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Courtesy Church History Library and Archives.

## *BYU–Idaho Pathway: A Gateway to Global Church Education*

**BENJAMIN C. PETERSON**

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With the announcement of BYU–Pathway Worldwide on 7 February 2017, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf identified the occasion as a “very special day for the Church Educational System (CES), and a day of hope and joy for many of our young people worldwide who are seeking to educate themselves and to prepare for successful livelihood.”<sup>1</sup> This new higher education online organization continues to revolutionize the way in which the Church provides opportunities of higher education to an increasing number of individuals around the world. At the heart of BYU–Pathway Worldwide is the BYU–Idaho Pathway program that has for the last eight years bridged opportunities toward college education for individuals who otherwise would not have them. It also serves as a “pathway to opportunities for successful livelihood.” Pathway has combined online learning and religious education within a household of faith while being grounded in the gospel of Jesus Christ. “The program inspires increased hope and faith in the Lord and opens up new opportunities in higher education to ‘learn by study and by faith.’”<sup>2</sup>

The name “Pathway” has become a buzzword among members of the Church around the world, but few members are as familiar with the

In 1888, when the Bannock Stake Academy at Rexburg was established, President Thomas E. Ricks said, “The seeds we are planting today will grow and become mighty oaks, and their branches will run all over the earth.”

protracted efforts and vision that formed and paved the program's course. This article begins by illustrating the Church's attempts to provide both religious and secular education to its members beginning in the early days of the Restoration. The focus of this article then shifts to the creation and evolution of the BYU–Idaho Pathway program originating with the roots of BYU–Idaho as an institution. The story of Pathway's creation is told through the lens of its architects and administrators, providing a window into the minds and early discussions of CES leaders in their efforts to seek the Lord's will to provide education to a greater number of his children.<sup>3</sup> The focus then converges on the creation of what is now a twenty-first century global education initiative and a new CES higher education organization.

### Foundations of Church Education

The beginnings of Church educational philosophy were given by the Lord in a revelation in which he said, “Teach one another the doctrine of the kingdom” (D&C 88:77). Furthermore, the revelations are lined with admonitions to “seek ye diligently and teach one another words of wisdom; yea, seek ye out of the best books words of wisdom; seek learning, even by study and also by faith” (D&C 88:118), and to “teach . . . that you may be instructed . . . of things both in heaven and in the earth, and under the earth; things which have been, things which are, things which must shortly come to pass” (D&C 88:78–79).

Joseph Smith embraced these revelations by establishing schools in towns scattered across the Midwest. Wherever Latter-day Saint communities were organized, among the first institutions to be provided were places of learning.<sup>4</sup> In 1833, the School of the Prophets was created and schoolhouses for general elementary education were also established during these early days. Church leaders organized the University of the City of Nauvoo to oversee a system of schools established throughout the city.<sup>5</sup> Upon the Saints' arrival in the Salt Lake Valley, the Church followed the same general structure and plan when establishing the University of Deseret—that ultimately became known as the University of Utah.

On 16 October 1875, Brigham Young established the Brigham Young Academy in Provo with hopes of implementing a model of education as a forum where fundamental subjects and courses could be taught within an environment of faith. When Karl G. Maeser was sent to Provo in 1876 to run the new academy, he was instructed by Brigham Young that he “ought

not to teach even the alphabet or the multiplication tables without the spirit of God.”<sup>6</sup> Church leaders continued to encourage the prompt creation of stake academies “where the principles of our religion may form a part of the teaching of the schools.”<sup>7</sup> As a result, the Bannock Idaho Stake organized an academy that would eventually play a foundational role in “reinvent[ing] undergraduate education.”<sup>8</sup>

### Seminaries and Institutes of Religion

In 1911, the seminary program was introduced as a form of religious education for high school–aged students. By 1919, it was clear that the seminary program should become “the great agency of the Church for promoting religious education on the high school level,” and seminary buildings began to be constructed adjacent to public high schools where there was a large body of Latter-day Saint youth.<sup>9</sup> The public school system in Utah saw rapid expansion during this period, drawing enrollment away from Church-operated academies. Within only a few years, it was decided that Church-operated academies were a financial burden, and as a result leaders sought to divest their interest in the academies. Nearly all academies were successfully transferred to local state governments with the exceptions of Brigham Young University (formerly Brigham Young Academy) and Ricks College (formerly Bannock Stake Academy).

Church leaders observed the success seminary was having at the high school level. They desired to find a way to provide LDS college students with religious education. Unlike the high school seminary program, these new “Institutes of Religion” demonstrated the possibility of helping a small cohort of LDS students form into a faith-affirming community at the university level.<sup>10</sup> This allowed the institute program to eventually spread worldwide, with buildings constructed or rented adjacent to many institutions of higher learning around the world. In a sense, the program's spread took religious education to the people wherever they lived—a concept and pattern that would also play a primary role in the eventual expansion of secular learning. Although Latter-day Saint scripture includes the clear injunction to increase in both secular and spiritual knowledge, the recommendation at the time was that the obligation of the Church was to provide spiritual education rather than secular.<sup>11</sup> Congruently, this recommendation allowed the Church to expand the Seminary and Institute program to all countries, as a groundwork for religious education that would reach every member.

