

How Are We Doing?

CECIL O. SAMUELSON

Once again, as we approach the beginning of another fall semester, it is my pleasure and privilege to welcome all of you here this morning. I am grateful for you who have retired and yet return to stay in touch with BYU; for those of you who have been here before, whether for one year or five decades; and especially for those of you just beginning your BYU career as a member of the faculty or staff. I trust all of you know that Brigham Young University is a very special place, and I am confident that if we are observant, whatever our personal responsibilities or assignments, these months ahead will bring additional evidence that this assertion is true.

As is usually the case on this occasion, I plan to report rather briefly on a number of events and initiatives currently or shortly underway. For me, and I hope for all of us, this is a time for preparing and planning for the new academic year. It is also a time that deserves reflection on our progress, on our current circumstances, and particularly on our future. BYU is not a static enterprise. We have had prophetic guidance and promises which should give us confidence that we have the opportunity to make BYU better than it has ever been, and I thank all of you who join me in the commitment to make it so.

No longer, if ever it was the case, is higher education considered to be the province of only colleges and universities. Politicians and concerned citizens also have more than a passing interest in what we are and what we do because of the complexities facing our society and the entire world; in the very great expense of keeping and maintaining institutions of higher learning; and in the acknowledged role and responsibility these educational enterprises have for the improvement and welfare of our communities and countries.

In the unique case of BYU, we are financed, supported, and encouraged by our sponsoring church. The Brethren give us needed guidance with respect to the basic priorities and principles that frame our charter and leave to us the specifics and particular applications in the various fields, departments, and disciplines that constitute this remarkable university. Not only do the leaders of the Church have a deep interest in who we are and what we do, but the faithful tithe payers of the Church and our many loyal friends and donors also

Cecil O. Samuelson was president of Brigham Young University when this address was given at the BYU annual university conference on 21 August 2012.

care greatly for us and about us. All have high expectations and hopes that we will fulfill the prophetic promises that have led BYU from the beginning.

We live in a wonderful age when the stature of Brigham Young University has never been higher within the Church and throughout the world. As the Church grows and the number of faithful young Latter-day Saints continues to increase even more rapidly, we need to think about and do the necessary things to be sure that we not only justify the tremendous investment that is being made in BYU but also do what we need to do to shape the university for the future.

I will share a little of our current thinking and activity but will defer a number of the specifics to Academic Vice President Brent Webb as he addresses the faculty this afternoon. As I do, let me refer to a quote attributed to James A. Garfield, the twentieth president of the United States. As a young man he had been a student of Mark Hopkins at Williams College in Massachusetts and was tremendously influenced by this great teacher of the nineteenth century. Said Garfield: “The ideal college is Mark Hopkins on one end of a log and a student on the other [end]” (popular paraphrase of a remark in Garfield’s address to Williams College alumni, New York, 28 December 1871).

I have had a particular interest in Mark Hopkins because of a few similarities in our careers and background. By training he was a medical doctor as well as an educator and college president. He was also an ordained Congregational Church minister and was well known and regarded as a lecturer and writer on moral and religious matters. President Garfield was only one of the prominent national leaders to be positively influenced by Hopkins.

I believe we have a faculty at BYU equally impressive as Mark Hopkins and perhaps the finest students to be found on any campus

anyplace. Likewise, I would not suggest that BYU is just a “log,” or a typical university, but this institution is today’s mechanism for connecting remarkable faculty members with outstanding students in the Lord’s own way (see D&C 104:16).

What should the log that Garfield references—meaning the university—look like in 2012 and 2022 and even further down the road? We are thinking a lot about this and encourage all of you to join with us in the endeavor. I will report on a number of ongoing efforts, projects, and developments at BYU, but, before doing so, please let me attempt to place them in proper context.

Lest anyone believe I am announcing or planning dramatic changes in the university, let me promise you that I am not doing so. But let me also assure you that as our circumstances change and the needs of our students and community differentiate, so must the way in which the university conducts its teaching, learning, and other businesses be responsive to our current environment. As I make this observation, I am reminded of an experience President Henry B. Eyring shared with some of us a few years ago.

