

NEWS

BYU RECEIVES HIGH MARKS IN REACCREDITATION

FOR FOUR days last spring, Brigham Young University again witnessed the on-site investigation of a sixteen member reaccreditation committee from the Commission on Colleges of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges. Since 1956, the university has been subject once every ten years to the scrutiny of outside academics to determine if BYU deserves the association of other American universities. For the fourth time in the past thirty years, the commission's verdict was yes.

In preparation for the committee's visit, BYU administrators appointed a seven-person in-house reaccreditation steering committee, headed by vice president Lamond Tullis, "to direct a university self-study and to gather information the North Western Association required."

Generally very complimentary to BYU, the steering committee reported that the university compares favorably in many areas with other big-name U.S. colleges and that, as evidence of a continuing emphasis on quality instruction, the percentage of faculty with Ph.D.s rose 11 percent during the past ten years to 79 percent. They cautioned, however, that "departments can slip into jargon of their practitioners and merely give their students the illusion of knowledge."

The committee also found that because of the school's recent stress on research and publication, some "faculty members believe attention has shifted too much away from teaching," while others are concerned that the school's standards of success have changed and "wonder if it is worthwhile." Committee members also dis-

covered similar concerns among BYU students, who tend to believe that the school "places less emphasis on their being critical, evaluative, and analytical than is the case with other students across the nation."

In fact, some faculty comments on the report expressed fears that today's BYU students, coming from families that are "richer, more conservative, more Republican, more materialistic, more career oriented, less problem oriented, more orthodox, more suburbanized, more grade oriented, less risk taking, less altruistic, and less ambitious" than students of a general age, might be compromising the "stimulating diversity on which educational excellence depends."

Perhaps the most thorny question the committee addressed regarded academic freedom. They reported that many faculty believe they have more academic freedom at BYU than at other institutions where they have taught. The committee admitted that "while there are some public policy, moral, and religious positions that BYU faculty cannot advocate with impunity, there is hardly any subject that cannot be explored, described, evaluated, analyzed, and opened for debate within the class room."

Nevertheless, in a passage that caused a lot of discussion, the committee found that currently BYU administrators are "advised not to publish in *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, or to participate in Sunstone's symposia where they may be viewed as attacking the General Authorities of the university's sustaining church or the foundations of its faith."

Following the release of the self

study, Paul C. Richards, BYU public spokesperson, was quick to point out in an article written by *Salt Lake Tribune* reporter Dawn Tracy that the naming of *Dialogue* and *Sunstone* was merely "one person's interpretation of a generic university policy" prohibiting the president, vice presidents, and deans, not the faculty and staff in general, from making political statements of any type.

"Someone picked up the general policy and applied it in this way, it should have been written better," Richard was quoted as admitting. "It's unfortunate these publications were picked out, it could have been *Time*, *Fortune* or a newspaper in California—if a person is involved in an issue on a side that implied university endorsement, it would not be allowed for high-level administrators."

Given the occasionally heated discussion that followed the steering committee's study's observations and admissions regarding the existence or lack of academic freedom at BYU, some faculty openly wondered if the school would be reaccredited. Their fears proved groundless, however.

Like BYU's own self study, the reaccreditation committee's report lauded BYU's "very able and effective administration, the general respect of the faculty for the administration, exceptionally strong financial support from the Church, extraordinary physical facilities, and continued maximal enroll-

ments," and praised the school for having "progressed in many important ways since the last general site visit."

At the outset of their report, the evaluation committee commented that "while BYU truly functions as a university it, in a manner unique among church-related universities in the United States, is truly a university of the Church and functions closely and strongly in support of the worldwide activities of the Church." They continued that BYU's mission "serves the students, staff, and administration well, that it is being achieved, and that it provides some insights in the discomfort and complaints from a few Mormon and non-Mormon faculty and students who expressed concern about university procedures that were perceived as being arbitrary and unreasonable."

The committee echoed the university's self study by recommending that the school attempt to expand its recruiting policies so as to attract a wider diversity of students and by criticizing the library's use as a "social hall," rather than a "study hall" by students. They observed that "Religious Education at BYU shares the same problems of several other private institutions which try to mix faith and scholarship: religion classes vary widely in content and style with some being a very exciting and challenging learning environment while others more closely resemble Sunday School for college

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credits.”

They also noted that the interpretation of honor and dress codes are “often couched in religious rather than developmental terms. . . in liberal/conservative or religious/secular terms, when these are really not the issues in question.” They consequently recommended that “discussion be undertaken to identify and better understand the common ground between student developmental issues and ecclesiastical concerns.”