Synchronous to the phasing out of the Church's international primary and secondary schools in the 1970s, religious education successfully spread around the world. Seminary and institute programs had expanded to dozens of nations, and by 2016 these programs were available in 155 countries.<sup>12</sup> In the years surrounding the turn of the century, other efforts were made to expand secular educational opportunities to Church members beyond the borders of the United States. Among them, BYU experimented with pilot outreach learning centers for young adults in various locations—though the pilot never took root. A more lasting effort at the time was the Perpetual Education Fund. Though many attempts were made in the twentieth century to globally expand Church education, making it available to all members, only the direct extension of religious education was successful. Initiatives to take secular education to all Church members were rooted in the doctrine of learning; however, these efforts lacked the necessary tools, funding, and vision to breed success broadly. Yet the seeds that would eventually germinate to more effectively achieve that objective had been planted more than one hundred years ago, in the soil of Rexburg, Idaho.

### From Bannock Stake Academy to BYU–Idaho

On 12 November 1888, President Thomas E. Ricks of the Bannock Idaho Stake and Karl G. Maeser of the Church Board of Education opened the Bannock Stake Academy at Rexburg, Idaho. Maeser, who was superintendent of Church schools, “promised [the students] that their new school should one day be a great educational institution.”<sup>13</sup> Ricks additionally stated that “the seeds we are planting today will grow and become mighty oaks, and their branches will run all over the earth.”<sup>14</sup> As the academy evolved, it took on several names and roles within the Church Educational System. The school eventually received the name “Ricks College,” and despite efforts to turn the college over to the state of Idaho in the 1930s due to steep financial burdens on the Church, the school succeeded in becoming a first-class junior college.

In July 1971, the school inaugurated Henry B. Eyring as its tenth president. In his inaugural response, President Henry B. Eyring espoused the idea of Ricks College reaching far beyond the campus in Rexburg. He stated, “We must also find ways for this college to serve young people whose needs are shaped by a great variety of cultures and situations, and who may not be able to come to this campus. We will find direct ways to move the blessing of education . . . from this campus out into the lives of men and women everywhere.”<sup>15</sup>

Enrollment at Ricks grew to exceed its then existing enrollment cap until 1997, when the enrollment ceiling was removed. Focused on admitting as many students as possible, a fast-track program was developed. Available campus space limited admissions at that time to about 8,250 students. When David A. Bednar was appointed as president of Ricks in 1997, he quickly began requesting recommendations from the faculty to rewrite the school's key goals and mission, with particular consideration to serve more students at an affordable cost.<sup>16</sup>

During the dedication of the John Taylor Building on Ricks campus, Elder Henry B. Eyring, now the Church Commissioner of Education, expressed personal concerns to President Bednar about the reach of Church education. Having just returned from a trip to South America, Elder Eyring remarked, “I am thinking about how much we do for so few and how little we do for so many. The tithing of the people I just visited in South America and from good people all over the world paid for this facility. And most of the people who have made this beautiful facility possible will never see or step foot in a building like this.” These words left an indelible impression on President Bednar that influenced his entire presidency.<sup>17</sup> The impact of that statement was felt in his inaugural response where he stated the following: “All worthy youth of the Church deserve a [BYU–Idaho] experience, yet an increasingly smaller percentage of them will ever have that opportunity. . . . It will be necessary for us at [BYU–Idaho] to serve ever better the thousands of students we have on campus while simultaneously reaching out to bless the lives of tens of thousands of young Latter-day Saints throughout the world. We must learn how to assist and bless institute students and other LDS youth in Rhode Island and Rome while effectively serving our students on campus in Rexburg.”<sup>18</sup>

President Bednar challenged the faculty to change their paradigm and consider how the school might serve fifty thousand students globally and impact the entire global Church membership.<sup>19</sup>

Early in 2000, after a meeting of the Church Board of Education (hereafter board), President Gordon B. Hinckley invited Elder Eyring to his office and asked, “Hal, couldn't we serve more students at a lower cost by making Ricks a university?”<sup>20</sup> Furthering the possibility of realizing this vision, a ground-breaking announcement came to the Rexburg campus on 21 June 2000 declaring the creation of BYU–Idaho. The communication stated in part that “the school will have a unique role in and be distinctive from

the other institutions of higher education within the Church Educational System. . . . BYU–Idaho will operate on an expanded year-round basis, incorporating innovative calendaring and scheduling while also taking advantage of advancements in technology which will enable the four-year institution to serve more students.”<sup>21</sup> Looking back sixteen years later, details of this announcement were prophetic, though at that time the impact was not immediately understood.

### “Rethinking Education”

When he joined the administration as the fifteenth president of BYU–Idaho in 2005, Kim B. Clark stated with some vigor, “We are going to reinvent undergraduate education out there.” He continued, “I get a chance to really think about creating the future because I am going into an environment where we are going to take on undergraduate education and do some new things.”<sup>22</sup> This future would be realized through rapid innovation, change, and growth.

Germinating in President Clark’s mind prior to arriving at BYU–Idaho was the needful feeling to take education to all Church members in all areas of the world. As he prepared his inaugural response, President Clark recalls seeing an image of children across the world who would make and keep covenants with the Lord, and he knew that the Lord desires to bless them with educational opportunities. He felt that it was BYU–Idaho’s responsibility to take education to them.<sup>23</sup> In his inaugural response, President Clark said:

We will find new ways to use information technology to reach more students and to deepen the learning experience of those we touch. In a day not far from now, we will be able to break down the barriers of time and space and connect our students on internships or between semesters to the university and to each other and, in that way, create outstanding, interactive educational experiences for them. In these experiences students will teach one another in new and powerful ways.

