always been our goal because we knew that they would be impacted by a visit.

Working at BYU–Idaho on a daily basis, it is easy to take for granted the spirit and power that is here. It is easy to forget that others don't feel that same power of the Holy Ghost daily in their lives. In general conference, Elder Glenn L. Pace described a similar phenomenon:

When seeking a testimony, those of you born into the Church may be looking for some spectacular spiritual feeling different than anything that you have ever felt before. You may have heard recent converts testify of their conversion and wonder if you are missing something. One reason that it seems so spectacular to them is that it is new.

You have had that same feeling your whole life during family home evenings, youth testimony meetings, seminary classes, scripture readings, and on many other occasions.²

I remember my first visit to this campus, for my employment interview, and the spirit that was here. I was profoundly moved, and I knew I wanted to be part of it. President Henry B. Eyring understood the power and spirit that is here when he spoke these now familiar prophetic words:

I hope I live long enough to someday meet some employer who employed one of you and says, "Where did that come from? I've never had such a person. Why people just flock around that person. And they want to follow. They don't have to be led; they're seeking to go where that person wants to go. And they come up with new ideas. I don't know where that comes from. They seem to find a better way, and the budget doesn't go up. I can't understand it." And I'll smile and say, "Well, come with me to Rexburg." And I may not be able to show it to you, and I may not be able to prove it to you, but you'll feel it. There will be a spirit here, I so testify, because of the love of God for all of His faithful children. And those blessings will be poured out here in rich abundance.³

Less than five weeks after President Eyring spoke those words, I had the opportunity to host two senior vice presidents of a Fortune 500 company on a visit to our campus. At a luncheon that day, I listened as they spoke of their visit and what they felt. I knew that I had been privileged to witness the fulfillment of prophecy.

In the years since that experience, hundreds of employers have visited this campus to recruit, interview, and hire students in the architecture and construction program. Many have felt the spirit that is here and have been touched by it. I have one dear friend, Larry Johnson, who is a member of the Church and a construction manager in California. Larry has stewardship responsibility in his employment for several hundred individuals. He is profoundly grateful for the opportunity that his children have had to attend BYU–Idaho. He has made over a dozen recruiting trips to this campus and has been responsible for helping to place many students in both internships and full-time employment. He loves to bring

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his associates to the campus, and each time he comes he tries to bring a few individuals who have not been here before so they can have the experience too. He told me once about the gospel conversations he was having with one of his employees, and he finished by saying, “I need to get him out to visit BYU–Idaho.”

Efforts and experiences of friends and faculty have been instrumental in helping to begin the initial flow of potential employers to this campus, but the real force moving those efforts forward have come from the students themselves. Again I quote President Eyring speaking about the graduates of BYU–Idaho:

From that example they—you—will become life-long teachers in their families, in the Church, and in their work, and they will bless others wherever they go by what they have learned about innovating with scarce resources and treating all they have as if it were the Lord’s.

You can imagine the joy of an employer or a Church leader when such a graduate arrives. The graduates will be at personal peace by having kept the commandments. They will be natural leaders who know how to teach and how to learn. They will have the power to innovate and improve without requiring more of what money can buy. Those graduates of BYU–Idaho will become—and this is a prophecy that I am prepared to make and make solemnly—those graduates of BYU–Idaho will become legendary for their capacity to build the people around them and to add value wherever they serve.⁴

This is another fulfillment of prophecy. As our students have left BYU–Idaho and worked in the industry, either as interns or as full-time employees, most have lived up to President Eyring’s expectations. Their work, lives, and goodness have been noticed, and their employers come to BYU–Idaho seeking more. The motto in the architecture and construction department is “It only takes one.” We have found that time and time again, shortly after placing a single student with an employer, that employer calls to inquire about hiring more.

