

WHAT COLOR OF BLUE ARE YOU?

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My decision to apply for a position here at BYU-Idaho was a matter of some controversy among the members of my extended family. My parents graduated from Utah State University as did all of my aunts and uncles. My maternal grandparents graduated from the Agricultural College of Utah as it was known in their day; and, although he was not a graduate, my great grandfather also attended classes at that same institution. My father's parents were also graduates of universities located farther south along the Wasatch Range, and although they were not "True Blue Aggies," I found a way to love them all the same. I must confess my grandfather was a graduate of Brigham Young University (Provo), but the fact that he majored in chemistry at least partly compensated for any contrary feelings I harbored toward that institution during my years as a prospective chemist in Logan.

I was not always convinced that I wanted to pursue teaching as a profession. My initial interests in chemistry were sparked by a book written by Max Perutz on structure-based drug design. Dr. Perutz was a pioneer in the field of x-ray crystallography at the M.R.C. Laboratory of Molecular Biology at Cambridge University. This technique has been applied to discover the structure and folding patterns of proteins involved in a variety of physiological processes. Fascinated by the prospect of developing therapeutic drugs based on the structure of a protein of interest, I pursued further studies in the field of biochemistry.

In spite of my enthusiasm for the subject, I became frustrated at the lack of balance and long-term perspective harbored by many of the researchers in that field and the cultural environment of academia that fosters such imbalance and focus. Although study within a graduate school does provide an excellent opportunity to develop advanced skills and to examine in depth a given field of study, I felt the expectations and certain performance standards could not be satisfied concurrently with my own personal goals or those of my family. So I made a decision. My family would come first, work second. At the time, my young children thought I was the neatest person around (when their mother was not in the room), and I didn't want to sacrifice this crucial time to develop a wonderful relationship with them for the sake of another experiment or publication.

These same feelings were very much on my mind as I neared completion of school and began thinking about long-term employment. I decided to pursue teaching because I had enjoyed being a teaching assistant at the University and thrived on the interaction with the students and loved

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hearing a student say, “Oh,” when learning something for the first time. However, I did not feel that I could be comfortable in a typical academic environment, where research dominates the intellectual landscape. I wanted to be a part of an institution where the focus was on learning, not teaching.

Reflecting on the day I came to interview, there are a few impressions I remember. One was the commitment to maintain small class sizes, so learning may occur through a one-by-one experience. The concept of integrated versus specialized degrees was something new to me. And as I thought about the types of job descriptions I had read over the past few months, very few specified a particular degree as a prerequisite for employment; instead, specific skills were in great demand. Finally, the “Spirit of Ricks” was something I had not experienced, having attended a gentile university.

The importance of building a secular education on a foundation of faith, testimony, and obedience to the commandments of our Heavenly Father has given me a new perspective for teaching and learning. I believe the importance of this is well stated in 2 Nephi 9:29, “But to be learned is good if they hearken unto the counsels of God.” Spiritual excellence precedes and qualifies us for academic excellence. I believe the Lord expects both at this institution, and both may be achieved by students and faculty who participate in this work at BYU-Idaho. So, with a grateful heart and a clearer perspective of learning and how it can be accomplished, I trade “Aggie blue” for royal blue.

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