

SAMPLE 1

Faculty Development Plan

Associate Professor, Department of Ancient Scripture

In its stated mission “to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life” (Mission Statement), Brigham Young University aims to provide an education that is “(1) spiritually strengthening, (2) intellectually enlarging, and (3) character building, leading to (4) lifelong learning and service” (Aims). I endorse wholeheartedly these aims, as well as the vision laid out in the “Strengthening Religious Education” document, specifically its focus on developing students’ faith and testimony, and its charge to “strengthen their ability to find answers, resolve doubts, respond with faith, and give reason for the hope within them in whatever challenges they may face.” I know of no better description of what I hope to accomplish through my professional work and the personal ministry that grows out of it. All of my goals—and the plans intended to reach them—are informed and inspired by that overarching sense of mission. Moreover, beyond helping my students directly, I have a deep desire to “make [my] service and scholarship available to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in furthering its work worldwide” (Mission Statement). Indeed, “the world is our campus,” and I hope to bless students “campus-wide.”

With these purposes in mind, the Faculty Development Plan presented here represents an initial but ongoing effort to assess my strengths and weaknesses in the areas of teaching, scholarship, and citizenship; to set goals to improve in each of these areas; and to mark a path of progress whereby I can contribute to the realization of BYU’s aims in the lives of students, colleagues, and others within the wider Church and world.

Overall Self-Assessment

Areas of Strength	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Deep Commitment:</i> Since childhood, I have had a deep and abiding testimony of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ and have served tirelessly to build God’s Kingdom upon the earth.• <i>Work Ethic:</i> I am used to working long hours and can give uninterrupted attention to tasks for lengthy periods of time; I am highly organized and strive to be as productive as possible in every aspect of my life.• <i>Empathy and Interpersonal Communication:</i> By nature I am a consensus builder, a communicator, and a problem solver. I grew up amid great diversity and enjoy discussing issues with people from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints. I enjoy interfaith dialogue and have worked for over a decade with people experiencing faith crisis. Rather than traditional apologetics, I focus on living a life of faith and charity, and strive to help the whole person rather than trying to prove points and win arguments. I also have years of experience understanding and helping people who experience mental illness and who battle addiction. People consider me approachable, understanding, and nonjudgmental.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Work/Life Balance:</i> I need to find healthier ways to step away from work in order to avoid burnout; I need to be more selective in the opportunities and assignments I take on, in order to meet family needs and maintain better balance in non-work-related areas of life.• <i>Efficiency:</i> In the tug-of-war between efficiency and effectiveness, I tend to favor effectiveness. This is both a strength and a weakness, but it sometimes leads me to spend more time on tasks than I should probably give them.• <i>Collaboration:</i> I have a hard time asking for help, delegating responsibility, or identifying potential collaborators.

Teaching

Self-Assessment

Areas of Strength	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Experience:</i> 6 years teaching seminary, 16 years teaching institute, and 2 years teaching at BYU; this includes not only teaching in the classroom, but training and supervising other teachers, building and administering programs, and writing curriculum• <i>Passion:</i> mine is a high-energy classroom meant to ignite student interest and maintain student engagement; students want to come to class and their evaluations are consistently above average in all areas• <i>Student-Centered:</i> I focus on my students both inside and outside the classroom; I have an open-door policy and am proactive in making connections and opening lines of communication; I strive to develop deep and lasting relationships as my students come to know me as a safe and welcoming conversation partner and mentor• <i>Relevance:</i> without being overly prescriptive, I aim for real-world relevance regardless of the subject of study; students find it easy to apply the principles discussed to daily life; beyond content mastery, students also develop habits and study skills to keep the gospel relevant beyond their time in my classroom• <i>Combining Mind and Heart:</i> striving to make gospel study a revelatory experience, I strive to engage both the minds and the hearts of my students (see D&C 8:2), balancing a breadth and depth of content with a desire to build living faith and a solid testimony	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Less Lecture, More Discussion:</i> much of my teaching tends to be so content heavy that I spend too much time explaining concepts and teaching principles, and too little time allowing students to share their own insights• <i>Pacing:</i> I tend to overprepare my lessons, with too much content in each lesson to fit into a single class period; this often makes the lesson feel rushed, leaves insufficient time for student questions and comments, and leaves students wondering what we didn't have time to cover• <i>Assignments & Assessments:</i> having relatively little experience with classes that require assignments and assessments, I struggle to give these areas sufficient attention in my lesson preparation and course design; class size also makes it difficult to engage students in meaningful projects and writing assignments, as the time required to grade such assignments becomes prohibitive

Goals for Improvement:

- Observe a colleague's class at least once a month, looking for ways to improve my own teaching.
- Survey colleagues regarding the best scholarship related to the courses I will be teaching. Create a living document compiling relevant academic resources, and study at least one book or article each month from that list.
- Conduct a mid-course evaluation each semester and make necessary changes based on student feedback. Let students see that their feedback is appreciated and is being implemented.
- Be more selective in identifying concepts and principles worth discussing in class. Allow for—and expect—more student participation, based on their own preparation outside of class.
- *Goal for Teaching Rel A 122 Fall 2023:* Experiment with the type and amount of assignments and assessments required until I find the right balance between what is demanding and what is doable in terms of workload (for both students and TAs). Create a list of personal projects that are related to the course and relevant to students. Also, have an eye toward assessments during lesson preparation, so that students will more clearly understand what might appear on exams.

