

Challenges for the Year Ahead

DALLIN H. OAKS

My dear brothers and sisters, I stand before you in great humility for the responsibility of addressing you on this occasion. I see your faces—thousands of them. I also see other faces: parents, alumni, tithe payers, Church leaders, the great and the humble friends of this university, and teachers and leaders of times past—all who have contributed to the great traditions of this university. These faces look to me to be their spokesman on this occasion. No one could face that challenge without humility.

The last time I stood up in assembly to deliver a comprehensive challenge to this student body was two years ago, just a few weeks after I had taken office. It is time that I do so again. Your faces are new. Only 4,000 of you were students at BYU when I gave that first talk; 21,000 of you were not here on that occasion. That fact impresses me to repeat a few things that have been said before. Other topics are dictated by the experiences of the last two years and our aspirations for the future.

Personal Safety

A few months ago Dean J. Elliot Cameron and I met with the grieving parents and brother of a BYU coed who had drowned in the Provo River. Many times over the past two years I have had to pick up the phone to

call the parents of BYU students killed in automobile or motorcycle accidents. Whenever I have one of these conversations I am left wondering if I could have said or done anything in advance to help avoid these tragedies. Some of these deaths seem so avoidable, so unnecessary. Each of you is aware of the need for extra care on the highways, especially in winter driving. But I wonder if each of you has been warned about the Provo River.

A week ago today I drove up the canyon and sat beside the Provo River near Canyon Glen to meditate and seek inspiration about the subject of these remarks. As I sat there lost in thought, I heard a whoop, and down the river came five fellows of college age on inner tubes, whirling and bobbing in the swift, cold water. They had no life jackets or other observable safety protection. As the current carried them beyond my view, I could still hear their happy voices. I wondered if they knew that this river had taken the lives of three boys and girls their age in the last six months. One of these bodies had been pulled from the river within a few

Dallin H. Oaks was president of Brigham Young University when this address was given at an assembly on 6 September 1973.

blocks of the place where I sat. A deputy sheriff searching for one of these bodies narrowly missed drowning also.

Those of you who have any possible desire to go swimming or tubing in the Provo River, please understand that for a multitude of reasons associated with the chilling water temperature, swift current, and hidden obstacles this is highly dangerous. You enter the Provo River at the peril of your life.

Drugs

Last year, in the middle of a semester, we dismissed a group of young men who were involved in the use of drugs. Some parents and fellow students were surprised at the swiftness and harshness of this action. Some accused us of not giving sufficient advance warning about our policy. I include this subject not only to make you aware of our policy but to add my voice to those who have warned you about drugs. My personal observations and experience with drug users have given me some indelible convictions about the destructive physical effects and the disabling spiritual effects of drugs. I know the reason for the provision in our Code of Honor that commits us to refrain "from the possession, use, or distribution of any narcotic or dangerous drug . . . , except as prescribed by a licensed medical practitioner."

As a young law professor I spent several weeks in the criminal courts in Chicago *prosecuting* men accused of selling and possessing drugs. Later I spent many more weeks *defending* men accused of narcotics offenses. I have counseled young people who have been deceived and disabled by drugs, including marijuana, LSD, and pills, as well as the harder opium derivatives like heroin. I am more determined than anyone that we will not permit this tool of the devil to gain a foothold at BYU, as it has on so many high school and college campuses. Consequently we have a policy that any student found to be distributing, using,

or possessing any drugs other than those used under a doctor's care, on or off campus, will be dismissed immediately and without any allowance for probation. Persons guilty of drug offenses can, of course, repent and change their ways—and we hope that they will—but they will have to complete their repentance away from this campus and demonstrate their total rehabilitation before they will be allowed to return.

This policy is stern, but necessary. National studies, confirmed by our own experience, show that the drug traffic spreads rapidly from friend to friend, infecting the innocent and unwary as well as the eager participant. Every day we permit a drug user to remain at BYU we take chances with the welfare of thousands of other students. We will not take those chances.

Our swift action may also save the participants from more serious involvement. At the time we apprehended one of these young men last fall he had ordered a large shipment of marijuana sent to his address in the dorm, intending to sell it to some of his fellow students who were already using the drug and to others who would become involved. When our officers advised him that we were aware of his activities, he confessed and surrendered the drugs without committing the serious crime of sale of narcotics. If we had waited just a few days to apprehend that young man, our officers would have been obliged to prosecute him for the serious felony of sale of marijuana, a penitentiary offense.

