

“And If Your Eye Be Single to My Glory”

ALAN L. WILKINS

Just a few months ago, Kent Crookston, our dean of the College of Biology and Agriculture, attended a conference with many officers of the Church and leaders of various businesses in which the Church has invested. President Hinckley was in attendance, and Kent happened to bump into him at a break. President Hinckley was very kind and jovial as they began to talk, but when he found out what Kent’s current assignment is, he went on the offensive. Pointing his finger at Kent, he asked, almost accusingly, “Why do we have agriculture at BYU?”

Kent and his colleagues had been discussing just that question, and he began to say that they had concluded that we shouldn’t have agriculture at BYU unless . . . , but President Hinckley completed his sentence, “Unless it is unique in a way that blesses the Church.”

Interestingly, those are precisely the words Kent and his colleagues have been using to help them focus and choose where to put their emphasis as they consider curricular offerings, faculty hiring, and research focus for the future. They have added the idea that their changes must bless students, especially undergraduate students.

So what is President Hinckley worried about? Why would he be asking such a ques-

tion and with so much energy? I don’t pretend to know all of the reasons President Hinckley asked that question, but as I have reflected on our interactions with him and with other members of the board of trustees, I have a perspective to share. We live in an era of unprecedented growth of the Church—often in third-world areas whose tithing can’t fully pay for the growth in chapels, temples, and other support needed. In this context, entities within the Church, including BYU, must ask: How can we ensure that our performance blesses the kingdom in proportion to the resources we receive? An additional question for BYU might be: How can we extend our gifts to as many people as possible, including members in the third world?

I think you can see from the institutional objectives we have been developing with you over the past two years an approach to addressing these questions. As President Bateman reiterated this morning, we must worry first about being a university that (1) educates the minds and spirits of our students

Alan L. Wilkins was the academic vice president at Brigham Young University when this address was delivered at the afternoon general faculty session of the BYU Annual University Conference on 21 August 2000.

and (2) advances truth and knowledge. If we perform those two tasks thoughtfully and well, we will find quite natural ways to bless Church members and to develop friends for the university and the Church. We will not be tempted to become a church welfare agency or a Mormon peace corps. We will learn how to bless others in ways that increase learning opportunities for our students and ourselves.

But we must be creative and prayerful, because the first two tasks are full-time efforts. It seems we have to learn how to do more than one thing at a time. I have heard that theme frequently from President Bateman. He has challenged us to consider how we can use new technologies to improve the learning of our students here and then use what we learn and produce in that effort to share these blessings more broadly.

Elder M. Russell Ballard, chairman of the executive committee of the board of trustees, recently asked leaders of the Church Educational System (which includes BYU and the other higher education institutions as well as seminaries and institutes) to reconsider everything that we are doing to see what still needs to be done. And if it still needs to be done, are there better ways to do it? We need to be as nimble and focused as we can be if we are to take advantage of expanding opportunities and fill the needs in the kingdom.

I think President Hinckley was just giving Kent a dose of what I regularly experience when I am with the Brethren. They are both loving and challenging. They are trying to help us lift our vision and get ourselves in shape to address the significant needs and opportunities they see.

This afternoon I want to focus your attention on two general ways we might continue to improve our individual and collective efforts to bless the kingdom: (1) align our efforts with the institutional objectives of BYU; and (2) experiment with new technologies to bless our current students and to share with others.

Align with Institutional Objectives

BYU's institutional objectives, which have been warmly endorsed by the board of trustees, give us a sense of priority and perspective about how to bless the kingdom as a university. They also provide a context for even more specific questions at the level of departments and disciplines. Let me return briefly to the applied biological or agricultural sciences to show you how some of our colleagues are trying to align their programs with these objectives.

They began by acknowledging that the Church has grown beyond the Wasatch Front to become a worldwide institution, particularly in the past two or three decades. They have concluded that it is no longer sufficient to address primarily the needs of Utah or Western agriculture. Utah State has that mission and significant state and federal resources to assist them. We don't have that mission nor those resources. So, what is our mission? What will bless our students, allow our faculty to make unique and important contributions, and address the needs of Church members and others?

Consider a few examples of the answers our colleagues are developing. The Food Science and Nutrition Department has decided to provide the best program possible to help with third-world nutrition and inform us about food storage. The Animal Science Department will focus significant attention on the family of Camelidae (llamas, alpacas, vicuñas, etc.), which are not well researched but are critical to the economic and domestic survival of many peoples in Latin America. Faculty in the Departments of Agronomy and Horticulture and Botany and Range Sciences have decided to focus more of their attention on quinoa and other indigenous plants in the Andes region of Latin America. These plants are staples in that area but have received relatively little research attention compared with crops like corn, potatoes, and wheat.

I have yet to see fully developed plans for the impact of these decisions on the curriculum.

However, I see our colleagues becoming aware of wonderful new opportunities they had not been able to see or at least had not been able to take advantage of heretofore. For example, the Farm Management Corporation of the Church, with vast holdings and tremendous international farming needs, is enthusiastic about providing research and internship opportunities for these focusing faculty and their students. Both Humanitarian Services and Welfare Services of the Church have been enthusiastic about providing similar opportunities.

Kent Crookston assures me that the experience of students on projects that apply basic science in these areas will provide them with excellent knowledge about the science involved as well as excellent preparation for careers in research and in government or business. His sense is that they not only learn how to be rigorous scientists, but they also develop an ethic of service that impels them to give of their developing scientific gifts to bless others.

These faculty also know that we need them to make major contributions to the teaching of basic biological sciences to students in general education and in other departments throughout the university. Imagine the way that the faculty's new learning in their areas of focus will help general education students see the benefits of the biological sciences. Imagine the teaching assistants in their classes who have been involved in significant research and internship experiences being able to share with general education students their enthusiasm for their science and their service.

It is very hard work to achieve the kind of consensus our colleagues in applied biological sciences are developing. We have to overcome concerns about individual research initiatives and a tendency to cling to the familiar to develop the right focus for the unit. But I have spoken directly with several of these groups. There is a light in their eyes and a palpable excitement.

I am reminded of the Lord's words in Doctrine and Covenants 88:67: "And if your

eye be single to my glory, your whole bodies shall be filled with light, and there shall be no darkness in you." I have always assumed that the body that would be filled with light would be that of an individual person. What I have been seeing in these efforts in the College of Biology and Agriculture and in other similar efforts on campus is that groups of individuals have become "a body" filled with light and with enthusiasm, operating more as one than as a collection of individuals and thus comprehending new things together.

Many departments will have more difficulty in making such specific connections to the needs of the Church than have our colleagues in the applied biological sciences. However, departments and other units who are helping their students develop the faith, intellect, character, and ethic of learning and service that are the aims of a BYU education are fulfilling their highest purpose. If in support of that purpose they can develop and pursue a few areas of focus for their research and creative pursuits, they will have more depth to offer their students and a greater ability to share this learning in their disciplines and with others through distance learning or other means. When it is appropriate, they will also find ways to help develop friends for the university and the Church.

The past two years have brought significant improvement in our ability to focus and to align ourselves with BYU's institutional objectives. We are trying to streamline our processes for department and accreditation reviews and link their results more clearly to our budgeting and planning. We hope all of these processes will help us become more aligned with our objectives. We have asked deans to work with chairs and, in turn, asked the chairs to work with departments to consider their purposes and align them with the objectives. We have asked to see how they are reallocating their current resources to address their priorities. When they have done all they can do within the department and college, we consider what

additional needs they have and try to help where we can in areas of greatest harmony with institutional objectives. Last year we were just starting this process and found some good work was being done. This year we received uniformly thoughtful proposals that showed evidence of significant work at refocusing colleges and other units. We have much more to do. But the progress is heartening.

It has been a remarkable blessing to have some additional funding made available because of the generosity of donors. We have found ways to sacrifice and reallocate to meet many of the needs we see. The Brethren have been very impressed with our efforts to focus and reallocate and have encouraged us to continue with this good work.

Another way that we are trying to align our efforts with our objectives involves the development of a survey that will help us ascertain the degree to which we are accomplishing the aims of a BYU education. Addie Fuhriman organized an excellent committee that has been developing this survey instrument for two years. The committee included Richard Sudweeks from the Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology; Gary Burlingame from the Department of Psychology; Howard Christensen from the Statistics Department; David Smart from the Counseling Center; and Danny Olsen, along with several others, from the Office of Planning and Assessment.

I am pleased to announce that this fall, and every year thereafter, we will administer this survey to a sample of our graduates who have been away from the university for three years. The Office of Planning and Assessment will provide departments and other units with data about their students and comparisons with the responses of the graduates as a whole. Each of the departments has been invited to suggest some specific questions they want to ask graduates based on their unit objectives. The Office of Planning and Assessment has received responses from more than half of the depart-

ments. I hope that you will be active participants in clarifying your focus for student programs, in submitting your questions for inclusion in this landmark learning effort for the institution, and in using the information derived from it to guide your improvements over time.

Experiment with New Technologies

I now turn to some brief observations about the use of new technologies to improve student learning and to share the blessings of learning with other members of the Church. Our first hope is that our experiments will lead us to real improvements in the way we support student learning on campus. We believe that students need to know how to manage themselves in a world that is increasingly involved with the Internet and a variety of computer devices. We also hope that as we improve student learning here, we can develop materials and approaches that can be shared more broadly. These two hopes must be buttressed by enough time savings that we can free up faculty to share these learning opportunities more broadly as well as be able to continue to update and further develop the materials involved.

The president showed us this morning materials that our faculty in several areas have developed in conjunction with the Center for Instructional Design that can significantly improve the ability of our students to learn certain concepts. We have had a surge of creativity from the collaboration of faculty and CID. What I have learned from observing these collaborations is that the technologies and approaches are quite diverse and are becoming more so. Take a look at some examples of this diversity and creativity from a sample of four of our faculty: Steven L. Turley, Department of Physics and Astronomy; Shauna C. Anderson, Department of Microbiology; Gary L. Hatch, English Department; and Norm Nemrow, School of Accountancy and Information Systems.

Our assessment of the courses we have developed that rely heavily on such media

objects and technology-assisted delivery suggests that learning outcomes for students are, on average, at least as good as their in-class counterparts. When we realize that in addition to good learning outcomes students and faculty are developing improved competence in these media, we are encouraged.

However, we have not been able to demonstrate that providing course work using a variety of approaches with new technologies results, on average, in significant efficiencies in faculty time or in the use of classroom space overall. In part this result seems to be related to the rather significant start-up costs associated with learning how to teach in a new way with new media. Several faculty who have been at this business for two years or more have found ways to achieve excellent learning results and become more efficient.

Another reason for differences in course efficiencies relates to the design of the course. When faculty use approaches like providing answers to frequently asked questions or using preprogrammed responses to pretest questions to give students immediate feedback, they are able to conserve time to engage students on more difficult or unique questions.

We still have more to learn before we can share the blessings of BYU's education as extensively as we would like. We believe that education of the whole person requires more than the conceptual knowledge we are trying to share in new ways. For example, we are experimenting with ways to bring young people together in distant settings while they are learning so that they can meet role-model adults and associate with and encourage one another in gospel living.

I am delighted at the number of faculty who have been involved in these efforts and the quality of their work. We are learning from each other and from our students about the limitations and the possibilities of using new technologies. I trust that we will all seek to improve our ability to help students learn, with or without technology. But I especially invite those of

you who have the energy and interest to experiment with using the Internet and other technologies both to improve learning on campus and to engage more actively in distance learning.

Of course not every new technology or approach will prove helpful, and we will need to be rigorous in our learning. As the Apostle Paul said, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). In that vein, I especially like the comment of Steve Turley, new chair of the Department of Physics and Astronomy, about what he and his colleagues are learning from their efforts to develop Physical Sciences 100:

I don't think that online courses will ever totally replace the classroom experience. There are a lot of things that go on in the classroom that are very difficult to capture online. What we were delighted with though was to find that there were some advantages online that we couldn't capture in the classroom. So even though there were negatives—some things we had to give up—there were some positives we picked up that, for some students, made an ideal learning environment.

By the way, we are sharing our online courses with more than independent study students. During the past several months, CID professionals have modified 20 independent study and semester online courses that our faculty have developed for use at Ricks College during this academic year. Ricks College president Elder David Bednar has called for every student entering this year to have at least one online learning experience during their two years at Ricks College. In addition to these courses, CID has customized three courses for BYU—Hawaii and one for LDS Business College.

We are likely to have about 49,000 enrollments in our independent study program this year, of which around 6,000 will be online enrollments. The online enrollments are growing at about 1,000 per month over the past several months. We hope that the growth in

demand for our online courses is providing enough additional revenue to help fund further development of online materials on campus and broader sharing. Proceeds from these online courses and the paper and pencil independent studies courses fund approximately half of the Center for Instructional Design and of buying out faculty time. The other half of the funding comes from earnings on our general endowment.

I am enthusiastic about the opportunity that is ours because of new technologies and this increase in funding. Heretofore Independent Study was only able to build a curriculum from faculty who needed a few extra dollars or who felt an obligation to share their learning more broadly. We need a more orderly process for deciding which courses will be developed and by whom.

The most important thing I want you to understand about these efforts to use new technologies is that department chairs and department committees need to assume greater responsibility in the oversight of this curriculum. We need your disciplinary expertise to prioritize the development of online courses for campus and distance uses. We need you to evaluate the rigor and currency of these courses and to recommend when and how they should be updated. We need department chairs to select faculty to do the work and to make these assignments part of their normal load. We can provide funding to buy out faculty time for appropriate periods.

Conclusion

Permit me one final observation in closing. Some have suggested to me that getting closer to the Church would limit us, would hinder our development as a great university. Candidly, I have found that aligning our efforts with the needs and purposes of the Church requires significant coordination and real work. However, I have seen an increase in the light we are receiving and in the influence of the hand of heaven

as we pursue this course. I see faculty, staff, and students being inspired, lifted, and magnified.

A recent example might give you an additional glimpse of what I am observing. Just a few months ago I had the opportunity of representing President Bateman in greeting Ambassador Fahmy, Egypt's ambassador to the United States, and his wife when they visited BYU. We were joined by Dil Parkinson, professor of Arabic and chair of the Department of Asian and Near Eastern Languages, and Erlend Peterson, dean of Admissions and Records and diplomat par excellence for the university and the one who had invited the ambassador to visit. We were pleasantly surprised by the ambassador and his wife's enthusiasm about the Church's Humanitarian Services and the similarities they saw between our religion and theirs. But we weren't prepared for Mr. Fahmy's statement midway through our visit. He said that he had just come from the dinner President Bateman and Elder Neal A. Maxwell had hosted in Washington, D.C., to show the Islamic community the most recent contributions to our Islamic translation series. He was deeply impressed with the work of Dan Peterson and others at BYU to translate classic Islamic texts into English, thus making them available to the Western world. Furthermore, he had discovered that the Church was seeking formal recognition in Egypt, and he offered his services to help accomplish that goal. He provided a candid assessment of the political and religious situation in Egypt and gave specific advice about the process we should follow.

Erlend Peterson was able to make last-minute arrangements that put our Jim Toronto in the car that took the ambassador to the airport at the conclusion of his visit. Jim is a professor of Arabic and comparative religion who has been working closely with Elder Jeffrey R. Holland on obtaining recognition of the Church in the Middle East. He and the ambassador made specific plans together, and the process for obtaining official recognition of the Church is underway.

We didn't find out until a few days later the rest of the story. Following the dinner for the Islamic translation series, Mr. Fahmy had called the Egypt desk in Washington to get additional information on the Church and BYU. The person who was on call was a BYU graduate and a member of the Church. He just happened to know a good deal about both institutions and was able to suggest that the Church would be very interested in obtaining formal recognition.

I know that the Lord is guiding Jim Toronto, Dan Peterson, and Erlend Peterson in their efforts to perform this service. I know that the Lord is inspiring President Bateman and Elder

Maxwell and Elder Holland and others to pursue this work. I also know that the Lord is micro-managing. He is inspiring our students and putting them in places of influence and respect.

May the Lord fill us with light, for "that body which is filled with light comprehendeth all things" (D&C 88:67). We do not yet comprehend all things. But I bear witness of Him who does. It is my conviction that the only way for us to fulfill our purpose as individuals or as institutions within His kingdom is to make our eye single to His glory. If we will do so, He will fill us with light and comprehension beyond our fondest dreams.