President Henry B. Eyring in his early years in Church Educational System leadership was asked by President Spencer W. Kimball to chair a committee of educators to think about and report on the distant future of education in the Church. As he visited with the prophet, President Eyring opined that universities would likely not exist in the Millennium as we know them today. He was stopped by President Kimball, who disagreed and made the case to Brother Eyring that universities had developed in ways that had resulted in great good over many years and likely would be found in recognizable ways for a very long time. I believe President Kimball convinced young Brother Eyring of this likelihood, and I know he and the other presiding Brethren feel the same today.

I also know that our board of trustees—presided over by the First Presidency and including three members of the Twelve and other general officers—also concurs with the many prophecies about what BYU needs to become in the future. Often, in this very meeting, a number of the prophecies and charges to our faculty and administration have been repeated at our annual university conference. In past years I have referenced them in my comments and am inclined to do so again today, although I am also sensitive to time constraints that make a comprehensive review impossible or at least impractical. I have recently read again *Educating Zion*, and I endorse this as a worthwhile endeavor for all of us as we begin a new academic season.

Because I was given my current assignment by President Gordon B. Hinckley, I think about and very often reread his counsel and charge to me with respect to what is expected of us during our relatively short periods of responsibility in the extended history of Brigham Young University. Nine years ago he said the following from this pulpit:

Here we are doing what is not done in any other major university of which I am aware. We are demonstrating that faith in the Almighty can accompany and enrich scholarship in the secular. It is more than an experiment. It is an accomplishment.

We must continue to strengthen our scholarship in every discipline that is followed here. But with that we must never let down on our determination to teach faith in the Living God; to build testimony of His Beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ; to teach the validity of the Holy Bible and of its companion scripture, the Book of Mormon; and to build conviction concerning the restoration of the gospel in this, the dispensation of the fulness of times. Here character building becomes an even greater concern than imparting knowledge of secular subjects, although we shall never neglect this knowledge.

President Hinckley continued:

To the staff who work with you in creating and maintaining this beautiful environment we extend our congratulations and a charge to keep them beautiful, clean, and conducive to habits of order in the lives of those who use these facilities.

To the faculty we express gratitude for your dedication in sharing with a large body of anxious and eager students the vast volume of learning that you have accumulated and to which you have added with distinction. There is a spirit of fellowship on this campus between teacher and student that is wonderful and in many respects unique. I am reminded of the occasion recorded in the book of Acts when Peter and John went into the temple at the hour of prayer. A cripple was brought daily to the gate of the temple, where he asked for alms from those going into the temple.

And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. [Acts 3:4–7]

Then President Hinckley said:

Yours is the great opportunity and the very precious responsibility, in effect, of reaching down to lift up those who come to learn and prepare for a productive and meaningful life. Most have been sent here by hopeful parents who pray night and morning for their success. Great sacrifice has been made to enable them to come. They long for success. And it is your opportunity and your responsibility to see that they do not fail. [“Remarks at the Inauguration of President Cecil O. Samuelson,” 9 September 2003]

There is not a day that goes by—and quite often not a night, I might add—that I do not

reflect on this and other counsel that we have received from President Hinckley, from President Thomas S. Monson, and from our other leaders. This is a place like nowhere else, and, likewise, the opportunities, blessings, challenges, and responsibilities are not usual or trivial.

And while our institutional mission and destiny are not in doubt, how we each participate and understand our individual responsibilities requires constant attention, effort, and vigilance. BYU will progress and prosper, but our individual success is not guaranteed without our own personal best efforts and worthily received blessings. Professor Clayne Pope put it this way in 1975:

It is fine for us to remind ourselves of the destiny of the University, but we must understand the need for patient progress. We should soberly ask ourselves if we at BYU are committed to the trek or simply enthralled with the idea of a destiny. [“No Shortcuts to Greatness,” Monday Magazine (Daily Universe weekly), 27 January 1975, 2; quoted in Ernest L. Wilkinson and W. Cleon Skousen, Brigham Young University: A School of Destiny (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1976), 798]

We do have a marvelous destiny, and we have the opportunity, usually in small ways, to advance it.

