

# The Church Educational System:

Preparing Students for a Life of Service

By Olivia Grayson  
Church Magazines

*As Church members choose where they will continue their education, there are so many options. How might a school or institute of religion within the Church Educational System help?*

Gaining an education helps God’s children prepare for the work He has in store for them. President Russell M. Nelson explained the importance of education: “Wherever you are, develop a deep desire to learn. For us as Latter-day Saints, getting an education is not just a privilege, it is a religious responsibility.”<sup>1</sup>

The Church Educational System (CES) prepares students around the world to serve faithfully in their circles of influence throughout their lives. Elder D. Todd Christofferson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who serves on the CES Board of Education, stated, “Learning is not an end unto itself but a means to bless God’s children.”<sup>2</sup>

Because the Lord commands us to teach and learn truth,<sup>3</sup> education has been important to Latter-day Saints since the early days of the Restoration, from the School of the Prophets in 1833 to the University of Deseret in 1850 and Brigham Young Academy in 1875. Latter-day Saints created many other frontier academies in the late 1800s.<sup>4</sup>

Today the Church Educational System consists of the following:

- Brigham Young University
- Brigham Young University–Idaho
- Brigham Young University–Hawaii
- Ensign College
- BYU–Pathway Worldwide
- Seminaries and Institutes of Religion

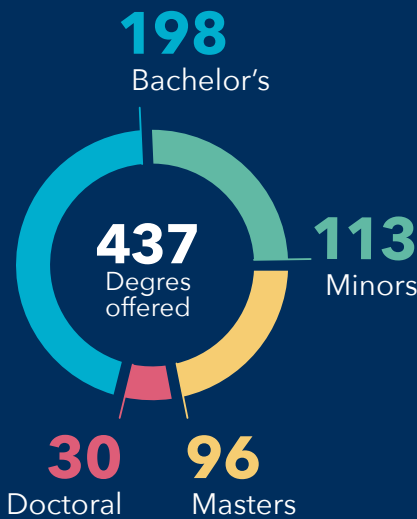
“In the Church Educational System, our schools must have the courage to be different—different from the world and, interestingly, different from each other,” says Elder Clark G. Gilbert, General Authority Seventy and CES Commissioner.<sup>5</sup> The CES options, though unique, stand united in the same purpose: “to develop disciples of Jesus Christ who are leaders in their homes, in the Church, and in their communities.”<sup>6</sup>

# BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY



“We must have the will to be different and to stand alone, if necessary, being a university second to none in its role primarily as an undergraduate teaching institution that is unequivocally true to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.”

PRESIDENT JEFFREY R. HOLLAND



“Becoming BYU will require enriching the student experience. ... Each student's eternal progression must remain our foremost concern.”<sup>10</sup>

SHANE REESE  
PRESIDENT OF BYU

Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, serves as the “educational ambassador” for the Church as well as for CES.<sup>6</sup> Not only do students advance in their chosen areas of study, but they deepen their knowledge and relationship with Jesus Christ and Heavenly Father. Spiritual growth occurs through religion classes and events such as weekly devotionals to help students as they include God in their education.

“BYU is the flagship brand most recognizable outside of the Church, with top-ranked graduate programs, NCAA athletic programs, and . . . scholarship and research,” says Elder Gilbert.<sup>7</sup> BYU is unique in its ability to represent the Church and increase the gospel's reach across the world.

Part of that uniqueness is tied to BYU's distinctive mission. President Jeffrey R. Holland, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, taught this: “We must have the will to be different and to stand alone, if necessary, being a university second to none in its role primarily as an undergraduate teaching institution that is unequivocally true to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>8</sup>

Speaking at BYU, President Spencer W. Kimball (1895–1985) said: “The uniqueness of Brigham Young University lies in its special role—education for eternity—which it must carry in addition to the usual tasks of a university. . . . This faculty has a double heritage—the preserving of the knowledge of men and the revealed truths sent from heaven.”<sup>9</sup>

BYU offers over 200 study abroad programs in over 60 countries, allowing students to learn how to understand and help others around the world. The student body comes from over 105 countries, and thanks in large part to the returned missionaries, more than 60 percent of the students speak a second language.