I believe that at BYU–Idaho we must learn to use new technologies and develop methods, materials, programs, and concepts that not only can be applied to our students on and off our campus, but also can be effectively and efficiently applied by others across the Church and, indeed, across the world. I am convinced that this university is in this valley where our pioneer heritage is deeply ingrained, where the people are humble and faithful, so that we can be a proving ground of great fidelity for education that will bless the young people of the Church worldwide.<sup>24</sup>

In 2005, Henry J. Eyring (son of President Henry B. Eyring) was named associate academic vice president at BYU–Idaho, with responsibility for online learning and instructional technology. Eyring explained that for him, the online learning initiative began on a hilltop in Rio de Janeiro,

Brazil. Visiting the country in 1998 in search of prospective MBA students for BYU’s Marriott School of Management, Eyring discovered that one of the problems he faced was finding applicants who were able to qualify for MBA study and leave their homeland. He found himself on the top of a hill that stood above one of the world’s largest slums. A close observation of the temporary shanties below revealed satellite dishes on the rooftops of a neighborhood with open sewers. Certain that something could be done to use technology to reach even into the slums, Eyring envisioned the possibility of using technology to offer quality education even to the impoverished.<sup>25</sup> He would later fill a significant role in realizing this vision.

Advancing toward global education, Henry J. Eyring formed a team in 2007 to explore opportunities for BYU–Idaho to expand online education beyond the Rexburg campus, even reaching young people who were often seen as unfit for college. When Clark Gilbert became involved in leading the university’s online learning efforts in 2008, he continued to make the online offerings a meaningful learning experience. To do so required innovative course designs and hybrid strategies that engaged students in a combination of online and in-class settings. Aiding him in this effort was Gilbert’s authentic experience in applying Harvard professor Clayton Christensen’s theory of “disruptive innovation.” Regarding online education, Christensen also contended that online technology in education should be utilized so as to enhance the learning experience and not simply to “cram” computers into existing educational models.<sup>26</sup>

The BYU–Idaho Learning Model eventually became a key component in expanding global Church education. The learning model was an active learning pedagogy that focused on improving a student’s learning experience by engaging him or her in the teaching process. It endorsed the notion that teachers become facilitators of learning rather than merely dispensers of information.<sup>27</sup> Gilbert and his team recognized the value of the BYU–Idaho Learning Model and sought to design the online courses following the principles outlined in the model to maximize student engagement and the overall student learning experience.

In his inaugural address at BYU–Idaho, President Kim B. Clark declared, “I am convinced that . . . we can be a proving ground of great fidelity for education that will bless the young people of the Church worldwide.”<sup>28</sup> He further explained that a test of good fidelity is one that yields results on

a small scale that accurately reflect—and thus predict—performance on a much larger scale.<sup>29</sup> Vice President Henry J. Eyring also observed that

as we build an ever-better university, we can be a proving ground for education of great fidelity relative to the needs of all Church members, including the poorest. Somehow, our deeply ingrained pioneer heritage, manifest in humility and faith, will allow us to discover means of learning here that will work everywhere. The cost of this education will be low enough and the quality high enough. And we will prove it here first. The path to Rio, as it were, somehow runs through Rexburg.<sup>30</sup>

By 2008, BYU–Idaho had capitalized on technology to enhance the on-campus learning experience and had designed and made available dozens of innovative online courses—including an online baccalaureate degree program. The university was changing through processes of disruptive innovation to “reinvent undergraduate education.” At the time, BYU–Idaho faculty could dream of the day when the university’s online learning capabilities would merge with peer instruction, the work of the Perpetual Education Fund, and Church Institutes of Religion internationally, though at the time the path from Rexburg to the rest of the world was only visible as far as Rigby, Idaho. The university’s efforts were close to home, “reaching methodically beyond the confines of the campus” through an innovative model that generated high quality at a low cost. This innovation and change would not end. “The phrase ‘rethinking education’ is not to be only a slogan for the transformation from a two-to-four-year status, the school is to be a place of educational innovation—permanently.”<sup>31</sup> The next phase of innovation was already in the works.

### “Technology and Institute Buildings”

While serving as president of Ricks College in 1972, President Henry B. Eyring led a committee for the Church Educational System (CES) to examine the long-term future of higher education in the Church. Fundamental to the committee’s purpose was the question, “How can we extend the reach and increase the impact of the Church Educational System’s post-secondary education?”<sup>32</sup> Committee discussions included the potential role of Institutes of Religion and technology to further the reach of Church education. Institute buildings would provide an enormous capital resource that could allow such a program to expand worldwide.<sup>33</sup> They had envisioned faith-based learning that would take place in CES campuses, institute campuses, chapels, and homes. The committee stated: “The primary limits on our reaching people are the high cost of bricks and mortar for campuses and the scarcity of great

teachers who can and do teach through study and faith. The way to break these limits is to make it possible for a student to have the benefits of the great teacher without having to sit with thirty to three hundred students in a room enclosed with walls built on land purchased with tithing funds.”<sup>34</sup>

The committee’s work was visionary, though decades ahead of its time. Henry B. Eyring recalls that “it was more a feeling of what ought to be than what would be.”<sup>35</sup> His vision of that future did not seem to change as he addressed the BYU faculty in 1993:

Ricks College will respond to the admissions pressures caused by the growth of the Church and their enrollment limit in a way also made possible by its roots. . . . The faculty drawn there have, with only rare exceptions, put their whole hearts into the proposition that what a student has done in the past is no limit on the future. . . . It is hard to see how they will do it, but even as a smaller and smaller fraction of the Church can attend Ricks College, it will find a way to admit students in whom other faculties might not see the potential.<sup>36</sup>

Fifteen years later, in April 2008, President Kim Clark decided that with a model in place, it was an appropriate time to forge a program that would allow the university to reach individuals across the globe. He ran projections of the LDS population of eighteen-year-olds in North America that forecasted a decline that would bottom out in 2011 followed by a substantial spike beginning in 2014.

