

Why BYU?

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Once again it is my happy privilege to welcome you to our annual university conference and to wish each of you an enthusiastic Happy New Year! While that statement would seem strange to those outside the academic tradition, for us this is the beginning of another new year in the university calendar. I'm excited for the opportunities that await us and hope you feel the same.

For some of you, this is your first experience with us in this setting, and we are grateful that you have joined us. While you are fewer in number than in some years because of the economic realities we face, your importance to the success and progress of the university is magnified. We also welcome back those of you who have been away on missions, leaves, or other assignments.

Some of you have been coming here for many years, and we are most appreciative of your splendid, consistent, and productive contributions. We especially are pleased to see retirees and companions with us as well. All members of this community appreciably add to the excellence, spirit, and accomplishments of this wonderful institution initiated and sustained by the Lord's servants.

Almost 11 years ago, in the October 1999 general conference of the Church, President

Gordon B. Hinckley addressed the priesthood session by discussing "why we do some of the things we do." Of the several topics he covered that evening, the first on his list was to discuss this question: Why does the Church sponsor BYU? Even though at that time I had absolutely no inkling that my current responsibility would ever be mine, I was very interested in what he said, and I recommend his address to you in its entirety. Since my appointment I have reflected on this question regularly and frequently, and it continues to inform me and us in our decisions, our priorities, our commitments, and our efforts. Some may remember that I have spoken about this on other occasions.

First, President Hinckley noted the Church's sponsorship of BYU has "a doctrinal root." The scriptures he quoted will be largely familiar to this group, and our Church's history from the beginning with respect to education is likewise well known.

Second, even though the Church is not able to provide a university education to more than

Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this address was given at the BYU annual university conference on 24 August 2010.

a small fraction of worthy Church members, it is important to do the most we can. Said he, “The number who can be accommodated on campus is finite, but the influence of the university is infinite.” Not only do our graduates bless the lives of others throughout the world, but BYU has “brought much favorable notice to the Church.” He went on to give several examples that you easily recognize.¹

While President Hinckley—and, I might add, our current First Presidency feels the same way—recognized how extremely expensive this institution is to the Church, he also was clear in his endorsement of continued support and recognition of the tremendous contribution Brigham Young University makes to the cause of the Church. This confidence is inspiring but also daunting as we consider together our possibilities and responsibilities at the start of the new academic year.

Our university conference theme this year is taken from Doctrine and Covenants 88:122: “That All May Be Edified of All.” This divine imperative for all to be edified is a wonderful goal and expectation. That all should also be involved in edifying others provides a construct that is not the pattern of the world generally but must be part of the culture of Brigham Young University. This reminds us of the heavenly expectation that we should practice courtesy, civility, and mutual respect in every encounter we have. I’m grateful that so many do this so well and encourage each of us to be both attentive to our own conduct as well as of assistance to others in their own growth and struggles to be edifiers.

If there are any in our university community who are intentionally malicious, then they must be very few. Sadly, from time to time, we do hear reports of those who are at best insensitive and at worst insulting in their comments to and about others. Unfortunately, our general society seems to be more polarized than ever. We hear derogatory and sometimes even defamatory comments about those with

different political, athletic, or ethnic views or experiences. Such behavior is completely out of place at BYU, and I enlist the aid of all to monitor carefully and, if necessary, correct any such that might occur here, however inadvertent or unintentional.

I worry particularly about demeaning comments made about the career or major choices of women or men either directly or about members of the BYU community generally. We must remember that personal agency is a fundamental principle and that none of us has the right or option to criticize the lawful choices of another. Please read “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” carefully and be sure that you are not misinterpreting or misrepresenting the words of the prophets or injecting your own bias or preferences.

All of us have probably heard reports in recent years about prominent athletes, politicians, or business people whose lives have come crashing down when their path to prominence was exposed as one built upon fraud and deceit. Perhaps you have also heard of other individuals—less well known—who became entangled in lies designed to cover fraud committed against their employers, a spouse, or others.

The social, political, and personal costs of this dishonest conduct are high. Twenty years ago President Gordon B. Hinckley thoughtfully observed:

What was once controlled by the moral and ethical standards of the people, we now seek to handle by public law. And so the statutes multiply, enforcement agencies consume ever-increasing billions, and prison facilities are constantly expanded—but the torrent of dishonesty pours on and grows in volume.²

If anything, this unfortunate trend has accelerated in recent years. Institutions like ours must increasingly respond to these laws and enforcement actions, which in turn increase

our costs as we diligently devote time, money, and human effort to ensure compliance. In addition, while dishonest acts are disappointing, disruptive, and costly to investigate for the institution, they also result in untold spiritual, personal, and family devastation for the individual involved. Acts of dishonesty may cause you to lose your job, be criminally prosecuted, and face prison time and restitution damages as well as to compromise your standing in the Church and with family and friends.