If any of you have any association or contacts with anyone possessing or using drugs, I urge you, in your own interest, to break off your associations entirely and immediately. If any of you have had any experience with drugs and have not completely repented, I urge you to confess to your branch president immediately to establish your total break with this vicious affliction of our times.

Chastity

Another provision of our Code of Honor is: "Live the law of chastity. This includes abstinence from all sexual relations outside the bonds of marriage." I could appropriately give an entire talk on that subject, whose importance transcends almost anything else I will say this morning. And it is needed. Too many of our young people have heard too little plain talk on this subject. Too few understand that young men and women who violate the law of chastity surrender their self-respect, forfeit their right to the companionship and guidance of the Spirit of the Lord, and sow a harvest of bitter regrets and blighted expectations. Persons who commit the sin of adultery or fornication separate themselves from God as surely as if they had locked themselves in a spirit prison from which they can obtain release only after the most painful and prolonged period of repentance. What I have said applies to sex relations between man and woman and also to homosexual relations between man and man and between woman and woman. All are deadly sins in the eyes of God.

Our campus stake presidents and branch presidents are best aware of the tragic consequences of sexual sins. They hear the confessions, give the counsel, guide the repentance, and, where necessary, hold the courts that take away the Church membership of persons involved in these sins. Further counsel and teachings on this subject will come from your Church officers. I will not say more than to urge you with every power of persuasion I possess to follow the commandment of God to live the law of chastity and also to avoid the physical intimacies and other conditions of temptation that lead young men and women to the brink of this desecrating sin.

Pornography

Our Savior emphasized the importance of sexual purity when he taught that it was sinful even for a man to look upon a woman to

lust after her. That teaching leads me to say a few words about the kind of material we read and the kinds of movies and television we view. On the printed page and on the screen we are surrounded by the promotional literature of illicit sexual relations. For your own good, avoid it. Pornographic or erotic stories and pictures are worse than filthy or polluted food. The body has defenses to rid itself of unwholesome food. With a few fatal exceptions, bad food will only make you sick but do no permanent harm. In contrast, a person who feasts upon filthy stories or pornographic or erotic pictures and literature records them in this marvelous retrieval system we call a brain. The brain won't vomit back filth. Once recorded, it will always remain subject to recall, flashing its perverted images across your mind and drawing you away from the wholesome things in life.

Please remember also that in a free enterprise economy we vote by each purchase we make. If we buy erotic literature or patronize X-rated movies we record a vote, we send a message, that this is what we desire: "Give us more." The market will respond to that message. Conversely, the most effective way to control unwholesome movies, literature, and every other form of evil that we would like to eliminate from the marketplace is to avoid patronizing it. By the same token, if we would only refrain from shopping on the Sabbath, the merchants who keep their businesses open and require their employees to work on the Sabbath would soon find it unprofitable and would arrange to do their business as each of us should, on the six days of labor. The free enterprise method of controlling evil, by not patronizing it, is more effective in most instances and has less bad side effects than the more popular method of passing a law to make certain behavior a crime or to control it in other ways. Cast your vote for wholesome literature and movies; avoid patronizing the other kind.

Religious Life

I am always distressed when I hear that a young man or woman at BYU is inactive or unreliable in his or her Church responsibilities. Religious activity is a vital part of life at this university. Our entire approach to learning is a spiritual one, born of our conviction that intelligence is the glory of God and that a balanced education should provide food for the spirit as well as the mind. This explains why we are concerned about creating and preserving an environment of personal purity and public beauty in which the Holy Ghost—that teaching and communicating member of the Godhead—can be the companion of every student and the catalyst in every lesson.

Church attendance is not required at BYU. Neither is attendance at the library. But students who fail to maintain an active religious life, just like students who fail to participate in the intellectual life of the university, are missing such a vital part of the educational experience that they raise serious questions about the appropriateness of their continued enrollment. All over the world there are young Latter-day Saints who would like to attend Brigham Young University, to participate in the entire educational program. Those who occupy places here have a responsibility to use these resources to the fullest or to step aside for those who will.