Scholarship

Self-Assessment

Areas of Strength	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Research:</i> I enjoy, and have experience with, both focused research in primary documents and wide-ranging research in secondary literature. I tend to be exhaustive in my research, which is both a strength and a weakness—a strength, as I tend to find things that are otherwise overlooked, and a weakness, as it can prolong the research phase and keep me from bringing projects to a timely completion. • <i>Writing:</i> My writing tends to be creative and engaging, and I have experience as an editor, which has refined my eye for detail. • <i>Interdisciplinary Work:</i> My academic background (in secularization, faith loss, anti-religious rhetoric, and scriptural reception and rejection history) has required an interdisciplinary approach, opening doors to the study of history, philosophy, psychology, sociology, communications, and literature. My interests are wide-ranging and I read broadly. • <i>Gospel Scholarship:</i> my passion is to help the Saints maintain and deepen their faith in the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. I prefer projects that will help people in real-world situations, and the relevance of my research topics affords me frequent opportunities to engage meaningfully with the Saints in both academic, devotional, and individual settings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Lack of Experience in Academic Publishing:</i> I have experience publishing in the area of gospel scholarship, but little experience publishing to the academy. I need to improve my understanding of the entire process, become more familiar with the various journals that publish in fields relevant to my research, and forge more relationships with other scholars. • <i>Pace & Perfectionism:</i> I tend to research and write more slowly and painstakingly than what a robust publication schedule would demand. I need to be more intentional with my schedule, more disciplined when it comes to deadlines, and more selective in my use of time. • <i>Delegation and Collaboration:</i> I am independent to a fault and struggle to delegate responsibilities to research assistants or collaborate with colleagues.

Goals for Improvement:

- Identify colleagues with a strong record of publishing (to the academy as well as to the Saints) and seek their advice. Keep a list of best-practices. Read at least one book each year on the processes of researching, writing, or publishing.
- Be an engaged participant in the Book of Mormon Academy and maintain awareness of publishing opportunities arising within BYU Religious Education. Be selective about participation in order to reserve time for projects intended for the academy.
- Identify the most significant academic journals in fields relevant to my research interests and review their contents whenever a new issue appears. Attend SBL/AAR and begin making contacts with scholars with similar interests.
- Submit the following projects:
 - article on overcoming pride in religious education (submit by Nov. 1, 2023)
 - article on Ethan Allen (submit by Apr. 1, 2023)
 - article on Abner Cole (submit by Sept. 1, 2024)
 - article on Thomas Paine (submit by Mar. 1, 2025)
- Continue writing book on proving contraries (Fall 2024 submission)
- Organize time so that Friday can be a writing day each week

Scholarship Development Project

Themes & Topics:

- Anti-Mormon Rhetoric
 - Abner Cole & the *Reflector*
 - Alexander Campbell and *Delusions*
 - Eber D. Howe and *Mormonism Unveiled*
 - *Book of Mormon Mockery* book
- Anti-Religious Rhetoric / Secularization
 - Ethan Allen
 - Thomas Paine
 - Elihu Palmer
 - Fanny Wright
 - Mark Twain
 - Robert Ingersoll
 - Watson Heston
 - H. L. Mencken & Clarence Darrow
 - The Absurdification of Religion
 - Divine Derision
 - The Spectator Goes to Church
 - Mocking the Methodists
 - Martin Luther's *On the Jews and their Lies*
- Navigating Faith Crisis
 - Podcast Series
 - Teaching Helps for *The Religious Educator*
 - *Proving Contraries* book
 - *Creation – Fall – Atonement* book
- Scriptural Reception History
 - “Swallowing the Whale” article
 - The Book of Commandments and The Sacred Roll
 - Canonization and the Ordering of Charisma
 - Biblical Rhetoric in Presidential Inaugural Addresses
- The Rhetoric of Ridicule
 - Reason and Ridicule in Common Sense Realism
 - *Laughingstock* book

Scholarly Goals (to be completed or in-process by December 2023):

- Identify journals, articles, and scholars focused on secularization, polemics, and ridicule; create a living document to organize this material
- Present a paper at the Society of Biblical Literature conference
- Submit one article to the Sperry Symposium committee and one to the *Religious Educator*

Strategic Plans

- Communicate with scholars in the above-mentioned fields: send feedback on their work and solicit feedback on mine; arrange in-person meetings at SBL/AAR or other conferences
- Identify potential publishers and make contact with editors to present ideas
- Read one article or book each month relevant to my fields of interest
- Include relevant research findings in classroom teaching and firesides
- Identify articles and books for my research assistant to study and summarize
- When Come Follow Me cycle ends, set aside daily writings blocks (short on teaching days, long on non-teaching days)

Measuring Success

- Compare scholarly productivity, habits, and work-flow in Dec. 2023 to 2022 levels; record and report change to department chair in annual interview