We are making progress, in my judgment, but we have a long way yet to go, and our commitment must not be fleeting or episodic. As has been said before by wise teachers, the responsibility of prophets is to prophesy and the duty of the rest of us is to work so that the prophecies are fulfilled.

Now, please let me report on some of the happenings, changes, and initiatives on our campus this year. Our log, to use the Garfield-Hopkins metaphor, is stable, fundamentally solid, and in place for the ages, but it is also improving and adapting for current challenges as well as for those of the years ahead.

Perhaps most evident is the building taking place on campus. For several years we have talked about the beautiful new Heritage housing units on the east side of campus. Several hundred students now live in new quarters, other buildings are under construction, and we anticipate yet further phases in this gigantic project.

Construction on the new, large, and state-of-the-art Life Sciences Building is well underway on the south of campus. This significant new structure will eventually replace the Widtsoe Building and greatly enhance our abilities to teach, mentor, research, and learn as we take our rightful place on the frontiers of the life sciences.

Much of the necessary planning and preparatory work has been completed for the Bean Museum expansion. The funding has been contributed, and, as soon as some vital storage issues for museum materials have been resolved, formal construction will commence. As you may know, the museum is temporarily closed while this work moves forward.

The utility tunnel projects are continuing on pace with our multiyear efforts to protect and provide safety and access to the essential infrastructure supplies that are required for this complex and advanced campus. Likewise, you see the impressive work on our overpass system that will increase safety and convenience. Because we can't do all we wish to do at one time, we will be involved in many projects like these in the years to come that will include traffic patterns, life safety, and aesthetic concerns that will contribute to the beauty and utility of this unique BYU neighborhood.

In a different but similar vein, our Student Wellness program, which formally began one year ago, has been warmly received. Our Student Fitness Center was remodeled and upgraded, and there has been significant collaboration with academic units working on fitness and nutrition with several good examples of advising and coaching. Although

activity courses are no longer required, more than 10,000 students participated in these classes this last academic year. A large number are already enrolled for fall classes with almost 2,500 more students on a waiting list. We are learning how to accommodate all who are interested, and the student response has been enthusiastic.

Another development is the new seating in a portion of the Marriott Center behind me where bleachers have been replaced with chair seating. The original benches—state of the art forty years ago—have aged and become dangerous. Like the rest of the nation, members of the BYU community seem a little larger individually than when the building was constructed, and thus the changes were made to bring this part of our seating to current standards and codes. Other seating in the years ahead is likely to be replaced and improved as we strive to keep our commitment of maintaining the Marriott Center as close to ideal as possible.

Those familiar with our campus will also notice that some changes are occurring with various support activities that fit under the rubric of our auxiliaries. Because these enterprises are not supported by appropriations from the Church, each is required to operate on a break-even basis. Like the early days in Utah when the Church operated department stores, hospitals, insurance companies, banks, and so forth, BYU also has various services not directly part of our educational mission that support our campus family and the broader community as well.

The BYU Bookstore is one example where the business model and demand have changed dramatically in recent years with textbooks being more widely available in the community and online. Our flower shop, print and mail services, barber and salon activities, and food outlets are only a few of our some thirty-six auxiliaries on campus. You have seen, and will continue to see, changes in what we need to do.

In all of this we recognize how difficult change is for many of us. We hope all understand that we do not have the resources or mechanisms to subsidize favorite and long-standing services and activities that are no longer self-sustaining. Most of what we do and have done will persist in more effective and responsive ways because our people are absolutely committed to our missions of service and support. But we must recognize that changes have and will come as our circumstances evolve over time.