This year, as always, our student body includes hundreds of students who are not members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. We welcome you and anticipate that your presence here will enrich our education as well as yours. We invite you to take part in the active religious life of our campus branches and stakes. If you choose not to, we urge you to affiliate with the church of your choice in this community. We urge upon you our conviction that each of us should have an active religious life along with our university studies.

Those Who Support You

Occasionally we hear that a young man or woman has chosen to go to another private school because of the receipt of a large scholarship. In one such case the tuition scholarship was \$1,500, but because the tuition at the other university was \$2,500, the young man still had to pay \$1,000 per year for his education. When I hear of such cases I wonder if we have done all we should to make our students aware of the fact that each of them has, in effect, a scholarship of more than \$1,200. That is the approximate average amount of Church appropriation per student in addition to tuition to cover the costs of education at BYU. Without that additional Church appropriation our tuition would have to be almost \$2,000 per year of two semesters instead of \$600, assuming we could maintain our present level of enrollment.

Other Church appropriations account for the capital investment in this campus, its buildings, equipment, grounds, streets, and other facilities. The investment in the last twenty years alone is more than \$100 million. To put that another way, that is the tithing on earned income of more than \$1 billion. All of the Church-appropriated funds that build and run this university come from the faithful tithe-paying members of this Church: the farmer in Ephraim and Juarez, the workman in London, the stockman in Star Valley, the businessman in Long Beach, the widow in Layton.

Among the important lessons to be drawn from these figures is that each person who benefits from this university community has a great stewardship to use these resources wisely and in the way the Lord and his servants intended. We who benefit from the expenditure of these tithing funds are representatives of the Church just as surely as are missionaries or Church officials. The sacred tithing resources are spent in our behalf, and the Church and its ideals will be judged by our words, our deeds, and our appearance.

For the next few minutes I will touch briefly on a variety of subjects that will be familiar to many of you but should be mentioned here for the benefit of the thousands of new students in our midst.

Dress and Grooming

I will say very little about our Dress and Grooming Standards. They are well known, and every student has agreed in writing on his or her admission application and in each succeeding registration to abide by them. BYU students overwhelmingly support these standards and remain in compliance with them. Most who violate the Dress and Grooming Standards do so thoughtlessly. Thus, I believe that most of the young women who wear blue jeans or other grubby clothes on campus do so without conscious intent to flout the standards. You help them and the university when you give them a gentle reminder that this is not consistent with our standards.

There are a few students who violate our standards purposely. I include here the deceitful fellow who gains entrance to the university by wearing a short-haired wig or slicking his long hair back over his ears to get through the registration line and then removing the wig or shaking his hair down for everyday wear. That kind of deceitfulness is a contemptible continuing insult to the university and its rule-abiding students and faculty. In my view the only proper course of action for this kind of fellow is to withdraw from the company of the honest men and women at Brigham Young University and pursue his studies at some location where he will not be in continual violation of the rules and his own personal word of honor.

I hope that our faculty and students will unite in clear and gentle reminders to those who violate our standards, to make them aware that others note and disapprove their violations and to encourage them to fulfill their commitments. Those of you who would object to such reminders should take care to remain

well within the standards. Persons who persist in running close to the line in any area are apt to have some embarrassing conversations with teachers and fellow students.

Assembly Attendance

Every Tuesday morning students and faculty walking to assembly see other students and faculty who are not. Though attendance is voluntary and no academic credit is given, our devotional and forum assemblies are among the most important events at the university. You neglect your education and fail to use a unique resource of this university if you miss a single one. Wise students will attend faithfully. The foolish will find other diversions, ranging from the indolent or frivolous to the real pressure of studies too long delayed. Last year some superb forum assemblies were very poorly attended, and the average devotional attendance of about 8,000 fell far below the level of which we are capable. Our devotional speakers are drawn predominantly from the board of trustees of this university: the First Presidency, the Quorum of the Twelve, and a few other General Authorities who have been given special responsibilities to supervise the Church Educational System. Our forum assemblies will feature messages of extraordinary importance and variety from carefully chosen BYU faculty members and speakers from outside the university. For your own sake, don't miss any assemblies this year.