Citizenship

Self-Assessment

Areas of Strength	Areas for Improvement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Work Ethic and Engagement in the Department:</i> I strive to give my all to any assignment I'm given. In my first year at BYU, I served on the podcast committee conducting interviews for the Y Religion podcast, served on the thesis committee of a student in the master's of religious education program, and provided peer review for several papers, both within the department and for <i>BYU Studies</i>. I was also an active participant in the Book of Mormon Academy, in all faculty meetings, and in the faculty search process.• <i>Serving Across Campus:</i> I am frequently asked to speak elsewhere on campus, and I have been a guest lecturer in psychology and student development classes, and at the office professionals conference. Next semester I will be speaking to the faculty of the school of accountancy.• <i>Interfaith Work:</i> I directed interfaith activities at the University of Utah Institute and the Westminster Institute, and have participated in interfaith events at BYU. I have worked closely with Greg Johnson of Standing Together and other Evangelical leaders.• <i>Helping Those in Faith Crisis:</i> I work one-on-one with people around the world who are struggling in their faith, answering emails, doing Zoom calls, and meeting with individuals in my office. I frequently speak at firesides and conferences, and I have trained priesthood leaders and institute faculties on helping people navigate their crises of faith.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Citizenship in the Academy:</i> I do not have any experience in this area, and need to be more proactive in working with academic programs, journals, and faculty outside of BYU.• <i>Collegiality:</i> I attend all meetings and try to engage socially with colleagues, but as an introvert I sometimes keep too much to myself. I can be more proactive in organizing informal opportunities to interact and get to know my colleagues on a personal level.• <i>Running Faster than I Have Strength:</i> I have a difficult time saying no to any invitation to speak, but they come so frequently that they are limiting my effectiveness in other areas. I also receive so many emails from struggling Saints around the world that I cannot keep up with them all, and often feel overwhelmed with the amount of work needed to help people navigate their faith crises.

Goals for Improvement:

- Invite a colleague once a month to have lunch; get to know them on a personal level, and seek to learn from them professionally as well
- Strive to limit outside firesides to two per month, being more selective about which opportunities will do the greatest good to the greatest number of people.
- Produce a podcast series on helping people navigate faith crisis, to which I can refer people who are struggling. Begin work in April 2024 and produce one episode every two weeks.
- Familiarize myself with key academic journals and reach out to the editors to offer my assistance as a peer reviewer; make connections with fellow scholars in my areas of interest by sending emails thanking them for their scholarship (do this upon completion of each book/article I read)
- Give my best efforts in all committee assignments

Citizenship Development Project:

Collaborative Teaching Activities:

- Observe a colleague's teaching once per month
- Discuss teaching ideas with colleagues in small group settings

Collaborative Scholarship Activities:

- Attend and actively participate in the Book of Mormon Academy (BOMA)
- Review colleague's work and provide feedback

Service Activities:

- Y Religion Podcast Committee: complete one podcast interview each month; curate list of targeted articles to highlight
- Continue helping Church members in faith crisis, through firesides, podcast episodes, and one-on-one counseling via email, Zoom calls, phone call, or in-person visits

Building Collegiality:

- Create survey and compile list of favorite candy or treats for department faculty and staff
- Invite a colleague once a month to have lunch
- Send email to colleagues whenever I read something they have written

Collaborating with Colleagues Outside of BYU:

- Become a reviewer for a journal in one of my areas of interest
- Attend SBL/AAR Conference

Measuring Success:

- Compare strength of faculty relationships and level of participation in committees and groups in Dec. 2023 to 2022 levels; record and report change to department chair in annual interview

Goal Calendar

Daily Goals:

- Help one person (outside of BYU) experiencing faith crisis (emails, Zoom calls, firesides, etc.)
- Dedicate at least ½ hour each day to research and writing

Weekly Goals:

- Have at least one interaction with a student (outside of class) that builds them up
- Have at least one interaction with a colleague that builds them up and acknowledges their work
- Dedicate one day primarily to research and writing

Monthly Goals:

- Observe one colleague's class
- Invite one colleague to lunch
- Study one book or article related to course content

Semester Goals:

- Conduct a mid-course evaluation and make changes based on student feedback
- Write and submit at least one article
- Conduct a workshop on helping others navigate faith crisis

Yearly Goals:

- Study one book on the processes of researching, writing, or publishing
- Attend at least one academic conference (ideally, to present a paper there)
- Write and submit one book manuscript

Department and University Needs and Resources:

- My goals align with the department's and university's aims, in that I desire to teach with conviction, publish with purpose, and serve with distinction. Furthermore, my plans are intentionally designed to further the work of the global Church, by including a podcasting format that can reach a worldwide audience.
- I feel strongly about fostering a spirit of inclusion and belonging in my classes, remaining open to diverse viewpoints; being sensitive to perspectives from across the political, social, and religious spectra; and including underrepresented groups in the quotes I share, the images I show, and the principles I teach.
- The department and university have been generous with financial resources and faculty support. My biggest challenge thus far has been finding the time to meet the normal expectations regarding teaching, scholarship, and citizenship while being so heavily engaged in efforts to assist Saints around the world experiencing faith crisis. I wish there were more organized and unified ways to share the responsibility to "minister to the one," and would love to have more institutional support to produce materials and train others to help those who are struggling. That support could include time, funding, and the opportunity to design and teach a course focused on navigating faith crisis. Such a class would also be an incredible opportunity to mentor students who could then help others (especially among their peers in the rising generation) who are struggling.

Faculty Development Plan Final Report

February 12, 2024

Teaching Goals (and report):

1. Observe a colleague's class at least once a month.
 - I have averaged one colleague a month coming to observe my class, but I have not observed my colleagues' classes as often as I had hoped. On the first day of each month, I will reach out to a colleague to schedule a time to visit his/her class that month.
2. Survey colleagues regarding best scholarship related to courses I will be teaching.
 - I have created a living document listing relevant scholarship on the Book of Mormon, and continue to add to it based on recommendations and personal study.
3. Conduct a mid-course evaluation and make necessary changes.
 - I conducted a mid-course evaluation last semester, created an executive summary of student feedback, shared that summary with my students, and immediately implemented changes based on the feedback received. Students expressed genuine gratitude (and a little surprise) that I would take their feedback seriously and make appropriate changes so quickly.
4. Be more selective in identifying concepts and principles worth discussing in class; allow for more student participation.
 - After preparing my lesson plan for each class, I review everything to identify which areas deserve the greatest focus. Based on estimations of how long the lesson will take, I try to trim down content to leave more space for student interaction and questions.
 - In the classes I am currently teaching, I have programmed student input and interaction into the course design, with each student submitting a PowerPoint slide that I review, selecting some to be included in the lesson (with the student explaining the content (s)he prepared).
5. Create a list of personal projects that are related to the course and relevant to students.
 - I have created a list of personal projects that are relevant to the content for REL A 122 and REL A 275. Student feedback on almost all of these projects has been extremely positive.

