

CAN LESS BE BETTER?

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During his campus visit in 2004, Elder Richard G. Scott made this statement: “The more you work at it, the more things seem to distill and you discover the wonderful truth, less is better.”¹ Elder Scott’s challenge can be a source of great discussion regarding the impact of the new calendar, particularly when combined with Elder Henry B. Eyring’s counsel: “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.”² As we consider how fewer weeks in a semester will impact our programs, we might also address the following questions. What do we need less of that will result in a higher quality learning experience? Where can we simplify and focus? What are the opportunities to integrate across campus among departments, colleges, and the university? What can we do to enhance the mission of the university with little or no additional resources? How can we fulfill the recent charge from President Clark to increase quality and lower the relative costs of education, while expanding the BYU–Idaho experience to more students?

Like all departments across campus, the Department of Business Management is continually striving to improve the overall learning experience for students. In the process we have tried to integrate and simplify much of our curriculum. Two key areas are the junior-level integrated business core (IBC) and our senior-level integrated emphases. Both programs are semester-long experiences in which students—usually working in teams—start-up and run companies, work on consulting projects, and take field trips to companies and other organizations. During a semester students enroll in 12 or 13 credits and meet every day for approximately two and one-half hours. The experience is broken down into one- to four-credit segments taught by different teachers who collaborate and coordinate with each other. The block of time is distributed between subject matter depending on the students’ project needs. For example, as students in IBC prepare to market their products, the marketing instructor might take the entire class period to review successful strategies. Due to the nature of these programs, the summer semester has always been a concern because of the break in the middle. Coordination between faculty and students has been somewhat awkward and has been a source of frustration for some students. The new calendar will eliminate this issue. However, because these programs represent more of a holistic experience than a typical student’s class schedule, there is a concern about shortening the experience by two weeks. We hope this

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shortened term will actually improve the experience—by asking students to make decisions in a shorter time frame—making the experience more like the actual world of business.

In addition to considering how the calendar will impact our junior and senior integrated courses, we have also developed three ideas to enhance the quality of the learning experience for all our students within this new calendar format.

First, less lecture and more discussion. We are realizing the benefits of a more dynamic classroom in which student participation is encouraged. The use of cases, simulations, role plays, team projects, and short student presentations are some ways to enhance the classroom—a classroom in which students come prepared to share insights, ask questions, test assumptions, and seek to edify one another. The use of case studies and consulting projects has proven very effective. Each semester our senior marketing students team up with a local business to help business owners with current issues they are facing. Recently our supply chain management students assisted with the operational plans for a business that is planning on locating to the area. Students involved with these consulting experiences seem to learn more because they have real world applications for the material they are learning. The longer class periods of the new calendar can allow for a more dynamic, collaborative classroom where there is time, not only to work on these consulting projects, but also to dive deeper into concepts and allow for greater student participation. Student and faculty preparation is critical; the classroom must be viewed as a community of learners where mutual respect and love one for another becomes the norm.

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Second, less content in class and more content online. In order to better facilitate a more dynamic classroom, we believe faculty must provide better resources outside the classroom. We are also realizing how ineffective it can be for an instructor to endlessly read *PowerPoint* slides in class. The technology is available to put this content online. Online content enables students to get much of the course content at a time and at a pace they choose. Faculty members in our senior finance area have started to use a product that allows for the recording of the computer screen along with the instructor's voice. Video clips are created and placed on the web, demonstrating and explaining complicated Excel models. Students can stop, start or play the video at higher or slower speeds. The *e-brary* database available through the library, which includes thousands of online books, also appears to be a wonderful resource for online content; something we are just beginning to tap into. In many cases online learning is a better way to present certain material and is not a second-rate alternative. We are exploring ways to move most of

our content to a digital format, which will be available to all students all the time.

Last, less traditional learning models and more designing of integrated experiences. As student participation in the classroom increases and presentation of content is moved outside the classroom, the role of the instructor changes. Instructors become more designers and facilitators of learning experiences based upon desired outcomes. For example, a teacher of the senior marketing emphasis might spend significant class time helping students design a market survey for their client, while spending far less time lecturing about the principles of effective surveys. Another teacher might spend time helping students analyze the data from the same survey, while another directs students to resources that will help them effectively present their analysis to the client. If instructors feel they are the main source of knowledge for their students, the new calendar could become a source of frustration. Such a perspective might result in instructors getting bogged down trying to dispense a prescribed amount of content to students in a shorter semester rather than using longer class periods to engage students in a more dynamic learning experience. As instructors, we place too much emphasis on getting through our material and are too prone to expect learning to take place based upon the number of textbook chapters covered in a semester.

The new calendar can be either a catalyst or a hindrance to the overall quality of the learning experience at BYU–Idaho. If extra class time is mainly used to extend lectures and if important curriculum is cut, we will have missed a wonderful opportunity to improve our students’ educational experience. As departments adjust to the new calendar, we will all need to focus and prioritize those areas of most importance for our programs and for the university as a whole. We will need to determine what the essential BYU–Idaho experience is—and hopefully come to realize that less can be better. ☺

NOTES

1. *News & Notes*, February 26, 2004. www.byui.edu/pr/N&Narchive/N&Nfeb262004.pdf.
2. Elder Henry B. Eyring, “A Steady, Upward Course,” BYU-Idaho devotional address, September 18, 2001.

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