

Inaugural Response

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It was a pioneer's heart that enabled the Lord to gather His Saints at the opening of this dispensation. Those early pioneers brought a spirit of frugality, a faith and optimism for the unknown, a longing for prophetic direction, and a spirit of personal sacrifice to their trek west. It was those same attributes that

allowed the Lord to reveal the ideas and innovations needed to gather His people. For the pioneers, innovation started with vanguard companies and wagon trains. Later developments included handcart companies and the Perpetual Emigration Fund. These subsequent advancements were different in design and less familiar than the earlier innovations, but they allowed many more Saints to gather to Zion.

At BYU-Idaho we draw on that same pioneer's heart, a gift of the early settlers who came to this valley and eventually founded this college. The pioneer's heart has been preserved by the Lord in the very location of this campus. It has been carefully cultivated in the Spirit of Ricks.¹ Regardless of its origin, the pioneer's heart was held in this valley "for such a time as this"² when the Lord would significantly expand His educational gathering across the Church.

On June 21, 2000, President Gordon B. Hinckley announced the creation of a new university,³ stating:

BYU-Idaho will operate on an expanded year-round basis, incorporating innovative calendaring and scheduling while also taking advantage of advancements in technology which will enable the four-year institution to serve more students.⁴

In the ensuing years, a pioneering faculty and staff created a three-track calendar, the BYU-Idaho Learning Model, and an unambiguous student-centered culture. They developed a cohort-based online curriculum and launched the global Pathway program to open educational opportunities across the Church. Since President Hinckley's announcement, the number of students at BYU-Idaho has tripled even as the relative cost per student has declined⁵—a miracle within the Church and a model for "rethinking education"⁶ more generally. Let me pause to thank my colleagues on the faculty and staff. None of this would have been possible without your sacrifice, dedication, and effort. As Elder Jeffrey R. Holland has declared,

What you are undertaking [at BYU-Idaho]... is virtually unprecedented in the world of higher education. You are making your own inspired, pioneering journey.⁷

And as Elder David A. Bednar has said, "The creation of BYU-Idaho is one of the most important educational events of the Restoration."⁸

Today, we remain on a "steady, upward course"⁹ of growth and discovery. We face a dual challenge: to continue to strengthen our core campus experience, even as we pioneer new ways to reach students around the world. Quoting President Henry B. Eyring:

It is possible to serve world needs as well as those of our local students if those who come here have a personal self-discipline and ...a spirit of sacrifice.¹⁰

Let me first address this campus. One of the hallmarks of BYU-Idaho is the personal investment of faculty who unapologetically build their professional focus on teaching and advising students. That this institution has been able to expand so dramatically while preserving this individual attention is a testament to the university's design and to the character of the faculty. I see the faculty's love for students leading to greater discovery in instructional strategy, measurement, and learning from peers. I see a faculty creating innovative curriculum at the intersection of disciplinary depth and instructional excellence. I see the scholarship of learning and teaching at BYU-Idaho increasingly reaching a wider community of practice.

We must remember that being student-centered goes beyond simply being teaching oriented. Providentially, BYU-Idaho's founding design included an emphasis on applied learning. Under President David A. Bednar, university-wide internship and Activities programs were developed. The already high levels of participation in these programs can be further expanded and more tightly connected to our academic programs. There is a temptation in higher education to fall back on approaches that, while professionally familiar, may ironically detract from meeting *students'* needs. We must consistently ask, "Why are we doing this, and are there ways of doing it better?" For example, applied degrees that are not bachelor's centric will benefit many of our students.¹¹ Separately, we must develop more rigorous and holistic ways to measure and track student outcomes. Clearly, some of those efforts will be academic. But if we are truly student-centered, we must also

be able to strengthen student outcomes that include life skills, career stewardship, family life, and spiritual leadership.¹²

Next, let me speak to the needs of students who will never physically come to Rexburg. If designed correctly, the innovations on campus and online will be mutually reinforcing. Our online organization has the responsibility to learn from the campus experience. Our campus faculty will, in turn, bless students they will never meet through the curriculum and course content they create for online students. But even as we draw on the principles, outcomes, and spirit of the campus, we must avoid the temptation to impose the exact pattern of a campus model with online students who may have very different needs. For example, as with *classroom* instruction, we must strengthen the scholarship of learning and teaching for *online* instruction. Similarly, curricular innovations that are less bachelor's centric, including certificates and applied associate degrees, will benefit numerous campus students. However, for many of our online students, these programs may be their *primary* academic experience. The university must develop formal and informal capabilities to understand the needs of non-campus students. Finally, as online learning continues to expand, we will need to amplify opportunities for local gathering in centers of strength around the world.