Scholarship Goals (and report):

1. Seek advice from colleagues with a strong record of publishing; read at least one book each year on the processes of researching, writing, or publishing.
 - Conversations with my mentor (Matt Grey) have helped in this regard, but I still need to reach out to additional colleagues. I have begun reading *How to Write a Lot*, by Paul Silvia, and have purchased several other books on academic writing and publishing to read in future years.
2. Participate in the Book of Mormon Academy and take advantage of publishing opportunities within BYU Religious Education.
 - I have been an active participant in every meeting of the Book of Mormon Academy and published a chapter in the Academy's recent book on Jacob. I have also participated in several other publishing opportunities within BYU Religious Education (one Sperry Symposium chapter already published and a second accepted for publication, a chapter in *Book of Mormon Insights*, and a chapter accepted for publication in *Quiet Disciples*).
3. Identify academic journals relevant to my research interests and review contents when new issues appear. Attend SBL and begin making contacts with scholars outside BYU.

- I have created a list of relevant academic journals related to my research interests and have begun perusing their contents. I attended SBL, presented a paper there, and met several other scholars from outside BYU.
- 4. Submit the following projects:
 - a. article on overcoming pride in religious education (submit by Nov. 1, 2023)
 - b. article on Ethan Allen (submit by Apr. 1, 2023)
 - c. article on Abner Cole (submit by Sept. 1, 2024)
 - d. article on Thomas Paine (submit by Mar. 1, 2025)
- I am still revising the article on overcoming pride, still writing the paper on Abner Cole, and have not yet submitted the articles on Ethan Allen and Thomas Paine. I have been overly optimistic about the amount of writing time I would have and the speed that I could complete projects. However, I was able to publish 3 articles and have two more accepted for publication.
- 5. Continue writing book on proving contraries (Fall 2024 submission)
 - I have begun work on this book, though I will likely need to push back my proposed submission date.
- 6. Organize time so that Friday can be a writing day each week
 - Fridays are often taken up with meetings, which interrupt or interfere with writing time. I participated in a writing workshop sponsored by the Faculty Center that emphasized spending at least 15 minutes writing to start the day, and I am working on making this a habit.

Citizenship Goals (and report):

1. Invite a colleague once a month to have lunch; get to know them on a personal level, and seek to learn from them professionally as well
 - My teaching schedule has made lunchtimes largely unavailable, but I have had a few social lunches, and I've been trying to be more social during meetings and in hallway conversations. Overall I am feeling more connected to colleagues.
2. Strive to limit outside firesides to two per month, being more selective about which opportunities will do the greatest good to the greatest number of people.
 - I have been more selective about accepting speaking invitations, with most months only having one outside fireside, though many months have included some kind of guest lecture or speaking invitation at BYU.
3. Produce a podcast series on helping people navigate faith crisis, to which I can refer people who are struggling. Begin work in April 2024 and produce one episode every two weeks.
 - The time to begin this project has not yet arrived, but I still plan to work on this goal, though I will need to postpone my start date until May 2024. In the meantime, I have been continuing my weekly Come Follow Me podcast, which has (as of year-end 2023) over 675 hours of content and 9.2 million hours of watch time on YouTube, in addition to 10.1 million downloads on the audio-only podcast version. I have also given 6 interviews for other podcasts and was a guest commentator for one episode of BYU TV's "Come Follow Up" series.
4. Familiarize myself with key academic journals and reach out to the editors to offer my assistance as a peer reviewer; make connections with fellow scholars in my areas of interest by sending emails thanking them for their scholarship (do this upon completion of each book/article I read).

- I have created a list of relevant journals, and I have completed reviews for *BYU Studies* and the Religious Studies Center, but I have not yet reached out to editors of journals outside BYU.
5. Give my best efforts in all committee assignments.
- I have been fully engaged in my official assignments on the Y Religion Podcast Committee and the Awards Committee. I have also volunteered frequently to meet with potential applicants and finalists identified by the Search Committee. In addition, I served on the thesis committee of one student in the Masters in Religious Education program, served as a volunteer reviewer for a Sperry Symposium paper and a Student Symposium paper, mentored a student whose paper was accepted for the Student Symposium, mentored another student working on a psychology project focusing on faith crisis, allowed another student to job shadow me for a day, and have mentored several students (including one former TA) who are working to become seminary teachers.
6. Help at least one person per day (on average) experiencing faith crisis (through emails, Zoom calls, office visits, firesides etc.).
- I have accepted multiple invitations to engage with members of the BYU community in my areas of expertise, including guest lecturing in a Psychology of Gender class (every semester) and a Student Development class (twice), giving the keynote address at a BYU OPAC conference, and helping to lead an interfaith dialogue between LDS students and Evangelical students visiting from out of state. I also spoke (by invitation) to a Business Strategy student organization, the BYU Catering employees, and a BYU administrative retreat organized by Vice President Steve Hafen; served on one faculty panel organized by a student organization focused on mental health and another panel organized for Honor Week; and collaborated with psychology professor Sam Hardy and BYU chaplain Jim Slaughter on matters related to faith loss.
 - I spoke at the Chaplain Conference for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Utah Suicide Prevention Summit.
 - As of year-end 2023, since coming to BYU I have given 31 firesides, have met with individuals in 85 separate office visits, and have answered countless emails from people around the world experiencing faith crisis. I have consulted with the Priesthood Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and have provided training on dealing with faith crisis to the faculty at the Utah Valley Institute, the Taylorsville Institute, the leadership of the Provo Married Stake, and the faculty of the School of Accountancy at BYU.

TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Semester Self-Evaluation for BYU Faculty

Instructor Name: _____

Department: Ancient Scripture

Semester/Term: Fall 2023

Courses Reviewed: REL A 122

Teaching that results in significant student learning is, and should be, the most important activity of university faculty. (BYU Rank and Status Policy, 3.2 Teaching)

Instructions: Provide evidence from multiple sources (e.g., student performance on exams and projects, student ratings, student comments, formative evaluations from peers and/or students, self-evaluations) relative to the *Three Pillars of Effective Teaching*. Include evaluative statements regarding areas of strength, areas for improvement, and action plans.

Past Semester

Processes of Improvement (current) Ctrl-click for [Guiding Questions for Processes of Improvement](#)

Describe actions taken and how they affected student learning and/or the learning environment. Include appropriate evidence.

The most significant changes I have been trying to implement relate to student participation in class and the kinds of assignments and assessments students complete outside of class. The choice to focus on these two areas grows out of the feedback I have received through midcourse and end-of-course evaluations and from informal conversations with students and with the Teaching Assistants that have worked for me. I am seeing improvement based on the changes I am implementing, which has been encouraging.

Student participation and interaction have suffered largely because I tend to prepare too much material to cover in a 50-minute class period. Thus, I have worked to be more selective in preparing content and more flexible in where each lesson leads. I am also including more questions on powerpoint slides (rather than having them be solely informational), asking more questions directly of the class, and creating more opportunities for student-to-student interaction. These changes have been especially pronounced this semester, and students seem genuinely excited to discuss in small groups concepts we are studying in class as well as insights they have discovered outside of class.

This semester I have also begun making student participation a more clearly structured part of my lessons, by making students a more integral part of the instruction. Students are assigned to create one powerpoint slide each week related to the content we will be discussing in class, which I review before class in order to select some of the best examples to include in the instruction. Not only are students coming better prepared to class, but they are making significant contributions to what we are learning, even as they build upon their individual level of understanding. This also allows students to participate who would never raise their hands on their own. Giving students opportunities to teach portions of the lesson has kept me on my toes, as I have to be prepared to discuss things I hadn't originally planned on—providing context, connecting doctrinal dots, and clarifying content—but this has been exhilarating to me as a teacher and highly meaningful for my students, who get to turn into teachers themselves. I am honestly learning from them, which has changed the class dynamic for the better.

The second major area of improvement has been in my assignments and assessments, where I have been experimenting and making adjustments each semester. In my first semester of teaching (REL A 211; the New Testament Gospels), these tended to be writing assignments: two “Biblical Briefs” that were more scholarly in nature (emphasizing intellectual enlargement), two “Come and See Invitations” that were more devotional in nature (emphasizing spiritual growth), and a culminating “Christ & Culture” paper that drew upon all they had learned during the semester to apply the Savior’s gospel to a real-world problem. Students did well with these papers, which helped them achieve the desired learning outcomes, but they became overly time-intensive to grade, being only possible because, as a new teacher, my classes were smaller and fewer in number than they would be in subsequent semesters.

Owing to this challenge, in my second semester of teaching (REL A 122; the second half of the Book of Mormon), I continued to have my students do a lot of writing, but without the need for every

assignment to be graded. They were assigned multiple “Book of Mormon Briefs,” that were scholarly in nature, multiple “Book of Mormon FEASTs,” which were devotional in nature, and multiple “Scholarship Summaries,” which consisted of studying existing scholarship and summarizing what they’d learned. Students received credit each time they submitted one of these assignments (with TAs simply spot-checking submissions to ensure students were taking them seriously), with the belief on my part that practice would facilitate improvement, and that effort could be rewarded with grades largely being objective and self-assessed. Students expressed appreciation for this approach, but also complained that too many were assigned.

Consequently, in my third semester of teaching (repeating REL A 122; the second half of the Book of Mormon), I moved away from having so many writing assignments, and assigned weekly personal projects instead, each of which was related to what we had been studying that week, and was meant to put learned principles into living practice. Each project was designed to take roughly one hour and students would self-assess the effort they put into each project.

My intent in assigning these projects and coupling them with daily scripture study to constitute a majority of the class grade was to maximize the time expected for a 2-credit course, which is a total of 6 hours of work (360 minutes) per week. This time would consist of 7 days of 30-minute scripture study (210 minutes), 2 class periods (100 minutes), and one personal project (50 minutes), totaling 360 minutes. In each of my three semesters, my students have spent considerably more time than department, college, and university averages, but I seldom get any complaints about the time spent, since it is never busy-work and has clear spiritual, intellectual, and personal purposes that students tend to value.

Overall, based on course evaluations, in-class discussions, and end-of-semester emails (described below), students seem genuinely grateful for the types of assignments they are given. Daily scripture study that is both “consistent” and “intense” is by far the single most meaningful part of the course, and student comments reflect this. As one student wrote, “Honestly, I don’t even know where to begin. The best I can put it is that scripture study is miraculous! I love being able to take the time to study within my scriptures every day and being able to avoid the one chapter a night type attitude that I had before the semester. I loved having the liberty to skim certain chapters and to really delve into what I needed for that day instead of just a prescribed reading.”

