

# *Deliberate Student Centeredness*

C. SHANE REESE

As I begin my remarks today, I need to express my gratitude to a few people. My colleagues in the academic vice president's office have been remarkable. Kris Nelson has been instrumental in helping to educate me on financial matters and other logistics of the academic vice president's office. Lynn Patten has been unbelievable in providing organizational advice and scheduling assistance, as well as general patience with my shortcomings. I am also immensely grateful for the associate academic vice presidents, who have braved the uncertain waters of a new and largely unknown dynamic of having a statistician as part of the Academic Vice President's Council. I would like to thank John Rosenberg, who takes responsibility for a wide variety of undergraduate endeavors; Laura Bridgewater, who is tasked with managing the rank and status process and faculty leaves; Brad Neiger, who shepherds our vitally important task of faculty hiring; and our new addition, Larry Howell, who has agreed to oversee research and external funding efforts. I express my profound

gratitude for their commitment, dedication, friendship, and professionalism. While he is likely *not* here because he opted to hop on his bike for a ride up Hobbie Creek Canyon, I want to express my gratitude for Alan Harker and his tremendous service to BYU.

I would like to take a few moments to describe an early afternoon on April 6, 2019. I had just finished some chores around the house, and I had settled into my comfortable couch position with "a diet soda that shall remain nameless"<sup>1</sup> to watch the afternoon session of conference. Seeing that the afternoon session included the sustaining of Church officers, I was naturally excited to find out about the new General Authorities. President Dallin H. Oaks read the following:

*It is proposed that we sustain the following as General Authority Seventies: Rubén V. Alliaud, Jorge M. Alvarado, Hans T. Boom, L. Todd Budge, Ricardo P. Giménez, Peter M. Johnson, John A. McCune, James R. Rasband, Benjamin M. Z. Tai, and Alan R. Walker.<sup>2</sup>*

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*C. Shane Reese, BYU academic vice president, delivered this address in the faculty session of university conference on August 26, 2019.*

As I heard those names read, my heart sank. I have never had the thought in my life that I wanted to oppose any names proposed, but on that day it actually crossed my mind. I remarked to my wife that while Jim Rasband would be an incredible blessing to the Church, Jim's new appointment as a Seventy would leave a crater in the administration. My wife had heard me remark about Jim's wisdom in personnel issues, his kindness in difficult interactions, his fierce protection of the academic mission of BYU, and his staunch devotion to the students and the development of their whole person. I shared with her that this new assignment felt like a punch to the gut, and I was breathless.

After I repeatedly tried unsuccessfully to convince myself that Elder Rasband's appointment really was good for the Church—even if it was a monumental loss for BYU—with a sense of resignation I was then filled with a feeling of incredible gratitude for the mentoring that I had received under Jim's tutelage. The next thought was the one my wife reminds me of regularly. I said, "And of course I feel so sorry for the poor sap who has to try to fill those shoes!"

As I have completed almost three months of trying to fill enormous shoes, my gratitude, respect, and appreciation for the capacity, talent, and gifts of my predecessor in this office have increased by a couple of orders of magnitude. While Jim is not here to accept it, would you all please join me in expressing gratitude for Jim Rasband's tireless efforts as BYU academic vice president?

I would also like to extend an enthusiastic welcome to the eighty-three new faculty who join our ranks today. Every college in the university welcomes at least one new colleague this year. In so many important ways, our new faculty colleagues are the lifeblood of the university, and we are grateful to have you with us at BYU. We hope you find joy in your work and that you find the campus inviting and warm.

### **Centering Our Focus**

As I begin my talk, it is probably not surprising to anyone in this room that I have gotten a fair

bit of advice from many different people about this talk. Most colleagues have been upbeat and supportive. Some have offered great suggestions about important and pressing issues facing the university. Previous occupants of this office have each offered kind support and kind suggestions. As with most of the truly important issues I have faced in life, the best advice was provided by my wife. This is not the first time she has offered sage counsel on the occasion of me speaking to an important group of people. In my first address as dean to students, faculty, staff, and family of graduates in the College of Physical and Mathematical Sciences during its convocation in 2017, I was fretting over my talk, and my wife offered the following advice: "Keep. It. Short. Nobody in that room is there to hear you speak. So I reiterate: Keep. It. Short!"

She was right. So I was all ears when she offered her words of counsel on this talk—which, by the way, is the most frightening talk of my life, with the bar for university conference addresses by academic vice presidents being set at unearthly levels by John S. Tanner, who was academic vice president when I was first hired at BYU. (Let me suggest to those new to the faculty that John's "Notes from an Amateur on Academic Excellence" from the 2004 BYU university conference is well worth your time.<sup>3</sup>) My wife wisely counseled me: "Be yourself. Don't be what you think others want you to be. Be you."