One area perhaps not widely understood but very much appreciated by an important part of our university community is the University Accessibility Center. Almost 1,000 students were served last year. Although the spectrum of challenges facing our students is very broad, it appears that students with emotional and attention disabilities are the most rapidly growing population helped by this office and our campus community. Wonderfully encouraging to me is that about 1,600 BYU students have rendered more than 16,000 hours of service to fellow students with disabilities.

As has been the case for many years, our graduates do very well. Last year more than 20 percent of our graduating class applied for professional schools with a two-thirds or better acceptance rate in all categories. An even larger cohort of our students goes on to prestigious graduate programs with similar high levels of success. Much attention and significant resources have been dedicated to advising in recent years, and the results include better placement for our graduates as well as the smallest number of students in academic difficulty in at least the last twenty years.

A continuing issue facing BYU and all other higher education institutions is accreditation. I am happy and grateful to report that BYU is in excellent shape with recognition and commendation from the Northwest Commission, which is our general accrediting agency. We also have

many discipline-specific accreditation relationships, and all are in good standing. Professor Jim Gordon, assistant to the president for Planning and Assessment, coordinates and leads these efforts with his outstanding staff and superb effort and support from throughout the entire BYU community. For those interested in these matters, our University Strategic Plan is available on the Office of Planning and Assessment webpage, and the Commendations and Recommendation from our recent site visit and review are also available.

As with other matters mentioned, much is also happening in academics as we attempt to smooth, strengthen, and improve the BYU version of Hopkins' log. This afternoon Academic Vice President Brent Webb will address these and other matters in more detail, but I will mention just a few that I consider to be very important.

An Academic Innovation Task Force was created a year ago. Its charge is to examine how the university might with more innovation better fulfill its academic mission utilizing the best pedagogies and technologies. Its charge also involves asking and answering how the university might do these things in such a way that serves more students without a commensurate increase in facilities, faculty, and other expensive resources.

One of the early outcomes of this initiative is a pilot project that will create the opportunity for students already taking classes on campus to enroll in at least one of our "bottle-neck" courses online without additional cost to the students. Many details deserve and require great attention in evaluating the potential for broadening our offerings, but our primary focus in this regard will remain with our on-campus students.

For a number of important reasons BYU has decided to develop its own learning management system called the BYU Learning Suite. It is a set of online tools with intuitive controls and user interfaces. These modular tools are

integrated at a fundamental level with each other and with the university's academic data systems while allowing each the ability to be independently updated or replaced. With the Learning Suite, faculty will be able to create courses, provide feedback, display test results, share files with students and colleagues, and submit grades automatically. Likewise, students not only will be able to display their best work but also collaborate with, mentor, and provide feedback to each other. You will hear more about this from those who know the details better than I do. We deem this to be a very significant and positive development for BYU.

As most will remember, for a number of years I have felt the need to address the economy generally and such matters as the hiring freeze that we experienced for two years. Happily, the board of trustees lifted the freeze about eighteen months ago. We are grateful that they supported us in making vital selective hires during this difficult period and in also keeping our budgets stable. At the height of the freeze, approximately ninety-five staff and administrative positions and about 180 full-time faculty positions were vacant. Since then departments and colleges have begun actively recruiting highly qualified faculty candidates to fill these positions. Because of our need to identify those not only excellent in their disciplines but also highly motivated to participate in BYU's special mission, hiring has and will continue to proceed deliberately and carefully. We anticipate that returning to our full faculty complement will likely take an additional three to five years.

We are grateful for the tremendous support of those who sacrificed and served during this challenging time and also are very excited about the new faculty members who have joined recently or will soon arrive. I also add that we, as well as our board of trustees, are increasingly impressed and grateful for the quality of so many academically well-prepared

potential faculty members who also understand the mission of BYU and wish to be part of it.

As with our new and prospective faculty members, the quality and qualifications of our students and applicants continue to increase. This past admission cycle we had more applicants than ever before with increasingly stronger credentials. By all measures, many of our students could be and are accepted at the most rigorous universities in the country. We are grateful that they choose to come to BYU and are sensitized to the responsibility to make their experience here a wise choice.