At BYU we are committed to the highest standard of honesty and integrity in maintaining our sacred resources. At a 1992 BYU devotional, President Gordon B. Hinckley stated:

*Every one of us who is here has accepted a sacred and compelling trust. With that trust, there must be accountability. That trust involves standards of behavior as well as standards of academic excellence. For each of us it carries with it a larger interest than our own interest. It carries with it the interest of the university, and the interest of the Church, which must be the interest of each and all of us.*³

All of us have committed and recommitted to be honest in all our dealings as a condition of our employment here. Indeed, as taught in Alma, may we be “perfectly honest and upright in all things” (Alma 27:27).

Yesterday, in our regularly scheduled annual university conference session with deans, directors, and department chairs, we were instructed and edified by our special guest, President Henry B. Eyring, first counselor in the First Presidency and an officer of the Brigham Young University Board of Trustees. President Eyring occupies the same position as did President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., when he (President Clark) shared his foundational statement “The Charted Course of the Church in Education.”⁴ Like President Hinckley’s address previously referenced, I highly recommend a reading or rereading of President Clark’s masterful discourse.

President Eyring also shared his remarkable vision and insights about the role of Church education and particularly the critical part BYU plays. He was clear in reaffirming the support the current First Presidency gives to the important work done here. I think no other university of substance enjoys the consistent support and encouragement that we receive from our board of trustees.

Now, for a few moments, let me give some updates on happenings across campus that may be of some interest to you. At the outset you will appreciate that I cannot touch on every activity, initiative, or matter of importance. My inclusions are arbitrary, and others could have been substituted or added to the list. I will mention briefly in this order the following: athletics, BYU Broadcasting, planning for a new life sciences building, and the current situation as I know it with respect to the economy and the ongoing hiring freeze. Other updates on such matters as accreditation, admissions, and various recognitions will also be touched upon in our time together.

Athletics

Much is frequently said and written about athletics at BYU. We are grateful to the individuals and teams who represent BYU so well on and off the fields, tracks, courts, and other venues in which we compete so successfully. When we rarely stub our toes, our athletics administration proceeds carefully but expeditiously to see that the matters are appropriately resolved in a manner consistent with all that we do at BYU.

Occasionally, naysayers have said that BYU could choose student-athletes who would abide by our Honor Code or BYU could choose student-athletes who could win athletic competitions. Happily, through the leadership and commitment of our athletic directors, coaches, and especially our BYU student-athletes, we are proving that BYU student-athletes can win on and off the field in all the ways that really

matter because of, not in spite of, the honesty, integrity, and commitments we uphold in our BYU Honor Code.

As athletic conference alignments and contracts of various kinds change, we extend best wishes to our neighboring institutions, even as we at BYU continue to focus on what we consider the primary mission of BYU and thereby of our constituent BYU programs and activities, including athletics.

Early this year I appointed a presidential commission on sportsmanship jointly chaired by vice president Kevin Worthen and athletic director Tom Holmoe to make recommendations on improving our sportsmanship and respect for others. Very shortly their report will be published and their recommendations will begin to be implemented. I express my appreciation to this entire group chosen from across the wide BYU community, and we will have more to say in the immediate weeks ahead.

BYU Broadcasting

Our new BYU Broadcasting building is coming along on schedule, and you now can anticipate its final appearance. Equally important, the installation of the highly sophisticated, state-of-the-art equipment is also proceeding apace. Because of the tremendous generosity of many donors and the very large investment of the Church, we will be able to provide better than ever before regularly refreshed, inviting, inspiring, and appropriate programming content to ever-increasing audiences within the United States and abroad. With the 24/7 streaming of content over the Internet, many more people than I could imagine when I came to BYU a few short years ago now have regular access to content that is both educational and faith promoting. We have had the motto “The world is our campus” for many years, and we now have this much more recent manifestation that it is true in ways most would have only dared imagine in the past. We learned recently, for example, according to CBSSports.com data,

that the BYU–University of Florida basketball game during the last NCAA tournament was the most-watched live sporting event ever online with 1,115,097 visitors.