Of course my immediate reaction was, "That's easy for *you* to say. People like *you*!" But her counsel was, as usual, spot on and exactly what I needed to hear. In the spirit of that advice and at the risk of being egocentric, I ask for your favor in granting me a bit of license as I use several personal experiences in addressing several important topics today.

Many of you in this room are unfamiliar with a process at BYU called resource planning. Most, if not all, of you are thinking that, given the name of the process, you would rather become familiar with the intricate details of the process of a root canal or the process of repeatedly running sharp fingernails on a chalkboard than familiarizing yourself with a process called resource

planning. Until my appointment as dean in the College of Physical and Mathematical Sciences (also known as the college with the most unfortunate acronym), I was not familiar with this process either. As the name suggests, the process of resource planning concerns itself with requests from departments for resources that have some potential for benefit to stakeholders in the requesting department. As there are many stakeholders in a department—including faculty, staff, and students—one might imagine a scenario in which some of the benefits to different stakeholders are in competition with one another. In an unlimited resource environment, each request would demonstrate benefit, and increased funding would increase the quality of the experience for all stakeholders.

This will come as a surprise to none of you, but one early observation I made in my new role was that we are not in an unlimited resource environment. (I know what you are thinking: “That new AVP, he is a quick study!”) So, given the obvious fact that we have some resource constraints, the requests from departments are sent to the colleges, which do an excellent job of balancing the various demands across departments within colleges. The colleges then bring these requests to the academic vice president’s office for consideration within all of the other colleges’ requests. The process has yet another level in which the requests from colleges are considered among the various other functions at the university. (On a sidenote, I have been fascinated with the complexity of the university.) Besides putting you to sleep with an enlightening description of a budget planning process, I share this to communicate two important facts: (1) there is a wide variety of stakeholders at many different levels in this resource planning process, and (2) the needs of those stakeholders are real and vitally important to each person requesting new resources. With that longer-than-necessary background, I had an absolutely delightful time participating in resource planning in this new role of academic vice president.

I worried about myself as I wrote that last statement, so some explanation is in order. The delight from participating in resource planning was due

to the constancy of the message from the wide variety of stakeholders with absolute passion in their requests. And the one constant across all of the presentations—whether it be a department, a college, or an auxiliary making the presentation—was how each presentation was razor focused on the incredible students here at BYU. And that is the topic about which I would like to speak today: centering our focus on the amazing students at BYU.

One of the more clarifying thought leaders on the topic of centering our work and our lives on others is David Brooks in his book *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life*.<sup>4</sup> We will have the opportunity to hear from Mr. Brooks this fall in our absolutely stellar slate of forum speakers.<sup>5</sup> I hope you will all make it a priority to join us for the forums and devotionals this fall. They enlighten, fulfill, and bring purpose and motivation to our daily work. In his book *The Second Mountain*, Mr. Brooks described the “two-mountain shape”<sup>6</sup> that characterizes the lives of people who radiate true joy, making a perfect connection to our university conference theme “Let us cheerfully do all things that lie in our power” (D&C 123:17).

The first mountain is climbed as we establish a career and tackle the tasks associated with that establishment: forging an identity, making a mark on the world, contributing meaningfully to a research discipline, and being recognized as an excellent teacher. The ascent up the first mountain is filled with at least “good things” and perhaps some “better” things—to quote from a seminal talk by President Oaks.<sup>7</sup> Whether it be an awakening, a jarring tumble from the first mountain, or just dissatisfaction with the peak of the first mountain, these people find themselves in a position to consider something more—or, as President Oaks put it, something “best.”<sup>8</sup>

The second mountain that characterizes the lives of people who radiate joy, postulates Brooks, is a yearning to

*see deeper into themselves and realize that down in the substrate, flowing from all the tender places, there is a fundamental ability to care, a yearning to transcend the*

*self and care for others. And when they have encountered this yearning, they are ready to become a whole person.*<sup>9</sup>

Those whose lives resemble a two-mountain shape have a completeness about them; the joy they radiate is contagious. The distinction between the two mountains of their lives was clarified by Brooks in the introduction of his book:

*If the first mountain is about building up the ego and defining the self, the second mountain is about shedding the ego and losing the self. If the first mountain is about acquisition, the second mountain is about contribution. If the first mountain is elitist—moving up—the second mountain is egalitarian—planting yourself amid those who need, and walking arm in arm with them.*<sup>10</sup>

As colleagues and members of our talented faculty, we have all made substantial progress on planting our flag firmly on the summit of the first mountain: colleagues have successfully navigated the rigors of graduate programs, colleagues have made important contributions to their disciplines, and colleagues have been conscientious and innovative in pedagogy. I consider it an honor and a privilege to be counted among your ranks. As we review faculty applications and the accolades, papers, recognitions, and accomplishments that are associated with the CVs of those hired, I am grateful I was hired at a time in which (apparently) the bar was much lower! Now, let me humbly suggest that there is more. During my career—and not unlike the observations made by Brooks in *The Second Mountain*—I have been profoundly influenced by a few who, often unknowingly, are in the process of ascending the second mountain of their two-mountain-shaped lives.

