DEVELOPING STUDENTS’ INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

PURPOSE
This tool explores ways in which the Learning Model can help instructors support students on the path to becoming more self-directed, self-initiating, life-long learners. It explores classroom activities that build intrinsic motivation in students.

DESCRIPTION
The Learning Model requires a different kind of student—young men and women who know how to ‘act for themselves’ in pursuit of their education. Russell M. Nelson (Ensign, Nov. 1992) said, “In the pursuit of education, individual desire is more influential than institution, and personal faith more forceful than faculty.”

As many students enter the university without having demonstrated this level of responsibility in high school, part of the BYU-Idaho experience is to nurture in them the intrinsic love of learning and desire for wisdom.

The difficulty, of course, is that intrinsic motivation is not produced through motivational techniques or the simple application of instructional strategies. Most instructors therefore fall back on what they can influence; a series of carrots and sticks intended to move the students through the course material as painlessly as possible.

These extrinsic motivators are not to be denigrated or dismissed. They play an important intermediary role and often accompany and support more intrinsic motives. Yet a BYU-I graduate who is not intrinsically motivated to learn is less able to become a disciple-leader. Therefore, what can we as instructors do to influence the desire to learn?

Learning Model principles and processes can help students as they work to discover and embrace the intrinsic rewards of education.

Learning Model Principles 1-3
The first three principles of the Learning Model teach that faith is a principle of action and power, that true teaching (and by extension learning) is done by and with the Holy Ghost, and that secular understanding is contextualized by the words of the prophets and the scriptures.

For many BYU-I students improving their relationship with God motivates them. Teach them that secular learning can and should be a spiritual undertaking. Encourage students to seek the Lord’s guidance in their studies. Explain your understanding of the role of faith in study. Define the classroom experience as a spiritual quest for over-learning of the material.

Learning Model Principles 4-5
Helping students to act for themselves and accept responsibility for their own learning and teaching implies a considerable use of agency. Giving students opportunities to choose aspects of their experience is intrinsically motivating.

Consider giving the choice between multiple assignments. Let students sometimes decide among themselves the process to accomplish the objectives.

The sense of belonging and purpose are also powerful motivators. As students learn to love, serve, and teach one-another, they tap into fountains of motivation stronger than self-interest.

Design Step #1: Learning Outcomes
Beyond good grades or jobs, many students have never thought about what a successful education might look like. They need someone to ask them the right questions: Do they have questions that they hope to answer through their learning? Do they pursue what they don’t understand beyond the assignment? What is the purpose of their education? What does being a disciple-leader mean to them?

Students also need clarity about learning outcomes. They need to be able to see classroom activities in terms of ‘what they’ll get out of it’ because that will influence what they put into it.

Design Step #2: Learning Model Architecture
Architecting means establishing a Learning Model structure within a course. Students can then plan ahead and know what is expected each step along the way. They can then better ‘act for themselves’ in meeting those expectations.

Learning Model architecture also refers to how material is engaged. Problem based instruction, experiential learning, case studies, and collaboration can be more intrinsically motivating than more passive forms of education.
Process Step #1: Prepare
Expecting significant student preparation before class places the responsibility for learning squarely on the students’ shoulders. While students might resist at first, the investment they make as they prepare for classes will eventually transform to an investment in what they’re learning.

Beyond preparing material, students also articulate questions as part of the Prepare step. Class then becomes a way to explore their questions rather than memorize someone else’s answers.

Process Step #2: Teach one Another
BYU-I students are developmentally in early adulthood. Often, they are still working out the socio-psychological tasks of the young adult: identity formation, defining a role in society, and finding a mate. Their daily experience is therefore largely defined by their social interactions. Allowing students to learn by interacting with others lets them learn in a context in which they are already intrinsically motivated.

Process Step #3: Ponder and Prove
Prepare and Teach One Another connect the content to the student. Reflection connects the student to the content. By providing opportunities for our students to regularly reflect on their learning, we invite them to internalize it, link it to their existing understanding, and identify its relevance in their lives. All of this leads to deeper understanding and better retention of material.

Students also want a forum to demonstrate their learning. Prove isn’t just about assessing for the benefit of the instructor. Students want to Prove both in terms of trying the new understanding on for size to determine its viability, and they want the chance to prove to themselves that they have reached an acceptable level of mastery.

EXAMPLE
Jim wondered why his cases weren’t catching student interest. He decided to rework that part of his syllabus. In doing so, Jim realized that he had kind of ‘sprung’ the case studies on his students without much context. He decided to make more explicit how the case fit into the arc of the whole course (Outcomes). Next, he realized that he needed to better train his students about how to work a case. He needed to be more explicit in spelling out the process for them (Architecture) and supporting them in their preparations (Prepare). Jim then changed one of the cases from a corporate giant, to the mom and pop retail outlet where many of his students shop and assigned groups to work on different aspects of the case (Teach one Another). He then invited the owner as a guest speaker and held a Q&A (Ponder and Prove). The students were more engaged and motivated than in past semesters.

TIPS
• Be patient. Rarely will a student be motivated solely intrinsically.
• Validate preparation. Acknowledge effective preparation and link it to classroom application
• Establish a classroom culture. Motivation is contagious. Recognize and socially reward intrinsic motivation in the mastery of content. Allow your own motivation for learning to clearly show in the classroom.

PITFALLS
• Impatience. Don’t get discouraged or judge students over-harshly. Learning to act and not be acted upon is a developmental process that many students are just starting.

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KEY ARTICLES

OTHER RESOURCES
• Teaching your class about the Learning Model