Life Sciences

For a number of years we have talked about the need to modernize our campus and keep up to speed with appropriate developments. For decades it has been noted by BYU leaders that as a university we may not be able to do everything, but what we commit to do, we will do well. Among the discipline areas in which BYU is committed to do well is life sciences. With the support and encouragement of our board of trustees, the College of Life Sciences and our physical facilities staff are carefully planning and exploring options for a new facility to replace the Widtsoe Building and other spaces that have reached their reasonable life expectancy. These times of some economic uncertainty require especially great care in considering the replacement of facilities. We, therefore, are grateful for the opportunity to proceed carefully where our academic mission and available resources justify some focused replacements and additions. As part of this effort, new greenhouses will be constructed east of campus to make possible site preparations for the new building.

Economy and Hiring Freeze

One of the few certainties about our current economy and the economic outlook for the future is that it is uncertain. While the various media have much to say and the opinions vary, it is clear that our current economic situation is unlike any before. Another situation unlike others is that Brigham Young University has done relatively well during this difficult period. Where other educational institutions—including those in this state—have had to lay off faculty and staff and cut student programs, majors, and other activities, we have been able to keep current BYU faculty and staff and do

some internal reallocating. Virtually everyone has made sacrifices of various sorts, and I am grateful, as is our board.

The board has permitted us to make some carefully considered exception requests for critical positions, and they have been granted. In addition, we have been able to bring on more temporary and visiting faculty than would be the norm, but the hiring freeze still has been very difficult. It is my belief that the board may find a way to ease the freeze in the months ahead, but, in the meantime, we must continue as we have with their support and appreciation.

Many students depend on campus employment for learning opportunities and for paying for school. We are grateful the hiring freeze has not included them. Demand for student jobs has been very strong, as might be expected, and we have had a significant increase in the number of students employed over the past 30 months. With some fluctuations due to the academic calendar, we have continued to increase the number of student employees. It was reported to me that we reached a high point for employing students in March 2010, when 13,595 students earned paychecks on campus.

Let me emphasize again our appreciation for the tremendous efforts and sacrifices of so many across the campus. We are living the familiar phrase "Use it up, wear it out, make it do, or do without." In many cases the university is stronger for it. When the economic tensions subside a little, I'm confident that we will be even better managers of our resources, allowing our impressive progress to accelerate. Let me share just two examples of positive outcomes that have been achieved in these difficult times.

Working closely with our university administrative vice president and chief financial officer, Brian Evans, and other campus leaders responsible for budget and financial matters, many deans, directors, faculty, and staff have found ways to use existing funds instead of

drawing on endowments when the markets have been so down. Preserving "seed corn," to use an agrarian analogy, makes good sense. Likewise, the situation has given us all greater insight into the differences between wants and needs.

Our university chief information officer, Kelly Flanagan, created something called a CIO Lab, which involves 27 student interns, of whom most work 20 hours per week to develop portlets for students. Instead of facing the lack of adequate personnel and other delays until at least early 2011, the project makes time available for brainstorming and innovation, creates easier-to-use interfaces for existing solutions, and gives students rich on-the-job training.

While these increased employment opportunities for students have been a blessing for many, we also have concerns about those students who work excessive hours. For example, we find that students working more than 31 hours per week do significantly poorer in their academic studies. This is one of the reasons that increasing financial aid for truly needy students has such a high priority with the administration.

There are other BYU enrollment challenges that we are monitoring as well. Our continuing student population is burgeoning. Because of the external employment situation, some students are delaying graduation to stay in school and delay the onset of student loan repayment. While we have great sympathy for them, we are also concerned that it further limits our capacity to serve worthy and otherwise eligible new students. There are other examples of the increased challenges the economy creates for the university, but you will appreciate that there is very little we do that is not affected.

As I stated earlier, our board of trustees does not see the hiring freeze as a way to reduce the size or capacity of BYU. The hiring freeze is not intended to establish what some have called a "new normal"—the shrinking on a permanent

basis the number of BYU faculty, staff, or students. In the face of current circumstances, the support for and the faith in BYU by our prophet leaders is truly extraordinary.

As we have seen, challenges very often also offer opportunities. It would be a great disappointment to our board and other interested, knowledgeable observers if someday, when the hiring freeze is lifted or modified, we just slid back to doing old things in old ways. Hopefully the lessons of this unique season of sacrifice will continue to encourage each of us to adjust and adapt, to find and create new opportunities and ways to do different things better. Likewise, when we again achieve more flexibility in hiring, we will want to take the appropriate time to choose very carefully those we invite in a gradual, measured way to repopulate the ranks of the BYU faculty and staff. How and when that will happen will be the topic for another university conference.

Now, let me move from these update snapshots to some other matters of both current and future interest. Again, these issues and areas are neither all-inclusive nor necessarily the most important or urgent. They are things we do and need to think about and consider.