Brooks noted that the people whose lives take on the two-mountain shape are the people who radiate joy because they find joy in others' successes. These same two-mountain-shape people live lives that are inextricably connected to a sense of purpose. For two-mountain-shape people, *commitment* to that purpose is a driving force in making decisions about careers and how to invest their precious time. Invariably, Brooks pointed out, the

people whose lives take on a two-mountain shape or those who have begun the steep ascent up

*the second mountain have made strong commitments to one or all of these four things:*

*A vocation  
A spouse and family  
A philosophy or faith  
A community*<sup>11</sup>

Now, in parlance familiar to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, we might understand the deep level of commitment that Brooks attributed to two-mountain-shaped lives as those who are entrenched in a covenant life. Today I hope to offer even a meager amount of food for thought about how we might individually and collectively ascend our second mountain as it relates to our responsibilities as faculty at BYU. I want to offer some examples that will start discussions among the faculty members within and between departments about how we can become more student centered in our approach to teaching and learning and how we can make our scholarship more student centered. I hypothesize that as we become more student centered in these two aspects of our responsibilities as faculty, we will find deep satisfaction, we will radiate joy, and we will receive heaven's help.

Now, before tackling student centeredness in our teaching and scholarship, let me give a reminder about the false dichotomy that persists in academic circles regarding teaching and scholarship. In "Paired Aspirations," his inaugural address to the faculty as academic vice president, Jim Rasband reminded us that our efforts in teaching and scholarship are not mutually exclusive but complementary. He said:

*The nature of paired aspirations is that they invite conversation and discussion about an appropriate balance. I hope that will be the case, because we learn when we counsel together. As we counsel together as faculty members, I also hope that the very recognition of the tension will engender some of the humility President Worthen discussed. . . . Part of that humility may be*

*recognizing that our preferred balance may be just that—our preference—and that we need to recalibrate with reference to the other part of our dual duty. It takes real humility to be personally introspective about our motives and about why we may have shied away from either aspiration. But being less defensive, less sure, and more open to letting the Spirit guide our allocation of effort will lead to greater peace in navigating the paired aspiration of teaching and research—or any other duties in apparent tension.*<sup>12</sup>

In his important address—worth reading in its entirety—Jim reminded us that the tension between scholarship and teaching, between research and student learning, is only “apparent.” As we ascend the second mountain, we find that the tension is more visible on the first mountain than on the second mountain. So, in presenting ideas on student centeredness in scholarship and in teaching, the line may not be crisp between the two, especially when they intersect in student-mentored research.

### **Student-Centered Teaching and Learning**

In my first two months as academic vice president at BYU, I have been overwhelmed. As I mentioned earlier in my remarks, I have been overwhelmed by the contributions and efforts of the people who have occupied the office before me. I have been overwhelmed by the number of meetings. I have been overwhelmed by the selfless contributions of faculty, staff, and students in working to help our students succeed. In this process of being overwhelmed, I have also been strengthened by the example of our president, Kevin J Worthen. His vision and his commitment to the students of the university are remarkable. He has also been an incredible advocate of the mission and aims of a BYU education. In his 2016 university conference address, President Worthen set forth a lofty and extraordinary vision for student-centered learning at BYU when he gave his seminal address entitled “Inspiring Learning.” In this address he gave an articulate and instructive description of the term *inspiring* and of the ideals that characterize student-centered learning at BYU:

*When I use the term “inspiring learning,” I have in mind both meanings of the word inspiring. I hope we inspire our students to learn. And I hope that learning leads to inspiration. When both things happen, inspiring learning occurs, and we can then know we are on the right track to achieve the core goals set forth in our mission statement.*

*While the term “inspiring learning” may not be familiar to you, my guess is that many of you are familiar with the phenomenon. Inspiring learning occurs in many of our classrooms for many of our students on a regular basis. Indeed, it may happen so often that we fail to appreciate how exhilarating it can be. We grow used to it. Sometimes it takes someone from outside the university to point it out to us.*<sup>13</sup>

Subsequent to President Worthen’s address, one such person outside the university pointed “it” out. In an address given to the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities at their Fortieth Anniversary Celebration Gala in 2016, David Brooks made this observation:

*Some Christian institutions adopt an adversarial posture toward the mainstream culture, a “Benedict Option” of circling the wagons, because things seem to be going against them. From my vantage point, it’s the complete opposite [for Christian colleges]. You guys are the avant-garde of 21st-century culture. You have what everybody else is desperate to have: a way of talking about and educating the human person in a way that integrates faith, emotion and intellect. You have a recipe to nurture human beings who have a devoted heart, a courageous mind and a purposeful soul. Almost no other set of institutions in American society has that, and everyone wants it. From my point of view, you’re ahead of everybody else and have the potential to influence American culture in a way that could be magnificent. I visit many colleges a year. I teach at a great school, Yale University. These are wonderful places. My students are wonderful; I love them. But these, by and large, are not places that integrate the mind, the heart and the spirit. These places nurture an overdeveloped self and an underdeveloped soul.*<sup>14</sup>

As we focus our attention on each of our students and the dual nature of our mission and aims

through inspiring learning, it will be exhilarating. But a question we might ask is, “How can I participate in inspiring learning?” Given the diversity of disciplines, there is likely not one single answer to this question, but the president has offered some general suggestions:

- Increase opportunities for students to participate in experiential learning, one important type of inspiring learning at BYU.
- Be purposeful and intentional in our inspiring learning. Be *deliberate*.
- Enhance the quality of relationships with each of our students.<sup>15</sup>

We have walked the path leading to the second mountain in our inspiring learning initiative for three years now. How are we doing? A simple answer is that we are doing well—very well, in fact. As an indicator, we measure and track the percentage of students involved in inspiring learning, with well over 92 percent of our students indicating that they have participated in at least one experiential learning of some type (types include service learning, research with faculty, internships, international study programs, or capstone projects) by the time they have completed their education. Across the university, through inspiring learning funds, college funds, and external grants, we have invested more than \$10 million per year in inspiring learning. For those efforts I applaud the work of the faculty in response to President Worthen’s inspired teaching on inspiring learning. We might be tempted to collectively pat ourselves on our collective backs. However, President Gordon B. Hinckley in April 1995 gave us sage advice:

*Each of us can do a little better than we have been doing. We can be a little more kind. We can be a little more merciful. We can be a little more forgiving. We can put behind us our weaknesses of the past, and go forth with new energy and increased resolution to improve the world about us, in our homes, in our places of employment, in our social activities.*<sup>16</sup>

So, may we consider President Hinckley’s wise counsel and “do a little better than we have

been doing” in our implementation of President Worthen’s vision of student-centered learning. Institutionally, we have been giving thought to our students and how we might center more of our efforts on them.

As a reminder, next week more than 30,000 post-Millennials will set foot on campus, bringing with them all the attributes that set them apart from Millennials, Gen Xers, and Boomers. They will be leaving home, coming to a strange place, being tested and tried, and making some of the most pivotal decisions of their lives. And we get to be their guides: taking students with us, edifying them “in all meekness, that [they] may become strong” (D&C 84:106). Earlier this year we hosted Laurie A. Schreiner, a scholar from Azusa Pacific University who for the last decade has researched how to define and promote student strength—or, more broadly, success. In one of her campus presentations, she asked the audience how BYU defines student success. The initial responses included such things as graduation and employment—worthy and necessary milestones. But, as President Worthen has reminded us repeatedly, BYU’s aspiration for all members of its community is more ambitious and more transcendent: assist one another in an eternal quest. Parker J. Palmer wrote that thriving communities are bound by some transcendent thing “that holds both me and thee accountable to something beyond ourselves.”<sup>17</sup> One way to understand that communal accountability to something beyond ourselves is the covenant we make with students, individually and institutionally, to help them thrive—not just survive—at BYU and beyond BYU.

Thriving, flourishing, succeeding, inspiring learning—however we choose to name the thing—engages every aspect of the student experience: academic, social, financial, emotional, physical, and, of course, spiritual. It requires the investment of all “the natives,”<sup>18</sup> as Elder Neal A. Maxwell once called the employees of a university. Teachers understand that encounters with students, even brief ones, that are hopeful, instructive, and engaging change lives. Academic and career advisors illuminate potential and point to possibilities. Secretaries invite,

custodians greet and mentor, and librarians say “welcome home” to students who have yet to make friends of books.

This fall we will begin conversations on how to leverage the many good things that are already happening to help students be safe and successful, with an eye to creating an immersive culture of flourishing and thriving—one in which each of us recognizes and embraces our part while celebrating our partners. We do not imagine a program with a start and expiration date; there will not be a new office directed by a new suit. The parts are largely in place. We are in search of the whole: an intentional and persistent campus conversation around a covenant with students “that holds both me and thee accountable.”

In the fall of 1989, I was one of those wide-eyed, anxious students, although clearly not a post-Millennial. I was an only child of an amazing single mother who was thoroughly invested in and prodigiously prodding me to complete a university education. Sharing stories of the fun times that awaited me in the dorms and with new friends and great outdoor activities, my mom instilled in me a sense of enthusiasm for my new educational adventure. It was my first opportunity to be surrounded by a critical mass of members of the Church. (Our high school student body of 3,300 students was the largest in the state of New Mexico, and we had less than twenty members of the Church, with various levels of activity.)