As we reflect on the need to continue to build both our campus and our online programs, we must recognize the implications of a university with increasing reach and scope across the Church. It is incumbent upon BYU-Idaho to continue to find ways to expand its reach while *decreasing* relative costs to the Church. Moreover, part of our responsibility will be to work beyond the boundaries of the university itself. We must increasingly look for ways to collaborate with other entities within the Church Educational System, across LDS membership, and even in missionary work. The Lord will reveal the pattern for this to happen, but the university must continue to prepare its heart in ways that will allow it to be a resource to a worldwide Church.¹³

President Kim B. Clark often summarized the mission of BYU-Idaho as developing disciple leaders.¹⁴ President Eyring has said that “every innovation, every change, [should be] measured against this test of the heart.”¹⁵ To build disciple leaders in the last days,¹⁶ we must help our students have the conviction to stand as witnesses of Jesus Christ. We must also teach the doctrine of the family with increasing force and application, for “marriage is more than something personal—it is a [‘post of responsibility’], an office”¹⁷—a disciple’s covenant. Our students must understand the principle of moral agency and learn how to act and not be acted upon.¹⁸ Finally, disciple leaders will need to understand and apply the Atonement in their lives. These attributes of disciple leadership will increasingly prepare our students to fulfill Jacob Spori’s prophetic vision:

The seeds we’re planting today will grow and become mighty oaks, and their branches will run all over the earth.¹⁹

Indeed, BYU-Idaho’s influence on the world will continue unabated through the lives and impact of its graduates.

In the painting by Minerva Teichert entitled: “Handcart Pioneers,” we see both our past and our future as the pioneers enter the valley. Looking back, may we remember the pioneer’s heart that enabled the BYU-Idaho educational gathering to commence. Looking forward, may we recognize the purpose for our gathering as we work together to build disciple leaders. I know that the Savior lives and that He loves each of us. It is through His Atonement that we can change and become more than who we are today. I pray for a pioneer’s heart and ask for the Savior’s mercy and enabling power in this responsibility. We are blessed by living prophets who lead and guide this Church and this university. The gospel has been restored on the earth today, and BYU-Idaho is part of that great work, I so testify in the name of Jesus Christ, amen. 🙏

1. David A. Bednar, “Spirit of Ricks,” Thomas E. Ricks Building Dedication, February 2005. See also Kim B. Clark, “The Spirit of Ricks,” BYU-Idaho Devotional, September 2007.
2. Esther 4:14.
3. Clayton M. Christensen and Henry J. Eyring, “The Innovative University,” 2011 (see chapter 23).
4. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Announcement: Ricks College to Become BYU-Idaho,” June 2000.
5. Kim B. Clark, Inaugural Response, October 2005, (see discussion of the three imperatives: raising quality, lowering relative cost, serving more students).
6. Elder Henry B. Eyring, “A Steady, Upward Course,” BYU-Idaho Devotional, September 2001, (see discussion of rethinking education). Note: under the BYU-Idaho presidency of David A. Bednar the theme “rethinking education” was adopted.
7. Jeffrey R. Holland, “Zion Revisited,” BYU-Idaho Commencement, December 2006.
8. David A. Bednar, “Brigham Young University-Idaho Inaugural Luncheon,” October 2005.
9. Henry B. Eyring, “A Steady, Upward Course,” BYU-Idaho Devotional, September 2001.
10. Henry B. Eyring, Inaugural Response, Ricks College, December 1971.
11. David A. Bednar, BYU-Idaho Faculty Meeting, August 2001, (see discussion of associate degrees and the need for preserving a two-tiered institution at BYU-Idaho in inspired learning and teaching).
12. Henry J. Eyring, “Major Decisions,” 2010, (see Part Two: discussion of academic and career stewardship).
13. Dallin H. Oaks, “It Hasn’t Been Easy and It Won’t Get Easier,” BYU Leadership Conference, August 25, 2014.
14. Kim B. Clark, “The Tree of Everlasting Life,” BYU-Idaho Devotional, September 2008.
15. Henry B. Eyring, “A Steady, Upward Course,” BYU-Idaho Devotional, September 2001.
16. 2 Timothy 3:1-7; 2 Nephi 28:20-22.
17. Dietrich Bonhoeffer as cited by D. Todd Christofferson, “Why Marriage, Why Family,” Ensign, May 2015.
18. David A. Bednar, “Act and Not be Acted Upon,” BYU-Idaho General Faculty Meeting, August 2003. See also D&C 58:26-28.
19. Jacob Spori, Dedication of Bannock Stake Academy, November 1888 (see also David L. Crowder, “Spirit of Ricks,” p 3-4).