While we have one of the most beautiful of campuses anywhere, in some areas ours is physically aging. Where appropriate and possible, weighing carefully both short- and long-term considerations, we are planning or undertaking needed renovations and regularly scheduled maintenance. For those who have been on campus this summer, you will be aware that, over time, we are placing all of our utilities in service tunnels. Initially, the standard practice was to bury them in trenches across the campus. We have learned that it is safer, less expensive, more efficient, and less intrusive on campus life to have water, gas, power, and other utilities so housed in service tunnels.

The Marriott Center has been a remarkable asset to this campus for many years. You

have witnessed some modifications to our corner entryways and efforts to make egress and ingress safer and more efficient. Over the years the asbestos has been removed, the floor replaced, and so forth. Even though many of us are larger than were our predecessors when the building was constructed, it is not possible without starting completely over to make the chair upon which you sit wider or the distance between rows greater. We will be very grateful for this facility as it is and promise not to keep you today longer than necessary!

BYU is truly unique in so many ways. Yet we are also pleased to demonstrate to the world that we uphold appropriate, generally accepted academic values and standards—including those set through the established procedures of both discipline and institutional accreditation.

Brigham Young University's commitment to quality assurance and continuing improvement is rooted in our relentless pursuit of academic excellence and effectiveness and the invitation and expectation expressed by the chairman and our board of trustees that we each do all we can to make BYU the best it can be.

We all know President Thomas S. Monson's statement of principle and practice: "When performance is measured, performance improves. When performance is measured and reported, the rate of improvement accelerates."⁵ While not everything that is important can or should be visibly measured, many things that matter most in a BYU education can and do improve by appropriate measurement, by sensible reporting, and by focused attention to both genuine improvement and the rate of improvement, particularly for the benefit of students.

As part of a voluntary, nongovernmental peer-review system of higher education accreditation, Brigham Young University is also committed to the principles of quality assurance and continuing improvement, peer review, protection of public interest, institutional

participation and adherence to academic principles, mission-centered evaluation of each institution, and institutional autonomy and academic freedom administered in our case under the auspices of our regional accrediting agency, the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU).

Over the last many years, all of this has been led admirably and with distinction by Dr. Gerrit W. Gong. Since he was recently called as a General Authority of the Church, he has now retired from Brigham Young University. We will miss him and his tremendous expertise, his devotion to BYU, and his innate intelligence and wisdom. Like all members of the President's Council, he has been a valuable colleague and friend. While I have not mentioned all the President's Council members by name thus far, I would be remiss if I did not publicly acknowledge my gratitude for all that they do so very well in service to BYU. Many of you will know them: Carri Jenkins, Mike Orme, Sandra Rogers, Jan Scharman, John Tanner, and Kevin Worthen, in addition to Brian Evans and Kelly Flanagan, who were previously mentioned. We are also ably assisted by Jan Ekeroth and Elaine Alger. This is really a terrific team, and BYU is most fortunate to have them. In this commendation I also include our deans, directors, and other leaders.

The President's Council has now been joined by Professor Jim Gordon, our new assistant to the president for Planning and Assessment. Jim has served in the administration previously and was also professor of law and interim dean of the J. Reuben Clark Law School. He will be spearheading our accreditation preparation, working closely with many across campus as we gear up to submit in spring 2011 a regularly scheduled report to the Northwest Commission as part of the new accreditation guidelines recently approved by NWCCU institutions, including BYU.

Professor Gordon and each of us can ask ourselves questions such as these:

Where and to what can I and BYU commit as we submit in writing Northwest Commission accreditation reports this coming year (spring 2011) and spring 2014?

Where and what will I and BYU want to show peer visitors when they come to BYU in spring 2012 and in spring 2015?

You know the phrase captured from the carpenter's lexicon: "measure twice, cut once." In our case, you might say we are measuring more than twice to cut once. It is important that we identify carefully our mission, core themes and objectives, and key indicators of achievement we submit to the Northwest Commission. We want to focus on matters of consequence to us in ways in which we can gather demonstrable evidence of improvement—both as we invite others to help evaluate how we are doing and, most important, as we do so ourselves.

Much good effort has established student learning outcomes for each BYU degree program. Now we want to add appreciable evidence that students are achieving those outcomes and that we are using feedback information to improve.

Learning to Learn

Fundamentally we are seeking to instill interest, skills, and internalized desire so our students actually and really "learn how to learn." At some point this may involve student opportunity for written personal reflection, perhaps as part of a personal student portfolio or integrated in a capstone course and interview. It may involve new or broader ways for students to learn from and teach one another. As our academic vice president John Tanner notes, he best learned to write when he began teaching writing.