As my mom drove away after dropping me at my dorm, I felt optimistic and independent. Being a part of a new community was a thrill for me. That enthusiasm took a fairly abrupt turn. I found that people were more frequently referring to me by my student ID number than by my name. I found that classes were much harder than I would have expected. Quite frankly, I found that being surrounded by members of the Church was, shall we say, “peculiar.” In short, the reality of my first couple of weeks at BYU was miles apart from my enthusiastic expectations—so much so that I called my mom and indicated that I thought I had made a mistake in choosing to come to BYU. I shared that I was likely to pack up my stuff and come home. She was kind, caring, and

understanding—even offering to fly up so that I wouldn’t have to drive home alone.

My mom’s response made me feel great relief, but I was also nursing some shame for not having the oomph to tough it out. Later that afternoon, my mom called back and told me that she had visited with a previous bishop and family friend. This bishop shared that his brother was a faculty member at BYU and that perhaps I should stop by to visit with him before packing all my stuff.

I was reluctant, but the feelings of disappointment in myself urged me to call the faculty member. I am sure that faculty member doesn’t remember the discussion, and I cannot remember the exact words that were said, but during the short meeting with this faculty member, he encouraged me by saying that if I would give BYU a chance, I would find my stride. His experience was that BYU was a welcoming and wonderful place.

It turns out that what the faculty member said isn’t all that important. What *was* important to me at that point in time was that here was a busy faculty member who took the time to spend with Shane Reese the person, *not* 54-321-2345. And that short but profound meeting was the beginning of my remarkable experience at BYU. My freshman year at BYU is one of the most cherished times in my life, and it would not have been possible if it were not for the care, concern, and sacrifice of a bit of time by that faculty member. I will eternally be grateful for him. This is the spirit of inspiring learning and the core of the discussions we envision for the holistic student experience.

Until now my remarks have focused on student centeredness in our learning experience, including advisement and mentoring. Most colleagues also have a dual responsibility to establish and maintain an active program of scholarly work. Today I invite us to consider that our ascent up the peaks of the second mountain may involve a unique approach to our scholarship that is also student centered.

### **Student-Centered Scholarship**

Those who know me best know that the word *unique* has been a trigger word for me. In the past I have bristled at the suggestion that our approach

is unique. It was a trigger, in part, because I felt the word *unique* was a hiding place. It was a disguise for mediocrity. However, in August 2017, President Worthen delivered an address entitled “BYU: A Unique Kind of Education,” a talk that completely changed my perception about the word *unique* and helped instill a broader definition of the uniqueness of our approach. President Worthen, referring to a statement by President Oaks, indicated three important aspects of the destiny of BYU:

1. *BYU has a prophetically proclaimed destiny to become a great university.*
2. *We have a critical part to play in realizing that destiny.*
3. *We will achieve that goal in a way that is different from that by which other universities have achieved their greatness.*<sup>19</sup>

So my grouching about uniqueness was, in fact, misplaced. An inference I make from President Worthen’s last observation about President Oaks’s statement is that uniqueness is not a place for faculty to hide in mediocrity but is rather a path to greatness. A fundamental way for our scholarship to be unique without leading to pride is for our scholarship to be student centered. What does it mean for scholarship or research to be student centered?

Student-centered research is first and foremost research. As a church-sponsored university closely aligned with our sponsoring institution, we have the difficult task of effectively teaching and facilitating learning of students “bathed in the light and color of the restored gospel”<sup>20</sup> of Jesus Christ. In addition, we are still a university, meaning that we have the dual responsibility of contributing meaningfully to our discipline and of *modeling* this contribution as faithful members of the Church to our students. An important difference between BYU and our peer institutions is the core of “the messy middle”<sup>21</sup> that our president defined two years ago in his university conference address. The understanding that our unique mission and our arduous climb up the second

mountain includes first-class research is an important difference between the paradigm at BYU and that of our peer institutions or even of other CES institutions. President Worthen asserted “that first-class research can enhance rather than detract from student learning and development” and, quoting President Spencer W. Kimball, “that BYU could produce ‘brilliant stars in drama, literature, music, sculpture, painting, science, and in all the scholarly graces.’”<sup>22</sup>

President Worthen then went on to quote then BYU academic vice president—and now BYU–Hawaii president—John Tanner, who said:

*As I reread [this] now-familiar charge to become a “refining host” for “brilliant stars,” it struck me that President Kimball was thinking primarily about the accomplishments of BYU students, not faculty. . . .*

*This fact can serve as a salutary reminder for us about the fundamental purpose of scholarship at BYU. It is not, and must never be, to satisfy our own vain-glory nor to advance our own careers. Nor even is it solely to advance truth and knowledge, though this is a worthy purpose and one specifically endorsed by BYU’s institutional objectives. The primary purpose for the Church’s large investment in faculty scholarship and creative work at BYU is to enable us to be a refining host for our students.*<sup>23</sup>

It is a transformative idea that the motivation for our scholarship is to assist in the refinement of our students through learning and development. We model the difficult-to-manage balance between scholarship, teaching, and faithfulness to our students when the research is cutting edge, at the frontiers of knowledge. The inspired and enlightened vision of President Worthen and that of John Tanner provide sufficient evidence in favor of the value proposition of student-centered research. There is little doubt regarding the benefit to our students.

As with most challenging balances encountered on our path up the second mountain, they come with a cost as well. We have been reminded that our student-centered approach may come at the cost of increased quantities of publications, even



though we will not accept a sacrifice of quality. I believe that we can be deliberate about our student-centered approach and that our deliberate effort can guide our choices about quantity versus quality of scholarship. For example, the extent of involvement for an early career faculty member might involve a longer runway with smaller investment during the first year or two, when the rigors of establishing a program of research are heaviest. As confidence in scholarly work grows, faculty who are early in their careers might increase the extent to which students are involved. This deliberateness will help us run commensurate with our strength—“in wisdom and order” (Mosiah 4:27).

Now I would like to offer some examples of student-centered scholarship for your consideration.

#### **Examples of Student-Centered Research**

The canonical example of student-centered research is one in which a faculty member individually mentors a student through the portal of discovery. This is an exhilarating experience for both the faculty member and the student. If you have ever been a part of this type of student-centered research, you understand the sense of accomplishment and satisfaction that accompanies this type of interaction. I have had the opportunity to experience this type of interaction several times in my career at BYU in the Department of Statistics. I have watched the light of understanding illuminate a student’s eyes as they have painstakingly waded through an obtusely worded statistics paper with complex algorithms, beaten their heads against their computer screen trying to find and correct an error in computer code, and revised a paper for the 138th time, only to find that the use of present and past tense is completely inconsistent. Amazingly, the path to the portal of discovery we call research or scholarship is necessarily paved with discomfort. My experiences working with students in a one-on-one mentoring scholarship effort have been among my most rewarding experiences as a faculty member. In fact, a couple of weeks ago, I received the following notification:

*Dear Dr. Reese,*

*I am pleased to inform you that your manuscript “Bayesian Multi-scale Spatio-temporal Modeling of Precipitation in the Indus Watershed” has been approved for production and accepted for publication in Frontiers in Earth Science, section Interdisciplinary Climate Studies.*

After a long collaborative relationship with the lead author of this study—a master’s student heading to Duke for graduate school—I was thrilled to receive this welcome news. Parenthetically, I should add that my exultation was abruptly brought to a halt when I realized that this might actually be my *last* such notification for quite some time!

This type of student coauthorship on a scholarly publication or creative work is clearly a wonderful example of how we might make our research efforts more student centered. However, as we seek to implement President Worthen’s encouragement to make inspiring learning—including inspiring student-centered research—available to more students, it is wise to realize that this canonical example might have some difficult elements. For example, this particular type of student-centered scholarship does not scale well. In many of our disciplines around campus, the student-to-faculty ratio is much higher than individual student mentoring and coauthorship will allow. Besides the lack of scalability, some disciplines are not traditionally suited to such an interaction. Many disciplines around campus employ scholarship models that are solitary in their execution; they are primarily accomplished by a single author working in isolation. This is especially true in nonlaboratory disciplines. In other words, in some disciplines it is fairly easy, and justifiably so, to say, “That is just not how we do things in my discipline.” I hope that by presenting examples of overcoming these issues that I do not suggest it is easy. It is not easy. In fact, President Worthen cautioned us:

*However, this lofty view of our potential should not obscure the reality that such an endeavor is not easy. We are in the messy middle on these two key issues.*

*And that position is sometimes precarious and almost always difficult and soul stretching.*<sup>24</sup>

Hearteningly, in the resource planning process that I discussed earlier, we were given a glimpse of efforts by departments and faculty members who had taken seriously President Worthen's invitation to consider ways in which we might give more students access to inspiring learning experiences through student-centered research. These examples provided evidence that our faculty have put their incredible intellectual gifts to work on solving both the scalability and the disciplinary cultural shifts required to make student-centered scholarship work on a large campus like BYU. Consider some compelling examples from colleges around our student-centered campus. As I present each example, please recognize that I am aware that each model of student-centered scholarship may not fit nicely into the wide variety of disciplines at the university. May I invite you to resist the urge to simply dismiss student-centered research because it does not fit nicely into your discipline? Instead, if you find misfit of the student-centered scholarship models represented in my examples, could I ask you to consider the question "How could I adapt that model to my discipline?"

As a first and scalable example, consider a department in the sciences that—despite annual faculty meetings suggesting that the practice is simply too faculty time intensive—makes the decision to continue requiring a senior thesis of every student graduating from the program. Each student is required to work with a faculty member, with each faculty member mentoring up to twenty students. Various models are used to manage the mentoring load, with some meeting in groups and others using a combination of group meeting times and one-on-one fifteen-minute mini-meetings. The model is only scalable by the use of graduate students to help with the mentoring of undergraduate students to help them with the more formative elements of research. This hierarchical mentoring model—in which faculty spend substantial time mentoring graduate students, graduate students spend substantial

time mentoring undergraduate students, and faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students meet regularly as a group—makes the practice of requiring a thesis feasible for a department with a substantial student-to-faculty ratio. I also find it interesting—and likely more than mere coincidence—that this department has, by far, the deepest hiring pool for faculty hiring of any department within the college. Every student senior thesis is presented at some conference, and many are turned into scientific papers submitted to journals.

Because student-centered scholarship is sometimes easy to imagine in our lab-based disciplines, particularly compelling are examples of student-centered scholarship in the traditionally non-lab disciplines such as fine arts, many of the social science disciplines, law, and business.

For example, a professor in the humanities has found an innovative way to transform a commonly solitary research discipline into one that is deliberately student centered. An oral history project in Cambodia included students as collaborators to develop students so that they can act as experienced interviewers to carry out interviews with a group of seasoned citizens in that country—a country in which oral histories are not collected or preserved. In addition to conducting interviews themselves, these students act as peer mentors to teams of youth and young adults who conduct additional interviews.

*With up to one-third of the adult population killed during the purges, the population is young and the remainder of the older generation's stories are being rapidly lost. Many of Cambodia's younger generation hardly know their families' backgrounds.*<sup>25</sup>

The research product is an exceptional example of shifting trends within a discipline to turn the focus away from faculty-centered research and directing it to student-centered research.

As a second example from a traditionally non-lab discipline, a department in one of our professional schools has created a "lab" class that helps students on research projects of their own making with oversight from the faculty member

coordinating the course. For those students who are not as far along in their understanding of the research endeavor, the faculty member provides opportunities for students to help with a project from the instructor's own research. Students are given assignments related to a research project, and completion of these assignments is the class expectation. The anticipation is that the results of this will lead to a conference presentation and multiple peer-reviewed publications. The students report that the opportunity for them to gain insight into the research process from a faculty member who has an established program of research is as informative and illuminating as the research itself. In other words, the faculty are modeling the practice of research for students—an important mode of instruction for BYU faculty.

These are a few examples of ways in which faculty can make students the center of their scholarly work beyond the classroom.

Now I have spent quite a bit of time discussing the work of the faculty. You might ask, administratively, what are *you* doing? We have been taught well by President Oaks that it is vastly important for us to administratively do our part in making the BYU experience student centered. Specifically, President Oaks counseled university leaders in 2017 about the need for us to properly incentivize that which we value when he said:

*As we seek to improve our efforts in the various colleges and departments of the university, and as we seek to help CES with similar needs in its various institutions and programs, the problem of how and what we measure is vital. What we measure will profoundly affect what we emphasize. There is great wisdom in the clever observation that the Saints do what they are **inspected** to do.<sup>26</sup>*

In other words, we need to assure that our measurements reflect the outcomes of highest import. Our incentives and rewards are most effective when they align closely with our values. Our second mountain ascent will stall unless we, as a faculty, and we, as an administration, work on that alignment with deliberate actions. With that in mind, I am happy to report that most colleges

have been busy revising their rank and status documents to reflect our increased emphasis on student-centered research and teaching. We are nearing completion of a final draft of the university rank and status document with an emphasis on student centeredness in teaching, learning, and scholarship. We have found, as have you, that when we are student centered in our approach to learning and scholarship, the lines between them are not crisp.

As we look to the upcoming year and to the years ahead, we have more work to do. The student success initiative discussed earlier is an example of one effort to link the student-centered view directly to our students. Trying to implement a student-centered approach is most commonly constrained by faculty time. As such, may I suggest that we may need to evaluate our mix of professional versus professorial faculty as a means to make ends meet as we try to use our faculty human capital to engage more with students.

## Conclusion

As we close this faculty session this afternoon, I thank you for your willingness to listen. While it may be bold at this point of a long (for you, likely, seemingly *endless*) talk to extend an invitation, I would invite all in attendance to do the following:

- Enhance the quality of the relationships with your students. Find a struggling student and make them feel welcome on campus. The campus is a big, scary place to a new freshman. It is a big, scary place to a first-generation student. It is a big, scary place to nearly all our students, and particularly so for a struggling student who may be on the margin.
- Be a part of the BYU experience. Attend more devotionals and forums than you did last year. For some of you, that will be a pioneering effort.
- Begin discussions with colleagues and devise a plan of action about ways in which you can make learning and scholarship more student centered.

In conclusion, friends and colleagues, our second-mountain ascent is before us. The ascent is not easy. The path is not typical. The view, however, is stunning. Ascending the peak brings radiating joy. And, perhaps most rewardingly, the greatest beneficiaries of our ascent are the talented students who will leave here.

Welcome back to a new semester. I am grateful you are here with us at BYU. Each one of you, individually, has an important role to play in the prophetic mission and destiny of Brigham Young University. Thank you, and I pray the Lord's choicest blessings for you as you begin this new semester, in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, amen.

### Notes

1. Dieter F. Uchtdorf, "O How Great the Plan of Our God!" *Ensign*, November 2016.

2. Dallin H. Oaks, "The Sustaining of Church Officers," *Ensign*, May 2019.

3. See John S. Tanner, "Notes from an Amateur on Academic Excellence," BYU university conference faculty session address, 24 August 2004.

4. See David Brooks, *The Second Mountain: The Quest for a Moral Life* (New York: Random House, 2019).

5. See David Brooks, "Finding the Road to Character," BYU forum address, 22 October 2019.

6. Brooks, *The Second Mountain*, xi.

7. Dallin H. Oaks, "Good, Better, Best," *Ensign*, November 2007.

8. Oaks, "Good, Better, Best."

9. Brooks, *The Second Mountain*, xiii.

10. Brooks, *The Second Mountain*, xvi.

11. Brooks, *The Second Mountain*, xviii.

12. James R. Rasband, "Paired Aspirations," BYU university conference faculty session address, 28 August 2017; referring to Kevin J. Worthen, "BYU: A Unique Kind of Education," BYU university conference address, 28 August 2017.

13. Kevin J. Worthen, "Inspiring Learning," BYU university conference address, 22 August 2016.

14. David Brooks, "The Cultural Value of Christian Higher Education," keynote speech given at the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities 40th Anniversary Celebration Gala,

Washington, DC, 27 January 2016; published in *Advance* 7, no. 1 (Spring 2016): 48.

15. See Worthen, "Inspiring Learning."

16. Gordon B. Hinckley, "We Have a Work to Do," *Ensign*, May 1995.

17. Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Wiley, 2017), 119.

18. Neal A. Maxwell, "Meeting the Challenges of Today," BYU devotional address, 10 October 1978.

19. Worthen, "BYU: A Unique Kind of Education"; referring to Dallin H. Oaks, "Challenges to the Mission of Brigham Young University," BYU leadership conference address, 21 April 2017; quoting his own words from Dallin H. Oaks, "It Hasn't Been Easy and It Won't Get Easier," BYU leadership conference address, 25 August 2014:

*[I] firmly believe that it is the destiny of Brigham Young University to become what those prophetic statements predicted it would become. But inherent in being the University of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is the reality that this great goal will not be attained in exactly the same way that other universities have achieved their greatness. With your help, it will become the great university of the Lord—not in the world's way but in the Lord's way.*

20. Spencer W. Kimball, "Education for Eternity," pre-school address to BYU faculty and staff, 12 September 1967, 11; quoted in Worthen, "BYU: A Unique Kind of Education."

21. *Deseret News* editorial board, "In Our Opinion: More Colleges Should Consider the BYU-I Model and Put Education First," Opinion, *Deseret News*, 3 August 2017, [deseretnews.com/article/865685973/In-our-opinion-Colleges-should-ask-if-greater-scholarly-production-is-really-worth-the.html](http://deseretnews.com/article/865685973/In-our-opinion-Colleges-should-ask-if-greater-scholarly-production-is-really-worth-the.html); quoted in Worthen, "BYU: A Unique Kind of Education."

22. Worthen, "BYU: A Unique Kind of Education"; quoting Spencer W. Kimball, "The Second Century of Brigham Young University," BYU devotional address, 10 October 1975. President Kimball similarly used this thought

in both “Education for Eternity,” 12, and in Spencer W. Kimball, “Installation of and Charge to the President,” *Inaugural Addresses*, 14 November 1980, Brigham Young University, 9.

23. John S. Tanner, “A House of Dreams,” BYU university conference faculty session address, 28 August 2007; quoting Kimball, “Second Century” and “Installation”; quoted in Worthen, “BYU: A Unique Kind of Education.”

24. Worthen, “BYU: A Unique Kind of Education.”

25. Dana Scott Bourgerie, “About the Project,” The Cambodian Oral History Project: Capturing Stories of the Generations, College of Humanities, Brigham Young University, [cambodianoralhistories.byu.edu/project-background](http://cambodianoralhistories.byu.edu/project-background).

26. Dallin H. Oaks, “Challenges”; emphasis in original.