New Calendar

Under the heading of wise use of time I encourage each of you, and especially entering freshmen, to examine carefully the advantages of our new three-semester calendar, including the independent eight-week half semesters we call the spring term and summer term. By attending two and one-half semesters per year—such as the fall semester, winter semester, and spring term, going to school from September 1 until about June 20—a student

can complete a full four-year college program and graduate in just three years.

Other Concerns

My list of periodic reminders concludes with the lawn. Don't cut across. Use the sidewalk. Our lawns are for lounging and looking, but not for walking. Help keep the campus beautiful and free from ugly muddy and dusty paths.

Helping Others with Their Responsibilities

From time to time students write me or speak to me about what they can do to help the university and their fellow students. That attitude of Christian brotherhood is characteristic of this campus. It never fails to fill me with admiration for this great student body. There are so many things you are already doing to help that I could give an entire talk on this subject. I will single out only one more.

The final provision of our Code of Honor obligates each of us to "help others fulfill their responsibilities under this Code." This has so many implications. I have already suggested that each of us be supportive of our Dress and Grooming Standards, sharing gentle reminders with our fellow students who are thoughtless on this subject. But there are many more important aspects. Thus your efforts to encourage your fellow students to observe the principles of our Code of Honor may save them from more serious offenses. I have already referred to the young men who were dismissed for using drugs, an action that saved at least one of them from deeper involvement as a seller. To cite a different kind of case, in the last month many of us have grieved over the press accounts of several instances in which the vicious crime of rape has been committed on young women, including BYU students, in off-campus housing in Provo. I am sure that every citizen in this community would rush to the aid of a girl threatened with this crime. Few of us are likely to be called upon in that rare

circumstance, but we can all be alert to notice persons who are present at times and in places where they obviously do not belong, reporting them to appropriate authorities where wisdom dictates. And we can all urge our sisters to use appropriate precautions in locking their doors, in not appearing scantily clad in places visible to the outside, and in not letting themselves get into remote places with strange men.

A student who is aware of serious behavioral irregularities on the part of a roommate or another fellow student—such as drinking, drug abuse, or sexual misconduct—cannot conscientiously ignore that behavior. The love and concern we owe our fellowmen should not permit us to withdraw into the cowardice of "It doesn't concern me; it's his life—not mine." That position is contrary to the whole spirit of love and Christian brotherhood embodied in the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is also contrary to the responsibility that has been laid upon every member of the Church to preach the gospel of repentance. In a talk given in a ten-stake fireside a year ago, President Marion G. Romney of the First Presidency told thousands of students assembled in this hall that if they knew of any fornicators or drug users it was their duty to do what they could to bring them to repentance, failing which, he said, "they must be removed from the campus."

A person with observable tendencies to violence, sexual misconduct, drug abuse, or thievery should be put in the hands of persons who can help him. If we refrain from reporting a person of this character, we share the blame for the harm that person may later do to others. The *law* does not require such affirmative action to help a weak person who may do wrong to himself or another, but the *gospel* does. The Lord has declared that if LDS parents fail to teach their children correct principles, the sin is upon their heads (see D&C 68:25). We are told that we should not have to be commanded in all things, that we are responsible to bring to pass much righteousness and to do

many things of our own free will (see D&C 58:26–28). The Lord has also told us that we are responsible to “succor the weak, lift up the hands which hang down, and strengthen the feeble knees” (D&C 81:5). All of that is involved in the loving encouragement each of us should exert upon one another to fulfill all of our responsibilities under the Code of Honor.

Thoughts on an Education at Brigham Young University

In the time that remains I will speak about the unique opportunities of a university education. My purpose is to stir up your minds to a bright consciousness of why you are here at Brigham Young University and to suggest some ways to make the most of your opportunities.

I begin with a conversation I had with one of our young men students last spring. I was walking by the tennis courts. He was waiting for a game. Finding out that he had just come to BYU as a transfer student from a junior college on the West Coast, I asked him to tell me about his experience at BYU.

“Well, I don’t know much about the studies yet,” he responded, “but the social life is sure great, and that’s what it’s all about here at the Y, isn’t it?”

I ground my teeth at that answer. What I wanted to reply was: “No, you featherheaded, indolent child, social life *isn’t* what it’s all about. This is a university. *Learning* is what it’s all about. You are here to get an education.”