Because of our strict enrollment ceiling, we have the very unhappy and difficult responsibility of turning away hundreds of students with good qualifications who likely could succeed at BYU if there were a place for them. I commend our strong and committed admissions officers and committee members who labor diligently to identify those students not only academically qualified but who have also demonstrated that they understand and value the unique aspects of a BYU experience, like our Honor Code and opportunities to have spiritually strengthening and testimony-building experiences as well as exposure to scholastic excellence. I cannot, however, overstate the pain that all feel in dealing with disappointed applicants and their families and friends.

Last summer we dedicated our new BYU Broadcasting facility. BYUtv continues to grow and expand its influence around the world. As it helps millions to “see the good in the world,” it also broadens and strengthens the influence and message of the university and the Church. Not all who watch BYUtv are Church members, but it does cause an increasing number to investigate the Church because of what they see that is interesting, inspiring, morally clean, and uplifting. We are grateful for those who support our efforts and who carry this work forward. We are making more friends in new ways not otherwise possible.

In athletics, our independence in football has allowed us to develop the tremendous relationship we enjoy with ESPN, which provides national exposure for virtually every home game and many road games via that family of networks and BYUtv. In most other sports we have a solid and productive relationship with the West Coast Conference. These schools in the conference are serious, selective, and accomplished academically. They also remain true to the religious values and traditions of their related churches in addition to providing successful athletic programs in the sports in which they compete.

We are very proud of our student athletes and many others in virtually all of our academic disciplines for the recognitions and awards they have received. Increasingly, BYU is becoming widely known as a great university with a record of broad excellence and achievement on the part of our faculty, students, and alumni.

With so many positive developments and progress, we must never forget that we still have much yet to do. Our external higher education environment continues to have increasing complexities with such things as progressively onerous regulation; financial crises, including unsustainable student debt loads; fewer jobs for graduates with the poor economy; and the list goes on. Happily, our general levels of student debt are much lower than national averages because the Church’s remarkable support keeps our tuition very low in comparison with other universities. Also, our students have very low—only a fraction of the national average—default rates on their loans. Sadly, we still have more than a few students and families who, in spite of their best efforts, do financially struggle mightily to complete their educations.

As our sponsoring church continues to come “out of obscurity and out of darkness” (D&C 1:30), we will try to do our part. Many are interested in BYU because of what our

students and faculty do and have done. Most would not be surprised that the serious candidacy for the presidency of the United States of one of our distinguished graduates has also brought increased interest and attention to BYU. More than ever the actions and behavior of members of our community—both the good and the rare bad—tend to be magnified in their impact on our work and that of the Church.

While some of these phenomena and events may be distracting or occasionally encouraging, we must not forget that the mission of Brigham Young University will never be altered or changed from the prophetically charted course we have been directed and blessed to follow. We are on the way and, I believe, on target, but we have not yet arrived. At this event over the years my predecessors and I have frequently quoted the prophetic statements of our leaders. You recognize that I have already done so again today. As I conclude, let me once again share the words of President John Taylor, who was quoted by President Spencer W. Kimball many years ago here at BYU. Said President Taylor:

You will see the day that Zion will be far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to

learning of every kind as we are today 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; quoted in Spencer W. Kimball, “Education for Eternity,” pre-school address to BYU faculty and staff, 12 September 1967, excerpted in “Climbing the Hills Just Ahead: Three Addresses” (pages 43–63) in John W. Welch and Don E. Norton, eds., *Educating Zion* (Provo: BYU Studies, 1996), 55]

We still believe this, and our prophet leaders still believe Brigham Young University has this remarkable potential and responsibility. We are grateful that so many in our community and throughout the Church and the world also subscribe to these promises and their attendant charges to us. It is indeed a tremendous blessing to have roles of responsibility for and at this very special institution that has such a significant place in those things we hold dear.

May the Lord continue to guide us and bless us as we do our very best to move Brigham Young University forward in its ordained charge to bless Heavenly Father’s children here and throughout the world I pray, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.