

TEACHING LOAD: WHAT IT IS IS HOW WE SEE IT

Vaun Waddell—Editor

Surprises awaited me at Ricks College: The faculty association did not conduct faculty meeting. Teachers had little to say about the institution. I was accountable for my students' feelings. The College took as much interest in social growth as in academic preparation. With moonlighting, Latter-day Saint family life, and ecclesiastical callings, there remained almost no impetus for collegiality. (Have you seen a faculty lounge on campus?) Two decades later I am not yet fully adjusted. But I recognize this grand fact—our model is not the world.

President Hinckley's outline of BYU-Idaho is for a learning and teaching university. We have no faculty rank, no post-graduate programs, and no intercollegiate athletics. We will prepare increasing numbers of young Latter-day Saints in faith, academic proficiency, and service. They will impact the world through their professional and personal lives.

Our teaching assignment is fifteen credits per semester. In today's trendy parlance, this is the hot button issue. Expressed as a simple dichotomy, it shapes itself as Us versus Them. Permitting the tension to play out in such oversimplified terms would be a mistake, diminishing the history of our institution, our better natures, and the precious and perishable opportunity to be part of a unique work and magnificent potential.

Some among us do five preparations; all of us teach classes we have never taught before. Even without the emphasis on research and publishing, this is hard. The viewpoint most often finding utterance is a contrast with teaching loads at BYU-Provo or BYU-Hawaii. But knowing that our charge is not to duplicate their work, we are uneasy in the comparison. We need other ways of seeing what we are.

Rod Keller talked about handling the work in the College of Language and Letters last August; his text appears in the most recent *Perspective* under the title "Charting Course: To Do What Only a Teacher Can Do." Rod's approach, as mine, is to examine boundaries of the question rather than to posit a reductive answer. Our ideas often overlap.

Some ideas follow. Probably some are simply wrong, and surely some will not please you. That is not the point. The point is that this question is more complex than we have yet described it.

The integrated life: Could teaching and family and preparation and Church callings and collegiality and recreation become a synergistic whole? If I divide them and do each for two or three hours a day, then nothing gets done adequately and I am chronically exhausted. If I unify my work under the principle Bringing To Pass Righteousness, then I do all of them all the time. I work reasonable hours, finish everything that's

important, and am filled with gratitude. But causality flows from back to front: when I am grateful, then the burden is light.

No one is alone: Those of us with five preparations and 300 students, each writing three essay exams, are in a pickle. The unstoppable force has met the immovable object. Relief is required, in the form of fewer essay tests, fewer preparations, and release time. Demands of teaching upper division students are not the same as those of lower division. It is right that each of us make our instruction increasingly integrated; we are obliged to do more with less. But one reason for this pickle is faith smaller than a mustard seed in our colleagues to do *their* parts in teaching *our* students. The ideal of integration is that I support the geology teachers by helping students learn classification and definition, while they help me teach English with their causality and concreteness. I would feel much gratified to receive a paper giving precise descriptions of aquifers, springs on canyon walls, and artesian pools, explaining points of likeness and difference.

Mis-Nurturance: Priding ourselves (it *is* a form of pride) in the Spirit of Ricks, we overshoot the mark by taking responsibility for others' educations. This is our greatest disservice to students, not that last chapter left unread or the favorite lecture cut short. Being agents, students are going to assemble the pieces of their educations, decide what things mean, and integrate learning with living. No teacher has much to say about any of these—the human mind is never forced. Our role is not to mold but first to guide and then to sustain and finally to approve—far simpler tasks than to shape, and yielding far deeper results. Do we teach students to think, or just to think like we do? Ironically, the latter exacts much more cleverness and energy than the former; it is propaganda.

Professional development: Have you noticed the inverse correlation between the cost of professional development and its value? The most effective academic growth comes from talking with a colleague; next, from reading a book. Then follows the category including brown bags, colloquia, and meetings. Conferences (with rare exceptions) are neither very productive nor very enjoyable as tourism—primarily they are another venue for publication. A guided tour around the world is almost sure to miss the point. The simple fact is: help helps when it addresses needs. The best help for our troubles is already located on this campus. Most of us don't use it much.