Out of 400 schools, BYU was listed 20th in the 2024 Best Colleges in America ranking by the *Wall Street Journal* alongside prestigious universities such as Princeton and MIT.<sup>11</sup>



# BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY—IDAHO



BYU–Idaho aims to be a “disciple preparation center” as it prepares students to lead, strengthen, and support their homes, communities, and the Church.<sup>12</sup>

It is also committed to student-focused teaching. Elder Alvin F. Meredith III, General Authority Seventy and president of BYU–Idaho, says: “Students tell us that their teachers know them by name. That is both unique and remarkable in the world of higher education, where large lecture halls are more the norm.”<sup>13</sup>

Mindi Anderson, an economics faculty member, explains: “I actually teach [my students] at the same level here as I have taught them at Cornell. . . . The biggest difference is that the classes are smaller here, I get to know my students better, and we actually get to do more interactive things. [And] my students reach the same levels of accomplishment and learning.”<sup>14</sup>

BYU–Idaho provides an affordable, quality secular education that is combined with spiritual learning. Similar to other CES institutions, students attend a weekly devotional and learn from teachers who strengthen their faith. With the Rexburg Idaho Temple located so close to campus, about half of the temple workers are students.

With affordable tuition and many scholarships, financial aid, and other resources, about two-thirds of the 33,380 BYU–Idaho students leave graduation with no student loans. About 90 percent of them find jobs within a few months of graduation.

BYU–Idaho’s emphasis on student-centered learning helps the students become leaders. President Henry B. Eyring, Second Counselor in the First Presidency and former president of Ricks College (the predecessor to BYU–Idaho), prophesied in 2001 that “graduates of BYU–Idaho will become legendary for their capacity to build the people around them and to add value wherever they serve.”<sup>15</sup>



“Graduates of BYU–Idaho will become legendary for their capacity to build the people around them and to add value wherever they serve.”

PRESIDENT HENRY B. EYRING

9  
— out of —  
10

Students employed within a few months of graduation

33,380  
Total Students

2  
— out of —  
3

Students graduate with **NO** student loans



“Students tell us that their teachers know them by name. That is both unique and remarkable in the world of higher education, where large lecture halls are more the norm.”

ELDER ALVIN F. MEREDITH III OF THE SEVENTY  
PRESIDENT OF BYU–IDAHO

# BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY—HAWAII



“If you are true and faithful, ... you, your families, and your homes will become beacons of hope in a darkened world. You will be seen as citadels of stability wherever you live. Your faith and optimism will make you leaders in your communities, in your countries, and in the kingdom of God on earth.”

PRESIDENT RUSSELL M. NELSON



# 60 Countries

represented by student body

MANY STUDENTS COME FROM ASIA AND THE PACIFIC AREAS



“As a university community we still strive to exemplify President David O. McKay’s prophetic words, standing as ‘an example in this little place of the purposes of our Father in Heaven to unite all peoples by the gospel of Jesus Christ.’”

JOHN S.K. KAUWE III  
PRESIDENT OF BYU—HAWAII

BYU—Hawaii is uniquely suited for its purpose to “prepare students of Oceania and the Asian Rim to be lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ and leaders in their families, communities, chosen fields, and in building the kingdom of God,” says president of BYU—Hawaii John S. K. Kauwe III.<sup>16</sup>

BYU—Hawaii is taking the blessing of education to students from many backgrounds. The students on its campus come from more than 60 countries, making BYU—Hawaii one of the most internationally diverse universities in the United States.

Students at BYU—Hawaii design their own academic paths by choosing one major and two minors or certificates in different areas of study. This allows students to diversify and develop new skills to help them be successful in life.

Just as the other Church schools, BYU—Hawaii integrates spiritual knowledge into everyday learning. President Kauwe says, “As a university community we still strive to exemplify President David O. McKay’s prophetic words, standing as ‘an example in this little place of the purposes of our Father in Heaven to unite all peoples by the gospel of Jesus Christ.’”<sup>17</sup>





# ENSIGN COLLEGE



Ensign College, located in downtown Salt Lake City, Utah, sets students up for success as it prepares them for work in the real world. Ensign College provides degrees and certificates that help students leave better equipped and more likely to find a job. At the same time, what makes Ensign College so important is that it is dedicated to developing “capable and trusted disciples of Jesus Christ.”<sup>18</sup> As students leave Ensign College, they leave with the skills and testimony they need to help build Zion on the earth today.

“We focus on preparing our students with in-demand skills to meet employer needs as they study and prepare for specific jobs upon graduation,” says Bruce C. Kusch, president of Ensign College. “Our goal is to produce graduates who are spiritually well-grounded and professionally prepared to provide a livelihood.”<sup>19</sup>

Elder Gilbert explains that Ensign College is focused on providing value to students by teaching skills early in their educational experience that improve their job prospects, no matter what credentials they earn: “It’s supposed to get you a job after your certificate or after an associate’s [degree] so if life gets in the way—and it does for many students—they’re not left saying ‘I have 60 credits, and I’m unemployable.’”<sup>20</sup>



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ELDER CLARK G. GILBERT OF THE SEVENTY

22 Certificates

25 Associate Degrees

8 Bachelor's Degrees



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BRUCE C. KUSCH  
PRESIDENT OF ENSIGN COLLEGE

# BYU—PATHWAY WORLDWIDE



“I consider the creation of BYU–Pathway Worldwide to be the most important and most far-reaching development in the Church Educational System of this Church since the creation of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion over a century ago.”