Instead I managed a gentler suggestion that he ought to discover some other purpose for his enrollment or his stay would be frustrating and short. Now this young man meant no harm. He was suffering from a misapprehension whose victims are all too common among our students, alumni, and supporters. It concerns the purposes and functions of this university.

Let us banish forever the illusion that Brigham Young University exists for any purpose other than to provide a university education. Social life, physical exercise, Church activity, cultural development, good times—all these are here. We deem all of them essential ingredients of a university education. As for the opportunity for our choice young men and women to meet and marry someone of their own faith, we consider that a welcome *by-product* of the coeducational enterprise. But none of these ingredients is sufficient in itself or in combination to justify the enormous capital investment and annual financial support appropriated to Brigham Young University. Each of these other activities could be conducted separately and economically in your own home areas.

Our reason for being is to be a university. Your reason for enrolling is to pursue a university education. Persons who are here for any other reason or who fail to measure up to this challenge with all their hearts and abilities have come to the wrong place.

I rejoice in our freedom—indeed our duty—to pursue knowledge in its broadest sphere. In an important address given on this campus by assignment of the First Presidency, President J. Reuben Clark, Jr., made this significant statement:

In all his promises and commandments about gaining knowledge, the Lord has never withheld from our quest any field of truth. Our knowledge is to be coterminous with the universe and is to reach out and to comprehend the laws and the workings of the vast deeps of the eternities. All domains of all knowledge belong to us. In no other way could the great law of eternal progression be satisfied.

[“Charge to President Howard S. McDonald at His Inauguration as President of the Brigham Young University on November 14, 1945,” *Improvement Era*, vol. 49, no. 1 (January 1946): 15]

This thought was further emphasized and elaborated by President Harold B. Lee in his great charge to the president at my own inauguration:

Brigham Young University, indeed the whole educational system of this Church, has been established to the end that all pure knowledge must be gained by our people, handed down to our posterity, and given to all men.

We charge you to give constant stimulation to these budding scientists and scholars in all fields and to the urge to push back further and further into the realms of the unknown. [“Installation of and Charge to the President,” delivered at the inauguration of Dallin Harris Oaks, 12 November 1971, p. 14]

Properly understood, these challenges run to every student, teacher, and other worker at this university.

Keep uppermost in your mind at all times the fact that you are here to gain an education. Lift your eyes to the total horizon of knowledge we promote in this university. Remember Brigham Young’s great insight that education is power: “Education is the power to think clearly, the power to act well in the world’s work, and the power to appreciate life” (quoted by George H. Brimhall in “The Brigham Young University,” *Improvement Era*, vol. 23, no. 9 [July 1920]: 831). Strive for harmonious growth of body, mind, and spirit. Participate in the activities and put forth the effort to make your stay at Brigham Young University a time of intellectual growth, artistic sensitivity, physical vigor, exemplary personal behavior, and spiritual progress.

I have already urged you to maintain an active religious life during your studies, referring particularly to Church activity. But our concerns with spirituality go farther than that and permeate all of our other activities in the university. Brigham Young University provides a unique educational experience.

What makes us unique is the spiritual dimension we provide. By spiritual dimension, I mean our faith in God the Eternal Father and his Son, Jesus Christ, our devotion to the principles of the restored gospel, our concern with personal behavior, and our commitment to the essential harmony of secular learning and the spiritual values that embody all truth. [Dallin H. Oaks, “Response,” delivered at his inauguration as president of Brigham Young University, 12 November 1971, p. 18]

Our spiritual concerns come into focus in the religion classes required of all who attend this university. If you pursue these studies with diligence, you will increase your knowledge of the spiritual powers that are within you, illuminating all of your other studies and guiding you throughout your life.

Your university experience should also be a time to cultivate a heightened appreciation for the creative arts. Learn to recognize what is “virtuous, lovely, or of good report or praiseworthy” (Articles of Faith 1:13). Cultivate your inborn sensitivity to what is beautiful and seek after those things.

Don’t neglect physical fitness. Proper food, rest, and exercise are essential to the vigor of the body and also to the sharpness of the mind.

Though most of our students have no need of this advice, a few need to be reminded that their university experience should also include opportunity for growth in social skills, improving their ability to associate gracefully with a variety of men and women in different circumstances.