Students also tended to enjoy the weekly projects more than the written papers, finding them to be more introspective, more relevant, and more meaningful. As one student wrote, “I gained a lot of self-awareness through the personal projects....It was really valuable to have multiple projects in which I was asked to recall moments of personal spiritual witness, of hearing God’s voice or feeling His love.” Another student wrote that “their variety was super interesting and fun, especially since nearly all of them related to what we learned over the course of that week.” Especially gratifying were the positive comments from students that I had taught previously in other courses, as they were present for both “before” and “after” versions of assignments. I plan to continue adding meaningful personal projects to my growing list, as I would like to add an increased measure of flexibility to enhance student choice. I also plan to experiment with different approaches to assessments, as I would like to have students do more teaching, rather than simply giving answers to a multiple-choice test. I am sincerely grateful for the training provided and flexibility allowed by both department leadership and the Faculty Center, which grants me safe space to experiment with different ways to improve my students’ experiences and outcomes.

List additional professional development activities in which you engaged.

I participated in the Teaching Seminar in 2022 and the Writing Workshop in 2023, both sponsored by the BYU Faculty Center. I have met with my teaching consultant, observed colleagues' classes, and invited colleagues to observe my classes, implementing their suggestions as appropriate. I attended the annual conference of the Society of Biblical Literature and attended a section focused on pedagogy, where I also presented a paper.

Student Learning

Ctrl-click for [Guiding Questions for Student Learning](#)

Describe areas of strength with appropriate evidence.

Personally and professionally, I am deeply committed to the aims of a BYU education, addressing each of them directly on the first day of class, with an explanation of how I intend to pursue each aim throughout the semester. I design each course to be both spiritually strengthening and intellectually enlarging, with flexibility built in so that students can decide on their individual ratio of head and heart, intellect and spirit, during their assigned daily study. I consider these two aims the principal *means* by which students will achieve the *ends* envisioned by the other two aims, to which I give even greater emphasis in my course design, activities, and assessments. As one who works constantly with Church members around the world experiencing faith crisis, I want my students to develop the Christlike character and establish the habits of daily discipleship that will lead to lifelong learning and service in building the kingdom of God.

This focus—on long-term results growing out of well-informed beliefs and ongoing behaviors—is also in keeping with the prophetic vision laid out in the “Strengthening Religious Education” document, specifically its charge to “strengthen [students’] ability to find answers, resolve doubts, respond with faith, and give reason for the hope within them in whatever challenges they may face.” Drawing upon my doctoral work in anti-religious rhetoric and my years of studying anti-Mormon literature, I try to equip my students with the knowledge, skills, and attributes that will be necessary for them to become lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.

In terms of in-class instruction, in my lessons I strive to balance the three “worlds” of scripture, providing students with the historical and cultural context necessary to enter “the world *behind* the text,” engaging in literary and rhetorical analysis to appreciate “the world *within* the text,” and aiming for real-world relevance and personal application to guide their navigation of “the world *in front* of the text.” This allows the content to be both intellectually enlarging (the world behind the text and the world within the text) and spiritually strengthening (the world in front of the text).

Outside of class, students are graded primarily on their study of the scriptures, which they are taught must be “consistent” (to create habits of discipleship) and “intense” (to ensure that their study is meaningful and productive). That study (30 minutes per day) centers on the scripture block or gospel principle that will be discussed in the following class (an emphasis on unity), but students can choose where to focus their time and attention within that block (an emphasis on flexibility).

Thus students come to class with a combination of shared preparation and individual insight, which leads to rich participation and interaction.

Evidence that these aims are being met can be seen in student evaluations over the past three semesters, as the following statistics attest:

% of students marking “enhanced” or “very effective” compared to dept. average (+/-)	Fall 2022 (211)	Wint 2023 (122)	Fall 2022 (122)	Average over Time
Spiritually Strengthening	+5.1%	+4.7%	+3.1%	+4.3%
Intellectually Enlarging	+5.9%	+0.7%	+5.5%	+4.0%
Character Building	+11.0%	+4.8%	+7.7%	+7.8%
Lifelong Learning and Service	+9.4%	+5.3%	+10.4%	+8.4%
Explained Concepts Effectively	+11.9%	+9.0%	+6.9%	+9.3%
Well Organized	+2.3%	+1.6%	-1.2%	+0.9%
Opportunities to Get Help	+6.0%	+16.9%	+16.1%	+13.0%
Opportunities for Student Involvement	+3.9%	+8.9%	+3.2%	+5.3%
Responded to Students Respectfully	+7.6%	+11.3%	+7.7%	+8.9%

Composite averages exceed department averages in every category, providing evidence that students are having positive experiences in my classes. In terms of the aims of a BYU education, the biggest positive differences appear in “character building” and “lifelong learning and service,” which is unsurprising, considering my emphasis on the development of Christlike attributes and lifelong habits. In terms of the categories of instructor effectiveness, “opportunities to get help” was the highest, which again is unsurprising, considering my open-door policy, my efforts to be accessible and approachable, and how emphatically I invite them to come to me with questions or concerns, especially those related to their faith.

Describe areas for improvement based on evidence.