Student Achievement

Across campus there are myriad evidences of student academic achievement. These

include student presentations, student performances, joint student-faculty scholarship, creative works, and publications. Our students do well in competitions of all kinds and contribute with poise, expertise, and insight that thrill us all. Indeed, as faculty and staff at Brigham Young University, we understand our most enduring legacy may well be the ongoing, continuing contributions and service of our students and their families . . . and their families . . . and their families. Many of the successes we value most are multigenerational in all the splendor of their flowering in individuals, families, professions, communities, and countries.

Faculty and Staff Achievement

Overall, we recognize the remarkable commitment of members of the BYU community to the mission of BYU. This includes the emphasis we place, as determined by our board of trustees, on BYU as an undergraduate teaching institution with some graduate programs of distinction. I have spoken on other occasions of how a student-centric lens lends specific perspective to all of what we do in scholarship and creative works, teaching, and citizenship. Thank you for your faith and commitment, your discipline and dedication, your living every day in ways that continue to make BYU better on our way toward best.

And that brings us to longer-term opportunities and challenges.

Longer Term

Today, perhaps in ways as never before, Brigham Young University is coming out of obscurity. As Elder Neal A. Maxwell used to point out, coming out of obscurity means showing our warts and all. The better we become known for all the many accomplishments and achievements of our students, faculty, staff, and athletic teams and the better we become known for our scholarship, editorial boards, professional society service and

leadership, and so forth, the more also the expectations will rise that will judge BYU and our sponsoring Church by the way we conduct ourselves.

The reputation of BYU continues to grow. We are now known not only regionally but nationally and internationally. Individuals and groups from BYU are welcome and contribute around the world, and BYU welcomes individuals and groups from all around the world who contribute here at BYU while they gain from what we offer them in return. All the while we understand our most important focus and work is within the walls of our own campus. Even though “the world is our campus” and we do “go forth to serve,” our primary emphasis remains on the quality and importance of what we do here at home.

We frequently ask ourselves this question: How can and will BYU be equal to our increasingly exceptional students? By every measure, students being admitted, enrolling, learning in and out of classes, and graduating are more prepared in faith, testimony, leadership, and service as well as in academic preparation and achievement and in natural and developed aptitude and multifaceted talent than ever before.

On average, undergraduate students come to BYU for about four to six years, not counting time away for missions or military service. This suggests that the average cycle time for a student’s BYU experience that includes learning, maturation, and improvement is the same—or four to six years. In fact, students tend to change much faster than that because of missions and moving between dorms, apartments, and wards—often every semester. In comparison, faculty and staff come to BYU for about 30 to 40 years. We have already noted with great appreciation the continuity and strength that come with such a dedicated commitment to BYU. At the same time, as BYU faculty, staff, and administrators, we can always ask ourselves questions such as

Are we doing all we can to fulfill the trust these students and their families place in us when they come to BYU?

Could we update the concepts or illustrations in our lecture notes or PowerPoint slides?

Could we help more students learn work skills and responsibilities beyond just the job at hand?

To come full circle and close where we began, I express gratitude for a place where we are under divine injunction to let each speak and for all to listen that all may be edified of all. Our BYU mission is chartered in the great opportunity and challenge to be learning and teaching all the time in a world of change while remaining true and firm in our values and moral compass, which do not change. This annual university conference and this coming year hold great promise as we continue forward in the great cause we know as Brigham Young University.

I hope you know that my conviction about BYU and its vital place in the economy and future of the Church is absolutely firm. I bear my solemn witness of the reality of our living Heavenly Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. The gospel of Jesus Christ has been restored, and

we are led by living prophets. Central to my certitude of these truths is the understanding of the importance of continuing learning as we strive to prove ourselves to return to the Father and the Son. How grateful I am for the privilege of being at Brigham Young University at this special time and having a small part, as do each of you, in accomplishing the tremendous work we have been trusted to do. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Why We Do Some of the Things We Do," *Ensign*, November 1999, 52.
2. Gordon B. Hinckley, "First Presidency Message: We Believe in Being Honest," *Ensign*, October 1990, 4.
3. Gordon B. Hinckley, "Trust and Accountability," BYU devotional, 13 October 1992.
4. J. Reuben Clark, Jr., "The Charted Course of the Church in Education," talk given at Aspen Grove, 8 August 1938.
5. Quoted by Thomas S. Monson in "Thou Art a Teacher Come from God," *Improvement Era*, December 1970, 101; *CR*, October 1970, 107.