PRESIDENT JEFFREY R. HOLLAND

28 Certificates

8 Associate Degrees

7 Bachelor's Degrees



“BYU–Pathway has the worldwide reach to deliver spiritually based, job-ready certificates and degrees to anyone who needs higher education.”

BRIAN K. ASHTON  
PRESIDENT OF BYU–PATHWAY WORLDWIDE

When talking about BYU–Pathway, President Jeffrey R. Holland, Acting President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, stated, “I consider the creation of BYU–Pathway Worldwide to be the most important and most far-reaching development in the Church Educational System of this Church since the creation of Seminaries and Institutes of Religion over a century ago.”<sup>21</sup>

BYU–Pathway provides online access to spiritually based degrees awarded by BYU–Idaho and Ensign College. At \$81 per credit in the United States (rates vary by country), students can graduate with a bachelor’s degree in three years for less than \$6,000. Because of this, BYU–Pathway is spreading higher education and the gospel to more than 180 countries around the world that couldn’t be reached in any other way.

To help students gain marketable skills and improve employment, they earn three job-ready certificates that stack into a bachelor’s degree.

Brian K. Ashton, president of BYU–Pathway Worldwide, says, “BYU–Pathway has the worldwide reach to deliver spiritually based, job-ready certificates and degrees to anyone who needs higher education. . . . Those students in turn will help those around them to become self-reliant until there are ‘no poor among [us]’ [Moses 7:18].”<sup>22</sup>





# INSTITUTES OF RELIGION

Students who don't attend a Church university still have access to a spiritually based education through institute. Institute classes are offered free of charge and help students "deepen their conversion to Jesus Christ and His restored gospel, qualify for the blessings of the temple, and prepare themselves, their families, and others for eternal life."<sup>23</sup>

Institute helps provide religious instruction for adults on topics that range from marriage to missions, scriptures, Church history, and doctrine. "The core purpose of institute remains creating personal connection and conversion to Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ," Elder Gilbert says.<sup>24</sup>

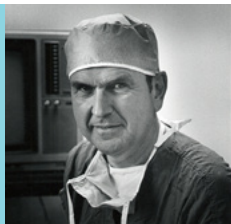
President Nelson described some blessings of attending institute: "If you want to know the truth about who you really are, attend institute. If you want to know the purpose of life, attend institute. If you want to stay on the covenant path, attend institute. If you want to learn how to let God prevail in your life, attend institute. If you want to be a peacemaker, attend institute. I promise you these blessings" (see [ChurchofJesusChrist.org/si](http://ChurchofJesusChrist.org/si)).

**348,054** Worldwide enrollment

**124** Countries reached

**38** Languages offered

**13,501** Students of different faiths



"Don't be afraid to pursue your goals—even your dreams! There is no shortcut to excellence and competence. Education is the difference between *wishing* you could help other people and *being able* to help them."

PRESIDENT RUSSELL M. NELSON, "WILL YOU CHOOSE TO INCREASE IN LEARNING?," *NEW ERA*, SEPT. 2014, 3.

## A Place for Everyone

So why choose a school or institute program within the Church Educational System?

Elder Gilbert emphasized the importance of these schools to the Lord by saying, "He is preparing the world for His return, and the Church Educational System is one of the many resources He will use in that effort."<sup>25</sup>

There is something for everyone in CES. Each Church school and institute program is tailored to its student body and can help students to become spiritually and professionally successful. Elder Gilbert says, "No matter

where you live, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has educational opportunities available through the Church Educational System."<sup>26</sup>

Each school within CES offers resources that can help students achieve their goals and become better disciples of Jesus Christ. Attending a Church school helps students gain skills that will help them in their careers as well as in their efforts to gather Israel. When the Lord calls, they can be ready through the education that CES provides. ■

# SCHOOL STATISTICS

## Tuition per Semester for Undergraduates (for Church Members)

BYU	BYU-Idaho	BYU-Hawaii	Ensign College		BYU-Pathway	
\$3,248	\$2,328	\$3,219	\$1,944	\$1,668	\$972	\$1,668
			On-campus	Online	12 credits (US)	12 credits (Canada)