To illustrate: Shortly after we became a four-year program, the architecture and construction students at BYU–Idaho began participating in a regional student competition sponsored by the Associated Schools of Construction in Reno, Nevada. At this competition, students from BYU–Idaho compete against teams of students from other construction management programs located around the United States. The competition includes working practical problems in construction and design. One of the attractions of having our students participate is the career fair that is held in conjunction with the competition. At the career fair, construction companies from all over the western United States recruit construction management students for internships and full-time employment. This event is considered one of this region’s premier venues for finding a

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position in the construction industry. At this career fair, a number of our students had the opportunity to speak with managers from a commercial construction company in Washington and Oregon. The managers were impressed enough with our students that they decided to plan a trip to the BYU–Idaho career fair. They brought a large team of managers and spent several days interviewing students, eventually hiring half a dozen to fill both internship and full-time positions. The next year, in Reno at the same career fair, the same managers invited to dinner the BYU–Idaho faculty members who had accompanied the students to the competition. As drinks were being ordered, a construction manager who was sitting next to Brother Troy Miller ordered a soft drink, leaned over to Brother Miller and whispered, “I am reading the book” (Book of Mormon). He went on to explain that he had been driving to his construction site every day with Travis Kay, a BYU–Idaho graduate whom he had hired the previous year. He had grown interested in the gospel by Kay’s example and the discussions they had while driving to work.

The aggregate effects of thousands of BYU–Idaho students who have continued to conduct their lives by the principles fostered here is having a profound influence on our efforts to build the Kingdom of God. Most just live quiet lives of simple goodness, raising their families and serving in their wards and communities. Let me share two such examples, not because they are particularly extraordinary, but more because they are ordinary and illustrate what President Hinckley meant when he spoke on this campus of how the work of the kingdom is done by ordinary people who have learned to work in extraordinary ways.⁵ I use these two examples because they are fresh in my mind after having returned recently from Las Vegas, Nevada, where we traveled with a group of students to attend the NAHB International Builders’ Show.

The first example is that of Brian and Shannon Drees, now of Las Vegas. Both Brian and Shannon are recent graduates of the construction management program at BYU–Idaho. While in Las Vegas, our faculty had the opportunity to dine with them and catch up on their news. While students at BYU–Idaho, Brian and Shannon represented the university on award-winning competitive teams. Shannon served as president of the Architecture and Construction Management Society (ACMS), which is the student society on campus for both the NAHB and the Associated General Contractors. Shannon, who graduated a year before Brian, applied her skills working for Rulon Nielsen in the campus architect’s office, helping to accomplish much of the on-campus remodeling that has occurred the past few years. At the same time, Brian worked for Karla Groom as a peer advisor in the Career and Academic Advising Center of the College of Physical Sciences and Engineering. I have heard both Brother Nielsen and Sister Groom express how difficult it was going to

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be to replace these two student employees when they were gone. Upon graduation, Brian and Shannon accepted employment offers in Las Vegas, where they are active in their local ward and their careers in construction. Shannon said that in their small subdivision five of the eight families are members of the LDS Church and graduates of either BYU–Idaho or BYU–Provo. Having known Brian and Shannon for many years, I know they are the type of young people described by President Eyring who are a joy to both their employers and their bishops.

Secondly, there is the story of Mike Henderson. Mike was in Las Vegas as the coach for a competitive team from New Mexico Junior College in Hobbs, New Mexico. I had the honor a couple of years ago to recommend Mike as he applied for a faculty position in New Mexico. When the dean of the college called to ask about Mike, I was able to tell her about my experience with him as a student, how during his time here he served as the captain of two competitive teams, one of which brought home a first place finish for the first time in BYU–Idaho’s history. I told her Mike had served as the president of the ACMS student chapter and that under his leadership the chapter grew to be recognized as the single largest NAHB student chapter in the nation. More importantly, I had the opportunity to tell her about Mike’s integrity. Mike was always smiling and optimistic in any situation. I expressed my view that he would be a wonderful choice to fill the position. She said that she felt the same, but she was worried he was almost too good to be true. With great joy I assured her that he was everything he appeared to be. In Las Vegas, Mike brought a competitive team comprised of two young men and two young women who were representing their school for the first time in its history to a national event. I had the chance to talk with these students, none of whom were members of the LDS Church, and to feel the deep respect and admiration they had for him. I also know Mike will continue to powerfully influence the lives of these students and others for many years. These two examples represent many hundreds who have graduated from the architecture and construction program at BYU–Idaho and are now living, working, and building in God’s kingdom across the United States.