Regardless of the then-decline in college-aged LDS students, BYU–Idaho’s enrollment was on the rise. The fear was that if enrollment was increasing with a regressive populace, there would not be enough space in 2014 when the trend would reverse and thousands and thousands of LDS eighteen-year-olds would graduate from high school every year. President Clark and other Church administrators hoped to address these educational needs. President Clark’s intent boldly determined that if the students would not be able to attend in Rexburg, the university would go to them. President Henry B. Eyring agreed that questions should be asked and that more could be done in utilizing Church resources to carry education to the people. President Clark then expressed the poignant feeling he had that “there is something with institute buildings and online education,” and commissioned BYU–Idaho employee J. D. Griffith to find out what it was.<sup>37</sup>

Within two weeks, all the pieces came together to form the initial seeds of what would become the Pathway program. Griffith and Gilbert rigorously worked on a proposal that was presented to the CES Executive Committee

on 17 December 2008. The proposal, titled “Expanded Educational Opportunities,” suggested a two-pronged approach: to offer online courses through BYU–Idaho and to “[couple them] with religious education and gathering opportunities available at local institutes.” President Clark considered the weekly gathering critical to providing “assurance, encouragement, social interaction, and a sense of purpose for students who traditionally would not seek a higher education experience.” Also hoping to tap into the spiritual benefits of such a program, the proposal suggested that “providing expanded academic options would increase the motivation for these students to gather—thus creating an additional avenue for spiritually strengthening these young people.”<sup>38</sup> Approval of the pilot program was given by the Board of Trustees on 14 January 2009. Griffith and Gilbert then looked to the Seminaries and Institutes (S&I) program as a partner for the spiritual growth of the students and asked for their help to allow use of institute buildings for the students to gather each week. S&I’s worldwide infrastructure could potentially provide facilities for Church education in every area of the world.

### Focus Groups

Focus groups were held at three pilot sites in Nampa, Idaho; Mesa, Arizona; and Manhattan, New York, in February and March of 2009. Attendees declared three principal reasons for not being enrolled in college: financial concern, lack of self-confidence and hope, and lack of accessibility to higher education.<sup>39</sup> The observation was quickly made that there existed a massive population that would never have enrolled in any college. A realization came that this new initiative is not about reaching out to the world but rather about reaching down and lifting up—serving the underserved. Their conclusion was that this new program would need to be affordable, build hope and confidence, and prepare individuals for a college education. They further concluded that this program, which was originally intended for young adults between eighteen and thirty years old, should also seek to make education accessible to individuals who are over the age of thirty.

The decision was made that there would be no ecclesiastical endorsement required for the first year of the program. This would bless the lives of thousands of individuals and would open up the real possibility of using the program as a ministering tool to bring individuals back into full Church activity. Gilbert and Griffith also came to understand the need for bridge courses that would prepare students for a college-level experience. This led

to the development of an “academic path” that they began to call “Academic Start.” Underlying the entire program were the goals of providing religious education, helping people learn how to learn, and giving a foundation upon which they can build to obtain more skills and become of value in the job marketplace.

Students enrolled in Academic Start were to move through the three-semester program with a cohort of local students who would each be enrolled in a three-credit-hour Academic Start course while concurrently attending a two-credit-hour institute course. The three academic courses consisted of basic math and English courses, as well as a life-skills course developed from the Heber J. Grant Life Skills course previously offered at BYU–Idaho to students in disadvantaged situations.

In the preliminary focus group discussions, it became clear to Gilbert that a bachelor-centric curriculum would not work for these individuals. They knew they needed to orient the curriculum to be applied right away, and that they needed to have sequential offerings. Henry J. Eyring describes this concern using a Boy Scout metaphor: “We need to have people working on their Tenderfoot, not their Eagle. But they need to know that if they work on their Tenderfoot it will apply to their Eagle.”<sup>40</sup>

Level one of the academic path included the Academic Start program—a one-year program for nonmatriculated students who pass through a reduced application process and advance through 15 credit hours together with a local cohort. Level two of the academic path was a professional certificate, requiring an additional 12 to 15 credits after matriculating to a BYU–Idaho online or on-campus program. Level three consisted of an associate degree with 60 credit hours, and level four was a bachelor’s degree after completing 120 credit hours and a supervised internship.<sup>41</sup>

Administrators understood that not all students would choose or even desire to complete the requirements for a bachelor’s degree. It would never be the program’s purpose to ensure a bachelor’s degree for every student. Rather, the program existed to help students build academic and professional confidence while working to develop marketable skills in a household of faith. Academic Start held as an objective to maximize the marketability of its students at all stages and ensure valuable “off-ramps.” It was to be an approach that “created paths” that would for some lead to a bachelor’s degree, and for others toward an associate degree or even technical certificates. By July 2009,

the word “Pathway” had been used to refer to the program, and it became the official name of the distant-site initiative.<sup>42</sup>

With the hopes of an eventual worldwide influence, Griffith recalls being encouraged to create a program that would be scalable—a franchise packet. He felt it necessary to create a program that could be taken anywhere in the world and local missionaries would easily know how to open and run a Pathway site.<sup>43</sup>

### Weekly Gathering

On a visit to BYU–Idaho as a member of the Quorum of the Twelve, Elder David A. Bednar said, “The spirit of gathering brings assurance, encouragement, and a sense of purpose greater than self.”<sup>44</sup> Pathway’s distant-site and online learning program has held true to the principle of gathering. In addition to online coursework, each cohort of between ten and thirty students was expected to gather together once each week to instruct and learn from each other. Pathway adopted a “lead student” model in which each week a new student from the cohort led the gathering discussion. A locally called missionary couple was present for the gatherings, but all teaching and learning was done by the students themselves.

The spirit of gathering, combined with a learning model that places students in the teaching role, established astounding confidence in the hearts of Pathway students. The gathering element of the cohort model has allowed students to feel a sense of family among their peers. They stand up for each other, and they seek to build and help each other succeed.<sup>45</sup> The sense of community led to higher student satisfaction and retention. Pathway became more than a program that simply enabled global Church members to earn college degrees from BYU–Idaho but “export[ed] the spiritually transformative experience that students were having in Rexburg and on other Church college campuses.”<sup>46</sup>

### Extending the Pilot

In their travels as members of the Quorum of the Twelve, both Elder Henry B. Eyring and Elder David A. Bednar grew increasingly uncomfortable with the idea that the Church Educational System was chiefly serving students from North America.<sup>47</sup> Reflecting on the source of his insight to entertain a worldwide program, Elder Eyring admitted, “I didn’t have a vision; I had a feeling. I had a feeling, and I got it from a prophet, I didn’t get it from myself.” He



Courtesy of Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

On 7 February 2017, the Church announced the creation of BYU–Pathway Worldwide. From left to right: Elder Dallin H. Oaks, President Dieter F. Uchtdorf, President Clark G. Gilbert (president of BYU–Pathway Worldwide), and Elder Kim B. Clark (Commissioner of the Church Educational System).

recalls how President Gordon B. Hinckley would verbally “pound” him saying “Why do you think about the haves instead of the have-nots? Why aren’t you worried about the have-nots? This is a Church of the have-nots.”<sup>48</sup>

On 28 October 2009, when the first semester of Pathway students was approaching the midterm point of their first semester, President Kim Clark entered the Executive Committee meeting with a proposal to expand Pathway by ten sites, with two additional international sites in Puebla, Mexico, and Accra, Ghana. Without any hard data or information about whether the program worked—whether the students attended or even stayed or benefited from the program—the proposal to research international expansion was approved by the board on 11 November 2009.

Rapid expansion seemed a top priority, and President Henry B. Eyring had recently confirmed both the desire and the need to take education to the world only days before at the inauguration of the new president of LDS Business College. He stated that change in technology will accelerate and that

excellent education will be delivered in new ways and at unprecedentedly low costs. “Education will not be confined to classrooms or even to campuses as we have come to love them. . . . The changes in technology will make it possible to reach any student anywhere in the world.” He continued, “I can’t see the full vision of that yet, but I know it is coming. It will allow us to make changes, both within a campus and across the Church, to extend the blessings of learning, of warm associations, and the influence of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>49</sup>

President Henry B. Eyring urged Pathway administrators to be cautious in how they measured success: “Pick the Lord’s metric. If you choose that, you won’t just succeed, you’ll see miracles.” And he promised that the Lord would direct their efforts if they sought his guidance: “He will run the Church—and your effort—if you’ll let Him. It’ll have to do mostly with this change inside people. God’s in the people-building business.”<sup>50</sup> A three-fold focus of Pathway later evolved with a focus on helping students embed the gospel of Jesus Christ deep into their hearts, become lifelong learners, and support and lead their families in a more productive way.

Approval to ultimately expand to international sites was given on 14 April 2010. The program’s international expansion was met with both excitement and anxiety. President Henry B. Eyring asserted, “This isn’t about education. It’s education as a way to take the gospel down into kids’ lives. That’s the purpose of every Institute or Church school. It’s faith-enhancing education.” President Henry B. Eyring further added, “We need to learn to help [students] but not too much. By making it too easy to keep going, they’ll never change. You’ve got to find some way to strengthen their capacity. Find some way so the students can see that they’re really getting somewhere—and not by making it easier. Find some ways not to lower the bar, but to help them recognize progress. . . .What you’re on the edge of is huge.”<sup>51</sup>

The board granted approval in April 2011 for Pathway to shed its “pilot” tag and become an official BYU–Idaho program. Clark also took the idea to the board to expand the program to include those who were older than thirty. This proposal was approved by the board on 25 May 2011. Within two years, students from this age group made up 54 percent of all Pathway students worldwide. A later study would find that this age population was the highest performing group of students enrolled in BYU–Idaho online courses.<sup>52</sup>

## Global Expansion

It became clear that this needed to be a program where the university supported Church leaders in their ministry. President Clark knew that “Academic Start works really well where priesthood leaders embrace the program, make it theirs and it becomes part of their ministry.”<sup>53</sup> When the program became official, he charged the Pathway team to work more efficiently with priesthood leaders. The biggest lesson learned in the pilot phase was that the success of a site depended entirely upon priesthood engagement. A site with a really good institute director could prove successful for a time, but the really successful sites had priesthood leaders who were engaged in the program. Clark Gilbert observed that “Pathway is inherently a spiritual-based program and when the local priesthood is supporting those students and helping them along, the students do better—they grow more spiritually and they grow more academically.”<sup>54</sup>

The effort to make Pathway a ministering resource for priesthood leaders was attributed for the program’s explosive growth. By the time Pathway was experiencing larger growth in the fall 2012, the majority of all Pathway sites were self-selected by priesthood leaders who requested that Pathway be brought to them. Priesthood leaders saw Pathway as a tool to rescue and lift individuals in their own neighborhoods. Pathway became an instrument in not only assisting Church members in becoming self-reliant but also helping them build testimonies of the gospel of Jesus Christ and habits of righteousness within their own homes. Beginning in fall 2012, a small number of individuals who were not members of the Church were also allowed to enroll in Pathway at its Boston site. This pilot has continued to expand and during fall 2016 was employed in thirty existing sites, with plans to expand internationally in future semesters.

## Enhancing Certificate Offerings

By spring 2016, between BYU–Idaho Online students and Pathway students, more than half of the students enrolled in the university were online students. In order to provide effective academic advising and certificate offerings for Pathway and BYU–Idaho online students, the university set up an online organization that thought only about online students.

During winter semester 2016, 56 percent of BYU–Idaho’s students were enrolled exclusively in online courses. President Clark Gilbert estimated that the number will increase to 75 percent. With this ratio of online students, and

a well-organized online organization, no longer would the university be saying, “This is what we offer on campus—we think it will help you.’ [They’re] now saying, ‘In Mexico, or Albania, or Russia, or Brazil, these are the needs. These are the career opportunities. How can we give the students an educational experience that will help them get these jobs locally?’”<sup>55</sup> Professional certificates are designed after local market research and counseling with individual students and Church Self-Reliance Managers around the world. A key element in Pathway’s success is the BYU–Idaho Online academic programs—including certificates and degrees. If the online programs did not exist, Pathway students would have limited options when they finished Academic Start. Without Pathway, the online programs would not experience burgeoning enrollment they way they do—the two are symbiotic.

Through Pathway, BYU–Idaho began to serve as a “dual-purpose asset in the kingdom.”<sup>56</sup> On campus, disciple-leaders were being created through foundational, integrated courses and a student-leader learning model that promoted learning “by study and also by faith.” Second, this success on-campus was also creating the means, material, ideas, and course structure that would allow the university to educate thousands more off campus than would ever come on campus.

When focus groups were held in Mexico, Brazil, and Ghana, it was apparent that demand for Pathway was high. Internationally, the need and desire for quality education had intensified, and opportunity and accessibility were important to these students. As of spring semester 2017, Pathway now operates in all fourteen administrative areas of the Church.

To accommodate students who otherwise would need to travel great distances to a Pathway site, and to address strict government limitations in some countries, approval was given in April 2014 to offer a virtual Pathway pilot, where cohorts could participate in weekly gatherings through video conferencing. By fall 2016, the virtual pilot had expanded to all countries in the Church’s Europe and Europe East Areas where Pathway sites had been approved, as well as to the Caribbean. On 2 April 2014, Church Commissioner of Education, Elder Kim B. Clark, announced that Pathway was transitioning from a successful start-up to a large organization. Clark stated that even though Pathway had already experienced significant growth, greater demands and development were on the horizon.

### Pathway: A Program for the Kingdom

After serving as president of BYU–Idaho for five years, Elder Kim B. Clark recalled observing members of the Church Board of Education over the course of approximately sixty board meetings who had caught a vision of Pathway that was far beyond the scope of the then current program. He describes their sentiments of Pathway as a “palpable feeling of inspiration.” Clark was also known to repetitively assert that “Pathway is not for the University—Pathway is for the Kingdom”—a phrase he coined from President Russell M. Nelson.<sup>57</sup>

Clark Gilbert, who became president of BYU–Idaho in 2015, remarked that “in addition to developing strong academic options, the greatest benefit is perhaps an ecclesiastical one—Pathway students grow spiritually and become more committed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Pathway not only helps teach students how to learn and prepare to provide for their families, but it also helps deepen [their] discipleship.”<sup>58</sup> Embedded within the cohort model is the ability to develop a sense of camaraderie where students help each other to succeed. This allows them to receive a true BYU–Idaho experience without visiting campus. Elder Kim B. Clark has said, “When you go into an area and offer people a church-based educational opportunity they have always wanted and at an affordable rate, they begin to feel hope and to feel God’s love for them in a new way. The people are thrilled and start believing in themselves and gain confidence. Their faith begins to increase and their activity and involvement in their faith grows.” Elder Clark further observed that “long term impact of Pathway in a family is enormous—setting examples for children, bringing family closer together and stronger in their faith. They become an asset to their neighborhood and community and also to become a leader in the Church.”<sup>59</sup>

President Gilbert acknowledges the students’ overwhelming gratitude for Pathway and retells of an experience about a young man who at his first Pathway gathering lacked the confidence to continue and announced his intentions to not return. Having later successfully completed Pathway, the student said, “The whole group rallied around me, and they would not let me fail. I knew if I wasn’t there, I would be letting someone down.”<sup>60</sup> The cohort model proved to build confidence in a boy that did not believe in his own abilities. With a cohort-based model, a weekly gathering, and the BYU–Idaho Learning Model built into each online course, administrators saw the ability to do more than simply transmit information—they sought to fundamentally change the life of every student.<sup>61</sup>

In one of his last interviews in his role as Commissioner of Church Education, Elder Paul V. Johnson reflected on the progress of CES during his service: “Probably the most remarkable thing in the last few years has been the [Pathway] program.”<sup>62</sup> The spirit of Pathway lies in what it does for and to the students. It seems that anyone who touches a part of Pathway tends to become electrified with vision and excitement for what it is doing to the hearts and in the lives of the students. Though for some, matriculation is considered a key metric for Pathway’s success, matriculation was never the exact purpose of Pathway. Most important to Pathway has been embedding the gospel deep in the students’ hearts and research among Pathway students suggests success in this regard.<sup>63</sup> “An overwhelming majority of Pathway students surveyed indicated that the Pathway Program inspired them to make improvements in their lives ranging from praying with greater faith to attending Church more regularly to improving personal scripture study and family prayer. Ninety-four percent indicated their testimonies had grown stronger; ninety-six responded that they were applying principles learned in Pathway in their daily lives. Ninety-five percent indicated that their confidence in the Lord’s ability to help them in their lives had increased as a result of their participation in Pathway.”<sup>64</sup> President Henry B. Eyring repeatedly stated to President Clark, “We don’t really know what this is going to be. But we know it’s the right thing to do.” President Clark’s instruction was to be ready for inspiration. “We know what it’s going to look like for the next couple of years. . . . But we have to be ready to be inspired by the Lord because he’s in charge, and we can’t see everything he sees.”<sup>65</sup>

### Accelerated Growth

During fall semester 2015, Pathway reached an enrollment record of 14,983 students. The number of students who have participated in Pathway now numbers 58,655, representing sixty-seven countries and forty-two US states. Pathway has opened a total of 537 sites around the world with forty-eight sites opening in April 2017. As of August 2016, Pathway had a site within an hour’s drive of 87 percent of all of the stakes in the United States.<sup>66</sup> Including potential future sites that have been identified and are being opened, that number could increase to over 92 percent.<sup>67</sup> What began as a small pilot has grown since 2009 into a worldwide organization of more than thirty-four full-time employees, dozens of part-time employees, five hundred online instructors, and a legion of over two thousand service missionaries.

Growth and potential in Utah is nothing short of explosive. Utah sites have historically enrolled up to more than five hundred students at a single site, and enrollment at most Utah sites consistently outstrips that of every other Pathway site worldwide. The first four Utah sites composed 15 percent of all domestic Pathway enrollment.<sup>68</sup> As Pathway sites continue to open for the over two million members in Utah, future growth of Pathway in the state is practically unbounded.

Nearly twenty-three thousand of the 41,067 students who have enrolled in Pathway’s one-year Academic Start program through fall semester 2016 have completed it.<sup>69</sup> That is a completion rate of 53.4 percent.<sup>70</sup> Approximately 60 percent of the first-semester students continue on to the second semester. Retention from the second to the third semester historically increases to approximately 80 percent. Attrition among this group of students is often a result of relocation, change in employment, illness, lack of interest, or other life factors. Approximately 80 percent of Pathway students who complete the program have matriculated into a BYU–Idaho online program.<sup>71</sup> By fall semester 2016, over twelve thousand Pathway students had matriculated to enroll in online programs. Roughly 9 percent of these students have already been awarded either a certificate or a degree. As of January 2017, Pathway students had been awarded 444 bachelor’s degrees, 701 associate degrees, and 285 certificates—250 of the certificates being awarded since December 2015. The total number of students currently affiliated with BYU–Idaho has skyrocketed from just above 17,000 in 2004 to 67,905 during summer 2016.<sup>72</sup>

This program is a pathway of “learning, hope, commitment, and conversion.”<sup>73</sup> Pathway has taken education to the people in an intimate mode of delivery that opens up opportunities and addresses a need that had not been filled before. It has brought hope to those whom for whatever reason have not felt they had access to a higher education.

At the first focus groups, three problems were identified that kept potential students from pursuing a higher education: confidence, cost, and access. Quantitative data points toward Pathway’s abilities to provide an accessible, affordable higher education. Metrics for creating confidence are more difficult to ascertain. Nonetheless, an exit survey requested of every student as they complete their first year of Pathway reflects that 92 percent of all Pathway students report increased confidence in their ability to succeed in college. Furthermore, the average GPA of domestic matriculated Pathway students

has climbed and for the last three years has outperformed all other categories of online students in equivalent online classes.<sup>74</sup> Elder Kim B. Clark observed:

This is classic “Church of Jesus Christ” where you take something relatively simple and you add to it the Savior, His love, His Spirit, faithful Latter-day Saints who are willing to work, tithing funds of the Church—which allows you to build institutes—and you put it all together and add the gospel and it is just amazing. But if you strip it down, it’s a very simple, straight-forward curriculum. There is a life skills course to help people learn how to budget, how to study, how to learn, and how to organize. You teach them math and English, and you do it in the English language and that’s all it is, but it has an enormous impact on people.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to increasing the spirituality and self-reliance of faculty members and students, Pathway is also building and preparing teachers and leaders who do and will yet serve in the Church. In an interview, Elder Clark emphasized with some vigor the vast number of Church leaders around the world—including bishops and stake presidents—who for various reasons enroll in Pathway and then use it to benefit both their families and the thousands of people they serve. Pathway, it seems, is for the kingdom.

### **A Gateway to the CES Global Education Initiative and BYU–Pathway Worldwide**

Pathway has been an instructive model for delivering education across the earth in a framework that can be applied in many settings other than just Academic Start. It has been a test bed for ideas and it has been a teacher. Pathway Academic Start revealed that there is a way to successfully combine online learning with a face-to-face learning component in a way that allows education to be distributed broadly across the world and yet still keep it intimate and low cost.

In the fall of 2015, Elder Clark and members of the Board of Education discussed how Church leaders could reach out much more broadly across the Church to offer many more members the kind of educational opportunities that could be provided through CES. In November, a proposal was approved by the board for the Church Educational System to “seek to provide opportunities for education to the members of the Church wherever the Church is organized.”<sup>76</sup> The result of this effort has been called the CES Global Education Initiative.

The initiative, presented by Elder Clark to BYU–Idaho employees in February 2016, would include religious education as a foundational part of

every program that BYU–Idaho would offer. Offerings would include secondary education; English-language instruction; Pathway Academic Start; technical and skills-based certificates; undergraduate degrees; and graduate degrees. It was anticipated that this initiative would collaborate with Self-Reliance Services and the Perpetual Education Fund to help students gain access to needed education.

The Global Education Initiative buds out of the existing branches of the BYU–Idaho Pathway program. Nearly all those who benefit from the global initiative will enter their education through Pathway Academic Start.<sup>77</sup> Pathway Academic Start is the gateway to taking advantage of all additional online degree programs offered through CES—the only exception is if a student has taken fifteen or more credit hours on a Church-school campus. With the global initiative, the number of Pathway sites and cohorts across the globe will increase dramatically. Pathway has set a precedent that will allow the Global Education Initiative to experience unbounded execution. This innovative program is transforming the model of education worldwide.

In February 2017, the First Presidency held a press conference to announce the creation of an unprecedented official Church-wide higher-education online organization called “BYU–Pathway Worldwide.” This new CES entity grows out of BYU–Idaho’s Pathway program and is responsible for BYU–Idaho Pathway<sup>78</sup> as well as coordinating all other CES online higher education certificates and degree programs including English language certification, technical and skills-based certificates, and online degrees. BYU–Pathway Worldwide is affiliated with all other CES institutions and reports directly to the Church Commissioner of Education. Its focus is to serve students, manage gathering activities, and provide students with advising and career services. BYU–Pathway Worldwide is responsible for determining what courses and programs are needed throughout the world, and coordinating their development and implementation by CES institutions of higher learning. BYU–Pathway Worldwide will also create and manage an online system as the principal point of access for students desiring to enroll in online programs through CES. Students currently enrolled in these online programs number 37,000.<sup>79</sup>

BYU–Idaho Pathway’s growth continues to accelerate, and its enrollment will continue to grow and expand for years to come. The words revealed so long ago to seek learning by study and also by faith are now becoming a genuine reality for many worldwide Church members—and even non-LDS

individuals—as BYU–Idaho Pathway assists them in finding their own academic path.<sup>80</sup> As BYU–Idaho Pathway continues to progress along its designed course, it will continue to change untold lives and as a result, families will be fortified, faith will flourish, and a people will be prepared. “[BYU–Idaho] Pathway is a miracle, it’s just amazing.”<sup>81</sup> **RE**

## Notes

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14. David L. Crowder, *The Spirit of Ricks: A History of Ricks College* (Rexburg, ID: Ricks College, 1997), chapter 1, <http://www.byui.edu/special-collections/collecting-areas/campus-history/history-of-ricks/chapter-1>.
15. Henry B. Eyring, “Inaugural Response” (address, Ricks College, Rexburg, ID, December 1971).

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53. Clark, interview, 16 June 2016.
54. Clark G. Gilbert, oral history, interview by the author, 30 March 2016, Rexburg, ID.
55. Jon Linford as quoted in Caleb Trujillo, "President Gilbert's Travels in Pathway," *The Pathway Compass*, 1 August 2015, <http://blog.pathwaynewsroom.org/2015/08/president-gilberts-travels-in-pathway/>.
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57. Kim B. Clark (address, All-Employee Meeting, BYU–Idaho, Rexburg, ID, 8 May 2014).
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63. "Pathway Evaluation Report" (unpublished document, 1 May 2016), in author's possession.
64. Rob Eaton, "A Brief History of Online and Pathway."
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66. "Pathway Fact Sheet, Fall 2016"; "Pathway Sites, Fall 2016." The number of Pathway participants listed here excludes repeat students that are listed on the total enrollment numbers on the published fact sheet. Pathway has 537 sites that have been opened; however, not every site has enrollment during each semester. Pathway fact sheets available at [www.pathwaynewsroom.org](http://www.pathwaynewsroom.org) now report the number of "open" sites with students currently enrolled in a given semester. Bryan Justesen to the author, email, 10 August 2016.
67. Pathway Stewardship Review, April 2016, (unpublished document), in author's possession.

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69. Pathway Facts and Statistics, Winter 2017, <http://pathwaynewsroom.org/facts-and-stats/>; Caleb Trujillo, "175 Pathway Alumni to Graduate from BYU–Idaho," 18 July 2016, <http://pathwaynewsroom.org/175-pathway-alumni-to-graduate-from-byu-idaho/>.
70. This number will likely increase as historically some students have not completed the program in three consecutive semesters but have taken a break due to family and personal circumstances before returning to complete the program at a later date.
71. The matriculation rates are based on a three-year window. Students who continue to the next semester of Pathway or who matriculate any time in a three-year window are included in these statistics. Actual matriculation of Pathway students who immediately matriculate into an online program after completion of Academic Start was 44 percent during fall semester 2016.
72. The total annual unduplicated headcount includes all on-campus students, online students, and Pathway students. This number increased by 10 percent in 2016; Brad Hales to the author, email, 2 August 2016.
73. Kim B. Clark in Pathway Webcast and Q&A, BYU–Idaho, 18 August 2014.
74. "Pathway: Six Years in Retrospect," webcast, BYU–Idaho, 23 September 2015.
75. Clark, interview, 16 June 2016.
76. Kim B. Clark, "CES: The Lord's Educational System for His Church" (address, BYU–Idaho All Employee Meeting, Rexburg, ID, 5 February 2016).
77. Clark, interview, 16 June 2016.
78. Since the creation of BYU–Pathway Worldwide, the segment of the organization that has previously been called the BYU–Idaho Pathway program will now be called Pathway Connect.
79. All information in this paragraph was taken from the "BYU Pathway Press Conference," 7 February 2017.
80. See Uchtdorf, "BYU Pathway Press Conference," 7 February 2017.
81. Clark, interview, 9 April 2014; for a more complete analysis, see the author's thesis: Peterson, "Pathway: A Gateway to Global Church Education."