In the chart of statistics included above, the lowest in the area of instructor effectiveness (and the only instance of an average being lower than the department average in a given semester) is how “well organized” the course was, which is likely owing to three factors, one of them positive and two of them negative. On the positive side, I design my courses to be flexible, but this may come across as a lack of clear organization. For example, in the one semester in which course organization was below the department average, I gave students the flexibility to turn in weekly personal projects in any order, without a set deadline for each specific one. I thought students would appreciate this flexibility, but in the mid-course evaluations, they explained that having set due dates for each specific assignment helped keep them on task (a change I have implemented in my current courses). On the negative side, first, I tend to prepare too much material, which means we seldom cover everything in class, leaving students feeling that they’ve missed something. Second, the design of the course makes it less clear during class time what will appear on the midterm and final exams, leaving students feeling unsure of what they should be taking notes on or paying close attention to. We have talked about the important

distinction between studying to learn and studying merely to take a test, but admittedly I can do more to make test expectations clearer.

Along those lines, my students' biggest complaint over the past two semesters was feeling that the midterm and final exams were too hard, too long, or both. In both instances, I wanted the exams to be experiences of intense scripture study, so I purposely made them open-book and asked questions that would drive students back to the scriptures in search of historical information, gospel principles, and personal application. Overall, exams were hardest for students who weren't as familiar with the location of the chapters in question, since finding the right place to search for answers extended considerably the time required to complete the exam. Taking their feedback seriously, I shortened the length of the final exam and ordered the questions to reflect the chronological progression of the text. It still forced them to study the scriptures intensely, but it wasn't so time-consuming, and for that they were grateful. Several students saw the midterm exam as a wake-up call to intensify their personal scripture study, which resulted not only in improved scores for the final exam, but more meaningful personal study along the way.

The next lowest score in instructor effectiveness, though still above the department average, addressed opportunities for student involvement. Having grown accustomed to teaching chapel-sized classes at the University of Utah Institute, and having spent nearly four years (beginning with the pandemic) filming lecture-style lessons to post online, I had grown somewhat out of practice in engaging students more directly. Furthermore, my lectures were so content-heavy (another habit developed after years of filming 3-5 hour podcast episodes) that it left little time for students' questions or comments. In midcourse and semester-end course evaluations, some students expressed a preference for teacher-focused lecture-style lessons, but enough shared a desire for more opportunities to hear student comments and to engage in student-to-student interaction that I clearly need to improve in this area.

A few representative complaints from previous semesters' student evaluations:

- "Brother was very good at explaining challenging concepts and going into depth about topics. However, he introduced so much material we usually never got through most of it."
- "I do wish there was some time for us to talk with neighbors and interact with each other, but I think that most of the interactions and sharing of opinions happened as a class which was good too."
- "His classes were incredible but what he required outside of class was a little challenging to complete sometimes."
- "I felt like we covered a lot of spiritually edifying material but I was often confused at what the key points he wanted us to take were and the tests didn't feel like they reflected that."

Learning Environment

Ctrl-click for [Guiding Questions for Learning Environment](#)

Describe areas of strength with appropriate evidence

From the very first class period, I strive to create a sense of purpose, a feeling of belonging, and a spirit of charity. I frequently reassure my students that I am accessible and approachable, I

share examples and experiences of other students coming to discuss their questions or crises of faith, and I try to model the vulnerability I hope to find in my students by talking about some of the challenges we have faced as a family, including matters related to mental illness, faith loss, and LGBTQIA+ issues. I also strive to model a spirit of inclusivity, teaching principles and sharing experiences that illustrate the need to reach across racial, gender, political, economic, and religious lines. My long history of interfaith work plays into this, as does my background of living in places of great religious and racial diversity. In all that I do, I strive to meet students where they are and gently point them in the direction of the Savior, creating an atmosphere of openness and nonjudgmentalness; addressing difficult issues directly, carefully, and faithfully; and promoting the kind of “let [them] ask” environment that allowed the Restoration to unfold (see James 1:5).

Consequently, students tend to feel comfortable being open with me concerning their backstory, their current spiritual state, and their hopes for the future. I begin every semester with an assignment to send me a personal email detailing as much of themselves as they are willing to share, and I am amazed at students’ openness and honesty once they know they have a safe conversation partner. I read every email and respond to each one, and though it takes me several weeks to get through them all, the relationships this helps nurture are invaluable throughout the rest of the semester and beyond. I almost always have students coming to talk during office hours, and beyond the unscheduled visits, I have dozens of students reach out each semester seeking one-on-one help to navigate their issues of faith.

An example from Fall semester 2023 is illustrative. One particular student suffered from significant mental health challenges, had endured a lot of negative experiences during his mission and afterward, and felt a lot of anger toward God, the Church, and BYU. I had a free hour after the class he was in, and we almost invariably spent it wrestling with his questions and concerns. I was insistent that he seek the help of his family, trusted priesthood leaders (he could still identify a few of those), and mental health professionals, but I also wanted him to know that I was on his team, and we talked about scriptural, doctrinal, theological, and ecclesiastical issues frequently. At one point he made some troubling remarks during class that we usually reserved for after-class conversations, but I decided to let the class sit with them for a moment, and enlisted their help in trying to respond to them. As I told him afterwards, it had felt a little like he had hijacked the class, since we both knew that those kinds of issues were better reserved for individual conversations (which we had had frequently!), but that I felt the need to let it play out in class, partly so that other students could get a taste of the raw realities some of their fellow classmates might be dealing with, and partly so that he could recognize that students around him were willing to take his concerns seriously and offer meaningful help in response to them. It ended up being a positive experience for both sides. During a later after-class conversation, it became obvious that he needed more immediate mental health intervention, so despite his repeated protests, he and I eventually made it from the JSB, to his favorite lab in the Clyde Building, to the Jamba Juice in the Wilkinson Center to treat him to lunch, and finally to the CAPS center where he was able to meet with a counselor. Crisis averted. This is simply the most dramatic and time-intensive example of what happens with dozens of students who seek additional help outside of class, going far beyond questions related to course content alone.