Let it happen—not make it happen: We are given lordship over the earth to nourish and protect all creatures so that they too can fill their measures of creation. Coercion, extortion, and profiteering are perverse stewardships. Most students are willing to learn and mature enough to make choices. Performing a perfect lesson is not the best teaching method, though it is good for testing chapters of a forthcoming book. Inviting,

suggesting, outlining, modeling, and encouraging provide structure and rigor without straitening students' growth.

The handcart analogy: Not to say that we should sink in famished fatigue at our desks and be buried in shallow and frozen graves. But, Oh!, the solemn glory of those who sacrifice to become fathers and mothers planting the rock in this goodly land. There must have been grumbling on the trail along with hymn singing. I don't know that it's very bad to grumble if you keep pulling. My ancestor Neils Christensen left his young wife in Denmark—she would not join with the Mormons. I cannot judge his familial decision; neither can I imagine my life without it. The march of Zion's Camp is not only a quaint historical object lesson; it is the custom of the Kingdom. At journey's end it is finished, and travelers are refined in privileged fires.

Teaching by ensample: Classification is a powerful organizer; I hope the mechanic knows each and every possibility before dismantling my sputtering engine. But in most undergraduate courses a few examples suffice. Indeed, the greater flaw is to cover all the species and ignore the genus. In "Shakespeare," we read only about seven plays, and them only cursorily. Imagine—we give general education credit in letters for the Shakespeare class and it contains no novels or short stories, not a single sample from American lit. Seven plays and you're certified. The education in Shakespeare is the Shakespearean essence; the details are little devils.

An occasional glimpse of the forest: When asked to write for *Perspective*, some colleagues plead lack of time, being absorbed in administrative duties, preparations, or CFS. Writing for *Perspective* is not the most important thing in the world (it's only here to illustrate), but does this response have something in common with, "I'm too busy doing my work to organize it"? The request to write is offered as encouragement to back away from the trees for a minute and contemplate the woods; it is easily perceived as one more sappy sucker from the forest floor. Actions not cleanly arrayed beneath principles always proliferate, never seeming satisfactory.

Reexamining the standard: We are in greater danger of embarrassment by graduates who can't think or won't take responsibility than by graduates who command too little information. An excellent baccalaureate education entails mastery of principle and process, but need include factual mastery of few subjects. All the surveys show that employers rank facts last among priorities. A stumbling block we have set for ourselves is mixing major and general students in some courses. My Shakespeare class is about evenly divided between the two: the majors are bored with generalities, to which they were ordained in the womb; the general students are overwhelmed with specifics, which things they never had supposed.

Be thou humble: As each winter began, Daddy roped Floss and Queen, harnessed them up, and hitched them to the hay rack. They were full

of summer's grass, fat with freedom, unruly, even a bit dangerous. By December their bodies and tempers became lean and focused. I am not suggesting that we teach best when worked into the ground. But I learn more readily under a teacher who knows his limits and the role of inspiration after all that he can do than I learn under one who esteems himself a pinnacle of preparation. The proverb runs: If you want a job done, ask a busy person to do it. The assignment we have received is also a compliment.

The big picture: In not many years I complete my BYU-Idaho course. My name will no longer appear in the class schedule, nor will it be chiseled on a rock under the Hinckley Building. Brian and Bill and Dorla just left—do you remember them? The Spori Building is no more—maybe you never missed it. BYU-Idaho has not in every respect treated me fairly, and I have not been entirely fair with BYU-Idaho; I hope to forgive and be forgiven. But I cannot imagine, much less encompass, the breadth of my blessing for being here. There is not room enough to receive it. My modest monument emits only an infrequent glimmer, as when my brother meets a former student of mine in the Mesa Temple or when one crosses paths with my pal in Pittsburgh. Now and then one sends a note or greets me on the street. Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning.