

The Banyan Tree

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It seems only a short time ago that Brigham Young University completed its first century. Now one-fourth of the second century has elapsed. I remember the interest among the faculty and students in 1975 as the university celebrated the achievements of the first 100 years. Excitement surrounded President Spencer W. Kimball's second-century address—an October 1975 devotional in which he provided guideposts for the future and spoke of BYU becoming an "educational Everest" ("The Second Century of Brigham Young University," *Speeches of the Year, 1975* [Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976], 244). His vision for BYU in its second century parallels the theme of this year's conference taken from President Brigham Young, who said, "We should be a people of profound learning" (*JD* 8:40). The thoughts of both Presidents Young and Kimball are similar to those echoed by other prophets of this dispensation. In fact, President John Taylor not only believed we should become a learned people but foresaw the day of Zion's excellence. He stated:

You will see the day that Zion will be as far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are to-day in regard to religious matters. You mark my words, and

write them down, and see if they do not come to pass. [JD 21:100]

In like manner, President Gordon B. Hinckley has spoken of the importance of obtaining an education and has counseled members that they are under "commandment to continue to study and to learn" (*TGBH*, 300).

None of us can assume that he has learned enough. As the door closes on one phase of life, it opens on another, where we must continue to pursue knowledge. Ours ought to be a ceaseless quest for truth. [TGBH, 301]

Today's theme of profound learning is a focus on excellence. It reminds us of the past intellectual and spiritual foundations provided by those who preceded us and upon which we build. It points to the future of becoming a people of profound learning and inquiry. It is particularly appropriate that the theme is

Merrill J. Bateman was the president of Brigham Young University when this address was delivered at the Monday morning session of the BYU Annual University Conference on 27 August 2001 in the Marriott Center.

taken from the words of President Young as we celebrate his 200th birthday.

My purpose today is threefold. The first objective is to describe Brigham Young University's role in the kingdom as seen by its prophets and leaders. The second is to review the last quarter century and evaluate the progress made by the university. Third, if our destiny is one of profound learning and excellence both spiritually and secularly, what are the tasks that lie ahead? What can we do to assure our ascent to new heights?

Brigham Young University's Role in the Kingdom

The role of Brigham Young University during the first 100 years was clear. It was to strengthen members and provide faithful leaders and teachers for the Church. Karl G. Maeser, faced with numerous problems in the 1880s, decided to leave Brigham Young Academy. He changed his mind, however, when in a dream he saw tens of thousands of members that would be blessed by a modern university on Temple Hill.

President Franklin S. Harris, after a meeting with the board of trustees, recognized the university's role in providing leaders in all disciplines. He said:

*The President of the Church, Commission of Education, and all who have anything to do with the Church schools are determined to make this the great Church University. . . . When someone tells you that all the institution will do will be to prepare teachers, tell them they don't know what they are talking about. There is nothing greater than to be a teacher, but the school will have to prepare leaders in other directions just as well. . . . All Mormondom cannot be educated here, but I hope to see the time when two of a city . . . will come here to become leaders. [In Ernest L. Wilkinson and W. Cleon Skousen, *Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 239]*

President Heber J. Grant recognized the role of BYU in providing teachers for the Church educational system. In the depths of the 1930s depression, financial pressures caused the First Presidency to announce the closure of all Church schools, including Brigham Young University. In a meeting following the announcement, a key member of the Brigham Young University Board of Trustees asked President Grant who would provide teachers for the Church. After a moment of reflection, the president reversed his decision regarding this institution. Most other Church schools were closed or given to the public sector. From the beginning, the mandate was clear. Brigham Young University's role was to build testimony, prepare students for their work in the world, and provide teachers and leaders for the Church.

As Church growth accelerated in the 1970s and the university began serving a smaller and smaller fraction of the membership, questions regarding its role and purpose began to surface. If the university could not accommodate all members who desired to attend or even "two of a city," why should the Church support it? Although BYU produces more teachers than any other university in the world, is it enough to justify its existence? Even with 9,000 graduates per year, the number of leaders produced is relatively small in a kingdom of millions.

President Kimball provided an answer to these questions as he illustrated the importance of the university to the Church educational system in his second-century address. In the early part of his speech, he referred to Principal Maeser's description of Brigham Young Academy as "the parent trunk of a great educational banyan tree" (in Alma P. Burton, *Karl G. Maeser: Mormon Educator* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1953], 73; quoted in Kimball, "Second Century," 244, with slightly different wording). President Kimball also noted that President David O. McKay had

described BYU as “the hub of the Church educational wheel” and that others had referred to this institution as “the flagship.” President Kimball then said:

However it is stated, the centrality of this University to the entire system is a very real fact of life. What I say to you, therefore, must take note of things beyond the borders of this campus, but not beyond its influence. [“Second Century,” 244]

In this same light President Gordon B. Hinckley spoke to the priesthood of the Church in October 1999 regarding the importance of Brigham Young University. He began with the Lord’s decree in section 88 of the Doctrine and Covenants, verses 78 to 80, which puts the Church under obligation “not only to learn of ecclesiastical matters but also of secular matters” (“Why We Do Some of the Things We Do,” *Ensign*, November 1999, 52). He then said, “We can accommodate only a relatively few. . . . The number who can be accommodated on campus is finite, but the influence of the university is infinite. Tremendous efforts are being made to enlarge and extend that influence.” He pointed out that “the university has brought much favorable notice to the Church” through the quality of its academic and athletic programs. Also, the university “has become known for standards and ideals . . . which have let the world know of those things in which we believe” (“Why We Do,” 52–53). Speaking of the various BYU campuses, he concluded by saying:

We shall keep these as flagships testifying to the great and earnest commitment of this Church to education, both ecclesiastical and secular, and while doing so prove to the world that excellent secular learning can be gained in an environment of religious faith. [Hinckley, “Why We Do,” 53]

As the Church has grown and the numbers accommodated by the university on campus have diminished in relative terms

and can no longer take even “two of a city,” the prophets have stated that the university is to be a model of profound spiritual and secular learning, a community known for high standards and ideals, a light whose special glow extends beyond campus borders, and an institution whose influence is infinite. The model is unique.

As I reflect on the words of the prophets, the aptness of Karl G. Maeser’s banyan tree becomes clear. A banyan tree spreads by sending out aerial branches that reach down to the earth and become rooted as additional trunks. We are “the parent trunk,” with three others in the form of BYU—Hawaii, BYU—Idaho, and the LDS Business College. We are at the heart of the Church Educational System with the responsibility of preparing teachers and providing learning materials. To the extent that we educate teachers and leaders in the seminary and institute programs, they are branches, and we extend our reach ecclesiastically.

The parent trunk consists of the 29,000 students gathered from all 50 states and more than 115 countries. In addition, 1,600 full-time and 600 part-time faculty assisted by 2,800 staff are also part of the tree. It is a community that speaks 85 languages and teaches more than 60. Overriding the many languages is one common language—that of the Spirit—which creates bonds that turn a diverse community into a unique university. The aerial branches of the parent are spreading carefully around the earth, touching down to bless LDS lives in distant places. BYU’s influence spreads both secularly and spiritually through faculty and staff contact with peers, performing groups traveling the world, independent study programs, education days and weeks, and radio and television. The quality of BYU faculty and student research and creative work are making headlines almost weekly.

In today’s world the spread of BYU’s influence is accelerating as new technologies allow students anywhere in the world at any time to

connect with us. This has helped fully matriculated students both on campus and in Study Abroad programs. In addition, Independent Study has grown from 35,000 off-campus students in 1996 to more than 100,000 in the current year. This has allowed the Division of Continuing Education to return to the university a substantial sum to support advances in the curriculum both on and off campus. BYU-TV, initiated in late 1999, now extends the campus reach to all states within the U.S. and to a large number of foreign countries. The branches and roots will expand the tree until it encompasses the earth. The tree will literally become a forest.

A strong trunk is essential if the branches and secondary roots are to receive quality nourishment. The parent trunk in Provo must be extraordinary both spiritually and secularly if the reach is to be infinite. In particular, it must be a part of “the true vine” (John 15:1) if it is to play a central role in the kingdom’s educational system.

President Spencer W. Kimball hoped for the day when Brigham Young University and the Church Educational System would produce “brilliant stars in drama, literature, music, sculpture, painting, science, and in *all* the scholarly graces” (“Second Century,” 247; emphasis added). His hopes and expectations are now coming to pass. Think of the numerous national and international awards received by our students, faculty, and staff during the past few years. From fine arts to the sciences, from humanities to business, from print to graphics to dining services, stars have arisen, and more will follow. Higher mountains and vistas still lie ahead, but this institution is beginning to lighten the sky. President Kimball’s vision will be fulfilled as the university approaches more closely the model described by President Hinckley.

Recent Trends

In the 1978 Annual University Conference, President Dallin H. Oaks examined changes in the university over a 10-year period, from

1968 to 1978 (see Dallin H. Oaks, “Business and Report Message,” Brigham Young University Annual Conference, 1978, 1–11). He noted that progress is almost undetectable on a year-by-year basis, but an extended period of time provides perspective. Today I believe a similar comparison using 1978 as a baseline will be instructive. It will help us appreciate the distance traveled during the past 23 years, help us understand where we are at present, and provide perspective for the future. The year 1978 provides an excellent comparative base because most of the growth in student numbers had taken place by then.

Student enrollments totaled 25,800 in 1978 and reached 27,000 by the early 1980s, when they were capped. Enrollments remained flat for a number of years but then were allowed to rise to 29,000 for a short time in the late 1980s. In 1997 the board of trustees formally approved an increase to 29,000 and provided additional faculty slots to support the increase. Consequently, the number of full-time students that increased 40 percent between 1968 and 1978 increased only 12 percent in the next 23 years. The percentage change in students is an important baseline for measuring growth in other areas.

The geographic origin of the students remained remarkably stable throughout the 23-year period. BYU students from Utah fluctuated around 30 percent, California’s percentage ranged from 15 to 20 percent, students from the Intermountain states (excluding Utah) fluctuated around 25 percent, students from other parts of the U.S. averaged 20 percent, and foreign students were about 5 percent until this year, when it jumped to 7 percent. Approximately five years ago, in a speech to the Phi Kappa Phi Society, I indicated that the number of foreign students at BYU would grow, given Church growth outside the U.S. It was my impression then, however, that the growth would be slow for various reasons—the main one being economic. However, from last fall to this, the number of foreign students increased

by one-third. One year does not a trend make, but foreign student admissions may begin to accelerate.

President Oaks noted in 1978 that enrollment growth in the prior 10-year period rose 32 percent whereas the number of graduates increased only 18 percent. Today the pattern is reversed. Although the growth in students is 12 percent during the past 23 years, the increase in graduates is 80 percent—increasing from 5,100 to 9,200. Especially significant is the growth in the number of female graduates, which has risen from less than 2,000 to more than 4,600—a jump of 130 percent. Males made up two-thirds of each graduating class 23 years ago. Today, female graduates slightly exceed their male counterparts with the percentages almost even. It is no longer a given that young women attending Brigham Young University will quit school when they marry. They are as determined to graduate as the men.

One of the most dramatic indicators of excellence is the quality of students enrolled. In 1978 entering freshmen had a grade point average of 3.4. Today the figure is almost 3.8. The average ACT score 23 years ago was 22.4; today the number is 27.4. As the Church continues to grow, the number of LDS students with high GPA and ACT scores will continue to climb. In another 20 years it is quite likely that the admissions pool could average a 3.9 GPA and 32 to 33 on the ACT. Given very high scores that provide little differentiation, other measures used to determine admission will become more important. It is imperative that the factors used in the process be improved.

Because of the generosity of the board of trustees and the additional funds gathered in the capital campaign, the number of full-time faculty increased 24 percent during this period—twice the percentage of increase in the student body. The student-faculty ratio dropped by two—from 21 to 19. The reduction is particularly important as we contemplate moving to a student-mentored learning environment,

where students at the undergraduate level become engaged with faculty in research and creative projects. The number of LDS women with high-quality terminal degrees is increasing. Consequently, the percentage of women among new faculty hires has risen, averaging more than 30 percent in recent years.

One statistic that remained static during the period is the percent of faculty with PhDs. The figure was 70 percent in 1978 and is 72 percent today. President Oaks forecasted a nearly constant figure because there are a number of fields in which “a master’s degree is the terminal degree” (Oaks, “Business and Report,” AUC, 1978, 2). What has changed in the interim is the quality of faculty as measured by books published, the number of critically reviewed publications, juried and invited works, etc. Books published by BYU faculty in the late 1970s averaged 60 to 70 per year. Today the figure is above 200. Just in the last 10 years the number of juried, invited, and published creative works almost quadrupled, rising from 103 to 380. In the last five years the number of critically reviewed publications jumped 17 percent.

There is more space today per student and per employee than in 1978. Square footage on campus increased during the 23 years from 6 million to more than 8 million—a 33 percent increase. This is in contrast to the 12 percent rise in the number of students and the 24 percent addition to the faculty. Moreover, we are becoming more efficient in the use of space. The new Smith Building will be much more efficient than the current Smith Family Living Center and the other facilities it will replace. The 50-percent addition to the library is of extraordinary quality and an immense improvement to the learning environment. The addition and improvements to the Wilkinson Student Center provide adequate space for student services. The refurbishment of the Eyring Science Center created additional space and increased the utility of that building.

The David O. McKay Building is now under renovation and will be much improved. The campus has never looked better—except for the hole in front of the Talmage Building. When completed, that underground, highly secured computer and telephone center will serve both BYU and the Church.

BYU Continuing Education enrollments continue to rise. President Oaks noted that registrations doubled in his 10-year period. Credit enrollments in 2001 are almost four times the 1978 number. In just the last five years, credit enrollments doubled—from 35,000 to 70,000. If one includes two new noncredit Web courses in family history, the number of Independent Study registrations will total 100,000 by the year's end. When Web courses were added in 1996, I thought paper-and-pencil enrollments would flatten and eventually fall due to increased use of the Web. In the five years that have elapsed, however, paper-and-pencil registrations for credit have risen 15,000, whereas Web enrollments have gone from zero to almost 20,000.

The funds provided by the board of trustees represent an enormous endowment for the university. There is no other educational institution in the world with a sponsor like ours, whether the measure is leadership or financial support. Church funding will continue to be the mainstay of the university for the foreseeable future. In addition, however, the board has seen fit to support us in raising additional funds for key purposes, including an endowment. All funds, both Church-appropriated plus donations, are treated as sacred, and expenditures are approved by the board. Donations to the university in the late 1970s averaged less than \$10 million annually. At the beginning of the capital campaign in 1994, gift receipts totaled \$20 to \$25 million annually. Yearly donations during the campaign increased from \$25 million to almost \$100 million at the end of the campaign in 1999, and averaged \$75

million for the five-year period. Development goals for the next five years are to provide funds for the new Joseph F. Smith Building, technology needs on campus, an indoor athletic practice facility, and support of the student-mentored learning program, as well as a number of other special needs.

Commitment to Excellence

Finally, there are challenges and opportunities for us to consider as we strive to build a house of profound learning. I firmly believe that Brigham Young University is a “school of destiny,” but the fulfillment of prophetic vision requires that we lengthen our step. President Hinckley had a vision of 100 temples by the end of the century. The vision became a reality because of the planning and execution taken by him and others. Prophetic utterances become reality when people believe and act. Faith is necessary to ascend the higher mountains that lie ahead.

In “The Second Century of Brigham Young University,” President Kimball quoted Ernest L. Wilkinson, editor of *Brigham Young University: The First One Hundred Years*:

*To go to BYU is something special. There were Brethren who had dreams regarding the growth and maturity of Brigham Young University, even to the construction of a temple on the hill they had long called Temple Hill, yet “dreams and prophetic utterances are not self-executing. They are fulfilled . . . by righteous and devoted people making prophecies come true.” [In Kimball, “Second Century,” 255–56; see also Wilkinson and Skousen, *School of Destiny*, 876]*

President Kimball spoke of this same principle. He said:

We must do more than ask the Lord for excellence. Perspiration must precede inspiration; there must be effort before there is excellence. We must do more than pray for these outcomes at BYU, though we

must surely pray. We must take thought. We must make effort. We must be patient. We must be professional. We must be spiritual. Then, in the process of time, this will become the fully anointed university of the Lord about which so much has been spoken in the past. ["Second Century," 253]

In what ways can we lengthen our stride, pick up the pace, and participate in creating a “fully anointed university of the Lord,” a Zion of profound learning? There are five suggestions that I believe will make a difference over the next few years. The first is concerned with the spiritual aspects of our work, building a community. The others pertain to improvements in our approach to secular learning.

1. Building a Community

Are we of one heart and one mind? To what extent are we unified in our efforts to build a Zion on campus, to become a fully anointed university, to receive an endowment of power? Brigham Young University is unique among its peers. It is the only major university that has a chance of becoming an eternal educational institution, of having infinite influence. No other university of its stature has a faculty and staff that speak the distinctive language of the Spirit. No one else has access to the spiritual forces that transcend disciplinary ties found in departments and colleges. We have more in common with people in other departments than a signature on a paycheck. Most of us are here because we believe in the destiny of BYU.

In this light, there is one campus activity that I believe has the power to create a sense of Zion above all others. It is the Tuesday morning devotional. Other major universities invite their communities to one or two celebrations per year—a commencement. BYU is one of the few universities in the world that attempts to bring its entire community together on a weekly basis. Why do we do it? Is it just for counsel? If so, why not save an hour and read the speech on the Internet?

I believe the major purpose of the devotional is to build a community, to expand our vision, and to recommit us to the quest.

In the recent alumni survey, former students were asked which activities had the most influence on their spiritual development at BYU. Respondents gave devotionals the highest ranking, followed by religion courses and BYU wards. I was surprised that devotionals came ahead of BYU wards, where students have an opportunity to participate actively in spiritual matters. I suspect the presence of prophets and apostles on occasion had some influence on their feelings. On the other hand, I believe that students became part of a larger community as they gathered with thousands of their peers and teachers to be spiritually taught. Devotionals helped them see the university and its role in the Church more clearly.

Gerrit Gong, a new member of the administration, recently told me about the commitment he made as a freshman student. During his first week on campus, he determined that he would not miss a devotional or a class during his time at BYU. He confessed that he missed four classes during the four years due to illness but attended every devotional.

I ask you to accept the following challenge. As faculty and staff, will you commit to attending every devotional that is within your power to attend? By attendance I refer to being in the Marriott Center. Will you help us build a sense of community by discussing the subject matter for a minute or two in classes or the workplace that day or the next? Will you share with students the sense of community we are trying to create and encourage them to become full partners in the community by attending devotionals? If you have administrative or supervisory responsibilities, will you encourage coworkers to become a part of this special hour?

Some have suggested that we force people to attend by making it a condition in the contract. Others have suggested that we return to

giving credit to students who attend. We have rejected both suggestions because we are not interested in superficial orthodoxy. Our hope is that your commitment to prophetic vision will lead you here.

2. Continuous Reinvention

The second request concerns the need for ongoing reinvention in departments, colleges, and educational support units. I applaud the changes underway in biology and agriculture, engineering, and technology, in family and social sciences, education, business, fine arts, health and human performance, in printing and travel and numerous other units.

Circumstances and needs change over time. If we want to add new subjects to the curriculum, we must be willing to drop others that may not be quite as important. If student loads shift from one department to another, we must be willing to rebalance if we believe the move is permanent and not temporary.

President Kimball pointed out 26 years ago that if Brigham Young University is “the flagship,” then it must be willing to take “out all old planks as they decay and put in new and stronger timber in their place” to keep the ship seaworthy (“Second Century,” 248).

3. Focusing Resources

The third suggestion concerns the need to focus resources. One of the dangers we face is attempting too many things. We are a community of 35,000, including students and employees. All are bright and creative. If everyone does his or her own thing, chaos will result. It is important that we channel our energies, select areas of opportunity unique to our interests, and build faculty teams in areas of strength where we can become world-class.

A strategic approach in a number of colleges has produced extraordinary results in a short period of time. The School of Family Life, the World Family Policy Center, and the Center for Religion and Freedom are examples.

The Center for Remote Sensing and the Environmental Laboratory in the College of Engineering and Technology are windows through which the world can see extraordinary research being conducted at BYU.

With the addition of two supercomputers in the last two years, BYU’s computer power ranks fifth in the nation among universities. The computers are being shared across campus by numerous departments, and undergraduate students as well as graduates are allowed access. A unique aspect of the computers is the creative excellence they are spawning. Faculty and students from various disciplines are doing world-class work as the computers save years of time in producing results.

The deans, department chairs, and heads of educational support units have accepted the challenge to focus resources to accelerate the quality of teaching and research across campus. This is an ongoing process. We hope in the planning, assessment, and budgeting activities we will identify key strategic areas where a concentration of resources will make a significant difference.

4. Student-Mentored Learning

The fourth suggestion pertains to student-mentored learning. Much has been said in recent months about this topic. The desire is to give most undergraduate students an opportunity to work with a faculty member on a research or creative work project. The culminating act is for the student to publish a paper or exhibit an important work. We believe that the number of students already having this opportunity is significant, but it is actually less than 20 percent.

Some funds have been made available through the academic vice president’s office to seed such activities. We understand that more funds are needed. For example, additional research and teaching assistantships will be required. We know that technical support staff is inadequate and must be

augmented. Student-mentored learning is one of the highest priorities on the development agenda. We will begin in the 2001–2002 school year to allocate some new monies from the endowment fund, including support for 10 new professorships.

Our challenge today is for departments to discuss these matters and determine the nature of the opportunities, what changes must be made to accommodate a student-mentored approach, and what resources are required. Our pledge is to work with you by providing the resources necessary to elevate learning to a new level.

5. Continual Curriculum Improvement

Finally, the last suggestion concerns continual improvement of the curriculum. Every faculty member must be a lifelong learner. An enormous investment has been made by each of you in the quest for a terminal degree. Further investment is required by the review process for rank and continuing status. Accrediting agencies now or soon will require further reviews of faculty productivity as long as you are employed by the university.

New technologies are available that have the potential of improving the learning process. Stephen Jones, assistant to the academic vice president, is making significant progress in identifying new tools, resolving problems that exist with current software, and organizing university resources to provide training for faculty. Presentations on new technologies will be given during the next few days.

Although we still have much to learn, it is becoming apparent that technology, if used appropriately, can enhance the learning process, increase student contact, and save faculty time. We encourage you to become familiar and determine the appropriateness of these technologies for your courses. Above all, curriculum improvement must be an ongoing process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Brigham Young University plays a central role in the educational process of the Church. BYU's destiny is to be a model of profound spiritual and secular learning with high standards and ideals. In the process of becoming the Lord's fully anointed university, its influence will become infinite.

Significant progress has been made on almost every front during the last 23 years as the university has matured significantly in terms of its spiritual and secular mission. Faculty and student quality is the highest in history, and the future looks even brighter.

For the university to achieve its destiny, there must be a sense of community, and devotionals play a critical role. Reinvention is an ongoing process and must continue. It is imperative that resources be focused in areas of strength and unique areas of interest. There is an opportunity to take the learning process to a new level through a student-mentored learning approach. Curriculum improvement in coming years must match the quality of students that will come.

Eventually the banyan tree will be transformed into a beautiful white tree with fruit that is delicious to the taste. The tree will shine as a standard for the nations because of its perfected dual nature. The light emanating from the tree will be of infinite power, and people will embrace the light and their knowledge will become perfect.

Most of us have planted the seed of the tree in our hearts. We have nourished the seed and it has sprouted. A swelling motion has told us that it is a good seed (see Alma 32:28–43). We do not know all things now, but if we continue we will become an integral part of the tree and enjoy its perfect light. May the Lord bless us to this end is my prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