At the end of each semester, I assign students to send me a second personal email that serves as a bookend opposite the first. In this one I ask them to share the personal growth they experienced throughout the semester, providing anecdotal evidence for the kinds of things they share in the online course evaluation. More importantly, though any submission earns full credit, this email acts as a cumulative assessment of what I believe matters most in my courses: not merely student

performance, but spiritual growth. It allows me to see if the course had the intended effect, not simply in the learning outcomes, but in the missions of a BYU education.

A few representative samples from the most recent semester:

- “This semester I was struggling with some mental health issues.... I struggled through most of my assignments, but one assignment I never struggled with was daily scripture study. Through daily scripture study, I was able to find peace and hope when I couldn’t find it anywhere else in my life.”
- “Before this semester whenever I had doubts about something I read in the BoM, I would often feel cynical. But now knowing that I can study more deeply the things I have doubts about, I feel more open-minded and feel more at peace about not having all of my questions answered right away.”
- “This class has been really helpful for my testimony which I’ve actually been struggling with for a couple of years. I don’t think I’ve felt the spirit this strongly while reading my scriptures for a while and while my testimony still isn’t perfect, it’s stronger than what it was before.”
- “It’s been a hard semester, one of the busiest times of my life, but no matter how exhausted or discouraged I felt walking to class, I never failed to feel revitalized after.”
- “My study of the Book of Mormon this semester has completely changed my perspective on scripture study, the Book of Mormon, and the gospel (for the better!). Possibly the biggest change I’ve seen is simply how much more aware I am of Christ in my everyday life.”
- “Much of my post-mission experience has felt like the dark ages. The combination of the pandemic, adjusting my RM expectations, losing relationships, and feeling intense cognitive dissonance caused me to disengage from church. It was easy to feel cynical, and I couldn’t stand being around naively optimistic BYU students. I’d taken a couple of religion classes that were engaging intellectually but hadn’t motivated me to do much else with my poor spiritual situation. Then I took this class. I can honestly say I’m in a renaissance era of studying the gospel, and I love the rediscovery of the simple truths written in the scriptures and especially in the Book of Mormon. Thank you for expanding my mind and pushing me to think in new ways. It is a true delight.”
- “I am excited about the scriptures again. Thank you.”

Describe areas for improvement based on evidence.

I would like to diversify the quotes I share and the visual images I use to reflect a broader range of voices, faces, and styles. Specifically, I want to create more space for female and minority representation. I would also like to integrate insights from sources of truth outside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to model to students a more ecumenical and encompassing view of those outside our faith.

Next Semester

Processes of Improvement (future) Ctrl-click for [Guiding Questions for Processes of Improvement](#)

Prioritize possible actions and select a feasible set that you plan to undertake and report on next semester.

I intend to engage in the following efforts at improvement:

- observe a colleague's class once each month to look for ways to improve my own teaching
 - complete the book "Ungrading" by the end of the semester
 - continue to brainstorm meaningful personal projects that will fit the content of REL C 121, 211, 212, and 250
 - create possible assessment questions based on broader and more significant principles emphasized in class, which will require students to teach others rather than simply recognizing or regurgitating information
-

Guiding Questions for Student Learning

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Learning Outcomes

- Are the course learning outcomes clear, appropriate to the course, and consistent with program outcomes?
- Do the learning outcomes reflect the Aims of a BYU Education?
- Are learning outcomes effectively communicated to students?
- Is the course well-organized?

Learning Activities

- Are learning activities well-designed and appropriate to the course?
- Do learning activities appropriately incorporate gospel methodology, concepts, and insights?
- Do the learning activities promote student engagement?
- Do the learning activities effectively facilitate the achievement of learning outcomes?

Learning Assessment

- Are assessment instruments aligned with learning outcomes?
- Are assessments effective measures of student learning?
- How well are students achieving the learning outcomes?

Guiding Questions for the Learning Environment

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Relationships

- Does the instructor integrate faith into the course and inspire students in their learning?
- Are instructor-student interactions appropriate, respectful, inclusive, and motivating to students?
- Does the instructor foster positive and supportive student-student interactions and ensure respectful discussions of challenging issues?

Settings

- Does the instructor use the classroom, lab, studio, etc. to create an effective setting for inspiring learning?
- Does the instructor create an atmosphere that motivates students to be active and engaged learners?
- Does the instructor create an atmosphere of civility and respect that welcomes diversity, promotes equity, and invites belonging for all students, regardless of their race, gender, sexual orientation, or other distinguishing feature?
- Does the instructor make reasonable efforts to make learning opportunities accessible to students with differing needs (e.g., physical, psychological, situational, technological)?

Materials & Other Resources

- Are course materials current and appropriate for the course?
- Are course materials used effectively to facilitate learning?
- Where appropriate, do course materials reflect a diversity of sources and perspectives (e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, culture)?

Guiding Questions for Processes of Improvement

[return to Processes of Improvement](#)

Course Improvement

- Are assessment data and other sources of evidence effectively and consistently used to improve the learning outcomes, learning environment, activities, and assessments?
- Do these improvements lead to increased achievement of learning outcomes?

Professional Development

- Does the instructor engage in regular self-evaluation of their own teaching?
- Does the instructor participate in activities (e.g., consultations, seminars, courses, study of pedagogy literature) that help them learn and develop as an instructor?
- Does the instructor implement best practices, and have they assessed the impacts of those practices?