The process of building anything—whether a building, a program, a university, or even the Kingdom of God—consists of many processes, parts, and pieces. Even a simple home is comprised of thousands of pieces that require hundreds of processes to assemble, each piece accounted for and each process occurring in proper order. We rely on architects for plans and specifications and on construction managers to guide the process. In the architecture and construction department we study the physical construction process, and we also study the spiritual process of building

the Kingdom. In building the Kingdom we follow the architecture of the Lord and rely upon his earthly managers, the apostles and prophets.

I was particularly touched by lines from President Bednar, quoted by President Eyring in the talk I mentioned earlier, who had spoken to the BYU–Idaho faculty about Spartanism. President Bednar praised the Spartan characteristics of self-discipline, self-restraint, and frugality as desirable virtues for BYU–Idaho. After quoting President Bednar, President Eyring said,

I am not sure where the Spartans got those characteristics, but I know why they are possessed by true disciples of Jesus Christ. Latter-day Saint pioneers came to this place for the Lord. They built this school in their poverty. The first principal, Jacob Spori, housed his family in an unheated grain storage shed in his first winter because that's all they had. The people here have treated all they had as the Lord's and always counted it as enough. And they have used it as if it was the offering of the poorest widow to her Lord and to His Kingdom. Nor have they felt badly treated when the Lord asked them to take less and yet give more. Because of that faithful obedience and sacrifice, I certify the Lord has poured out His Spirit here.

There will be a practical benefit, in turbulent times, from that frugality borne of faith. There will come times when the Lord's prophet will ask us to do more with less. Knowing that will come, we must and will find ways to improve and to innovate that require little or no money. We will depend more upon inspiration and perspiration to make improvements than upon buildings and equipment. Then hard economic times will have little effect on the continuous innovation that will not cease at this school, even in the most difficult times.⁶

Those words were especially poignant as I read them in Las Vegas, thinking of the current recession, which has hit residential construction particularly hard. I spoke with my counterparts in other universities where programs and faculty are being cut. Just a few days prior to my leaving for Las Vegas, President Clark announced the increase in the BYU–Idaho enrollment cap. I was again struck by the reality of the inspiration that guides this place.

In the beginning stages of the construction of the auditorium building, the work seemed to move slowly, but in truth much was being accomplished in the way of preparation to move the building forward rapidly when the appropriate time came. The foundation was excavated out of solid rock and much that was taken out was put back in and carefully compacted in order to provide a solid platform for the giant cranes that would be needed to set the pillars, walls, and roof that would form the structure. Careful attention was paid to each detail, from leveling the surface to choreographing the movements of two giant cranes, requiring computer simulation to ensure that they could move in tandem without interference

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with each other as columns, panels, and trusses of the building were set in place. While things seemed to be moving slowly on the site, out of sight and unnoticed—sometimes hundreds of miles away—building components were being fabricated to careful tolerances.

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I believe that in the building project called BYU–Idaho we find ourselves at a point similar to where we were last spring with the auditorium building. Foundations that will carry the structure have been carefully placed. The cranes of the Learning Model are being put into place. With the recent announcement of the increase in the enrollment cap, we receive a new concept of magnitude. It is my conviction that over the next months and years, as we see this structure develop, a better university will rise out of the earth, and we will find that our divine architect has put into place the planning and processes that will be needed to carry the *vertical construction* through to a successful completion. When this structure is finally *topped out*, it will be much more encompassing than we can now imagine. ☺

NOTES

- 1 Brett Stone and Ryan Kunz, Brigham Young University–Idaho *Scroll*, 2 February 2009, Page 1.
- 2 Glenn L. Pace, “Do You Know?” *Ensign* (May 2007): 78–79.
- 3 Henry B. Eyring, “A Steady, Upward Course,” Brigham Young University–Idaho Devotionals and Speeches Archives (September 18, 2001), http://www.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2001_09_18_Eyring.htm.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 Gordon B. Hinckley, “Dedication of Gordon B. Hinckley Building,” Brigham Young University–Idaho Devotionals and Speeches Archives (October 22, 2002), http://www.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2002_10_22_Hinckley.htm.
- 6 Eyring.