Regarding academic freedom, the committee found that in some campus colleges, particularly the social sciences, “a latent but pervasive constraint on academic freedom does lurk.” “The lack of diversity,” committee members explained, “does not create an intellectual environment which fosters controversy, dissent and debate—the essential stuff of a vibrant intellectual climate.” The dilemma confronting the college, according to the committee’s report, is that “to move forward positively to diversify will create issues and

conflicts largely foreign to the institution. Not to move in this direction will condemn the Social Sciences, and the institution, to a status that will fall far short of BYU’s potential.”

In conclusion, the committee predicted that BYU’s “challenge for the future will be to continue the scholarly development of the faculty while continuing to emphasize (and reward) excellent teaching; to remain primarily an undergraduate institution open and accessible to the children of the families whose financial tithes support it; and to define clearly the extent and type of graduate education and research that it believes appropriate.”

Although an interim visit is set for 1991, BYU will not be required to undergo the same kind of thorough examination until the mid-1990’s. What administrators, faculty, and students learned this time around will no doubt affect the university’s direction and the problems it will be confronting during the coming decade.

LOWELL BENNION HONORED AT ROBERTS SOCIETY

“THIS MEETING HAS all the happiness of a funeral and none of the grief,” rejoiced Emma Lou Thyne when the B.H. Roberts Society met recently to discuss “The Triumph of the Spirit: Lowell Bennion.”

According to panel moderator Leonard Arrington, Bennion only reluctantly agreed to attend the event when the idea was presented to him at a Chinese restaurant after he read his fortune cookie: “You will be honored by your friends.” The panel consisted of four of Bennion’s friends who discussed different aspects of his life.

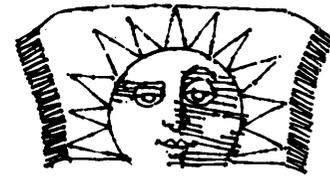
Arrington opened the session by reading an encouraging letter he received years ago from Bennion, which complimented him for his “realistic yet constructive” tone in writing Church history. Arrington

said that an “open ear and understanding heart” had always been Bennion’s trademark.

“We’re here to celebrate the life of the Church’s saint,” proclaimed Sterling McMurrin, University of Utah E.E. Erickson Distinguished Professor of History and Philosophy and former Institute teacher with Bennion. McMurrin shared several humorous antidotes about Bennion and then “with deep appreciation” discussed Bennion’s intellectual contributions, saying that he is “one of the leading theologians and moral philosophers of the LDS church. Mormon theology is at times a rough-cut affair which, in a sense, Lowell Bennion has helped to smooth and polish more than anyone else.”

Elaine Smart, volunteer coordinator and consultant for the Salt

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Lake Area Community Services Council, explained why Bennion has directed the center for the last fifteen years since his retirement from the university, saying, “he is still in the stream of life so he can know individuals’ needs and act.” She shared stories of how Bennion has served individuals and reviewed his labors in mobilizing the Community Services Council, organizing the Salt Lake Food Bank, the Independent Living Center for quadruplegics, and the Boys Ranch. “His single purpose is to help the individual and to rally others to help,” she concluded.

Elder Marion D. Hanks, of the First Quorum of Seventy and former University of Utah Institute of Religion instructor, quoted King Benjamin in the Book of Mormon to sum up Bennion’s life: “If ye believe these things see that ye do them.” Elder Hanks related a personal story about how Bennion’s honest counsel about some priesthood questions (“This is a matter about which we need more revelation”) kept him as a questioning student from being “derailed” from the Church. “Lowell Bennion,” said Hanks, “believes there is something in the individual better than they know and asks them to rise to it.”

At the meeting’s close, several announcements were made concerning Bennion. The editors of *Dialogue* announced an annual prize in Bennion’s name for the outstanding essay that explores Christian values and gospel principles in thought and action.

University of Utah President Chase Peterson announced that he is proposing to the Board of Regents

the establishment of a campus Lowell Bennion Community Center, initially funded by an anonymous donor. The center’s activities will match volunteers with individual and agency needs, develop courses and forums for teaching civic values and training volunteers, collect and distribute food donation, and work with the elderly and handicapped.

Leonard Arrington passed around the society’s B.H. Roberts hat to collect donations for the Community Services Center. Emma Lou Thyne revealed the existence of a secret Lowell Bennion Fund campaign which raised money to buy the Bennions a new “power-everything” Escort wagon to replace their old and unsafe vehicles.

LDS poet Emma Lou Thyne who reviewed his varied career: his European studies on Max Weber, his organizing the University of Utah’s LDS Institute of Religion; a writer of Church lesson manuals; professor of sociology and dean of students at the U of U, and currently director of the Salt Lake Area Community Services Council. Thyne expressed gratitude for the principles Bennion taught which still remain with her: “You can never be effective on the outside of an organization, you must work with, not against;” “Never waste yourself on a lost cause, save yourself for the things that you can win;” “Repentance is in dealing with things in order;” “Be an actor, not a reactor;” She concluded by saying, “Wholeness is what he traffics in, the inner music that allows the pieces to fit.”