Last, but most important, because of the unique mission of the university, every student at BYU should make his or her stay here a time of great advance in intellect. Take up the challenge of learning. Raise your sights and aspirations. Reach out for knowledge. Expand your vision. Stretch your mind with new ideas. Learn precision in thought and expression. Develop your awareness and deepen your understanding of the world in which we live.

Strive for excellence in all your studies. Budget your time. Do not use other activities, valuable or otherwise, as an excuse to neglect your studies. In this connection I urge you to remember that Monday evenings and Tuesday evenings should be planned to permit you to take part in a home evening activity of not more than an hour and a half and MIA activities of appropriate duration, with ample time remaining for study activities on both evenings. Remember that this is a university and you are here to gain an education.

Cultivate balance and be thoughtful in the choice of your courses and the allocation of your time so that you can benefit from all that is available at this university. A university is like a great smorgasbord of opportunities for learning and experience. The wise student will sample widely and gather a variety of knowledge and experience that will prepare him or her to serve well in a multitude of life's activities. Don't make the error of the inexperienced person who circles the smorgasbord until he sees one or two foods that are familiar and desirable and then fills his plate with those to the exclusion of the wondrous variety that remains. Like the person who makes out a meal on black olives and jello salad, the university student who concentrates on skiing and student government or who specializes in performing groups and a handful of major courses or who fills his plate with competitive athletics and social activities never learns what a university is all about and never partakes of the wondrous variety and harmony of a university education.

The initiative and responsibility are yours. You make the choices and arrange the time to reap the benefits. In this connection I urge you to support one another by mutual cooperation and encouragement in all study activities. I have been deeply concerned at reports of student interference with other students' study activities: loud noises, harassment, horseplay, and other nonsense activities, which have

sometimes prevented serious students from studying in our on-campus and off-campus housing. Such interference frustrates or prevents a brother or sister from achieving his or her goals at the university. It is inexcusable and should be the subject of prompt and appropriate corrective action. But to those who are the victims of this kind of interference, I say: Don't blame poor academic performance on a roommate. If your surroundings are intolerable for study, you are responsible to change them, either permanently by moving or temporarily by studying in the library or elsewhere. We provide the library, which we are seeking to enlarge with the cooperation and efforts of our Student Development Association, but it is up to you to take the initiative to use this and every other learning opportunity.

Honor the teachers who challenge you to choose excellence. Both you and your teachers should be dissatisfied until your performance has risen to the best that is in you.

In a society grounded on the brotherhood of the gospel it is difficult for teachers to give and for students to receive low grades, even for inferior performance. Yet teachers do you no favor when they reward substandard performance or fail to challenge you to do your best.

Despite the obvious importance of high academic standards, the standards set for you by your teachers and by the university are far less important than the standards you set for yourself. Your own pride and desire for improvement should not allow you to be comfortable with a level of performance in any area that is less than your best. Be your own severest taskmaster. The self-discipline and skills you acquire by this means will be far more important in the long run than the grades you receive, whether they are high or low.

The highest councils in the world—in government, professions, business, arts, letters, science, or any other area—are composed of men and women of no greater natural ability

than the young men and women in this student body. There is no town so small and there are no origins so humble that they have not produced the greatest men and women in the world. The list of such people who have graduated from Brigham Young University is long and proud. In almost every case, what brings men and women out of the crowd and up to the pinnacle of achievement is the high standards they have set for themselves, their iron will, and their extraordinary efforts. Anyone can drift with the crowd, but notable accomplishments invariably require overtime. I love the lines in Longfellow's poem:

*The heights by great men reached and kept
Were not attained by sudden flight,
But they, while their companions slept,
Were toiling upward in the night.*

[“The Ladder of St. Augustine” (1858), stanza 10]

The gospel teaches us that we are the sons and daughters of God. That fact identifies our destiny and the ultimate goal for which we strive. Your education, all that you learn and do, should contribute to that destiny. The road toward perfection is long and arduous. There are many mileposts along the way. Your formal education is only one of them. The road leads on to others. We prepare now for them. Make yourself ready while you are here. The challenges will come, sooner and more magnificent than you dream. Will you be ready? The breadth of your education and the purity of your life should prepare you for challenges in parenthood, church service, community leadership, and employment. Use your opportunities to prepare yourself for the responsibilities the world will place upon you. May our Father in heaven help us that we may help you, and help you that you may help yourself, I humbly pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.