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Integrating BYU's Education in Zion Gallery into Campus Life

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The Education in Zion Gallery is a unique space on BYU’s campus. Located on the east side of the Joseph F. Smith Building (JFSB) and extending from the basement to the third floor, the gallery houses a permanent, multimedia exhibition and contains rotating exhibition space. The expansive windows inside the gallery offer a spectacular view of campus and the Wasatch Mountains.

The Education in Zion Gallery highlights the long tradition of education within the LDS faith, tells of the sacrifices that went into Brigham Young Academy and later Brigham Young University, and inspires students to seek an education of the whole soul—in­tellectually, spiritually, and physically—through integrating the permanent exhibition into course curricula, hosting programs and activities, developing rotating exhibitions, and forming partnerships with various campus entities.

**Brief History of the Gallery**

I think of Terry Warner, now an emeritus professor of philosophy, as the gallery’s founding curator. He envisioned a place where students could both learn about the rich history of education within the Church and also contemplate their role in God’s kingdom. University administrators agreed with Warner that a gallery would be a valuable addition to the campus. As fundraising for the gallery got underway in the 1990s, the old Smith Family Living Center was being demolished to make way for the new JFSB, which was designed with the gallery in mind. (See John Rosenberg’s essay on page 113 of this issue.)
Warner spent eight years working with a team of talented students and a few recent graduates to research, plan, and install the permanent exhibition. Although Warner consulted with specialists from various disciplines and involved them in a peer review of sorts, the bulk of the work was accomplished by students under Warner’s close supervision. Years later, the gallery continues to rely heavily on students who now work as gallery educators. They primarily greet visitors; lead tours for classes, groups, individuals, and campus guests; plan and execute a variety of programs; and assist the curator, who is the only full-time employee, in developing and displaying rotating exhibitions. In many ways, the gallery continues the legacy left by Karl G. Maeser, who trained students to take initiative and serve others.¹

¹ Karl G. Maeser, “The Monitorial System,” *Juvenile Instructor* 36 (March 1, 1901): 153. In this reference, Maeser stated that although he called his system by the name commonly used among educators, he altered his version of the system to discourage student abuses, such as bullying and tattling, and to encourage “cultivation of a public spirit among the pupils.” In James E. Talmage, “The Brigham Young Academy,” *Contributor* (June 1881): 272–73, the system is described, though not named.
In 2008, shortly before the gallery opened and Warner was preparing to retire, the university administration tasked the Harold B. Lee Library with the responsibility of overseeing the gallery. Currently, it falls under the Promotions and Outreach Unit headed by Cali O’Connell. An advisory committee chaired by Scott Duvall, Assistant University Librarian for Special Collections, brings together key campus partners to expand the gallery’s reach.

The goal in creating the Education in Zion Gallery was to present the stories of the BYU educational pioneers—those who initiated and those who now carry on the distinctive BYU tradition of faith and learning. The stories in this permanent exhibition bear witness to the sacrifice and the innovation that characterize the Church’s efforts to educate its members from its earliest days to the present. These stories illustrate the Church’s tremendous educational legacy and seek to inspire visitors to carry this legacy forward in their own lives. Stories were highlighted as the main feature of the exhibition because they are understandable, interesting, and memorable to people of all ages, cultures, and educational backgrounds.

**Faculty Involvement with the Gallery**

Since the Education in Zion Gallery opened in August 2008, the two successive curators—Ann Lambson (2008–11) and I (2011–present)—have
worked diligently to get the gallery up and running and to integrate it into campus life.

By winter semester 2013, over fifty professors regularly used the gallery in their classes. The gallery’s content makes it naturally suited to augment religion and education classes, but remarkably many more professors outside of these two disciplines use the gallery in their courses. Because the permanent exhibition has content relevant to the four aims of a BYU education,² it is an appropriate way for professors in secular disciplines to integrate a spiritually strengthening component into their curricula.

Many of the professors who use the gallery assign their students to write reflective essays about their experiences touring the exhibitions, while others have them answer specific questions relative to their particular classes. Ann Lambson and I have drawn up a list of potential questions that may be used by various disciplines for such an assignment.

Still other professors come up with a variety of creative assignments related to the gallery and their particular classes. For example, a chemistry professor had his students tour the gallery and answer a handful of questions in a reflective essay, including, Why is education such a priority for the Church and the Lord? What does the Lord expect from me in Chem 351, during my time at BYU, and after I graduate? How will my time in Chem 351 prepare me to help build the kingdom of God? How does my faith inform how I learn and practice science? A geometry class came to examine the spiral staircase and completed an assignment about how it acts like a spring. An upper-division Spanish class was given an assignment to summarize sections of the exhibition, translate those into Spanish, then give an oral presentation on the material. An English as a second language class read Franklin S. Harris’s inaugural address in the book Educating Zion,³ came for a gallery tour, and then wrote an essay about their experiences. A visual arts professor wanted her students to tour the gallery and then create unique artworks inspired by both their visit and their study of the aims of a BYU education (this culminated in two student exhibitions, Inheritance and Clarity, which were displayed along the spiral staircase; see EducationInZion.byu.edu).

². The four aims are that a BYU education should be (1) intellectually enlarging, (2) spiritually strengthening, (3) character building, and (4) leading to lifelong learning and service. See aims.byu.edu for more information.

for photos). A biology professor wanted her students to examine the eternal nature of education, so she used the gallery to illustrate this point. An anatomy professor wanted his students to learn to work creatively in teams, so he had them self-select into groups of three to six students to produce a creative project that integrated what they had learned in class with the information from the gallery. There are probably many other creative ways that professors have used the gallery in their courses, but I generally hear only about the larger classes. Although professors’ desired learning outcomes for their students necessarily differ, this brief list demonstrates that the gallery contains more than enough material to accommodate a wide variety of tailor-made assignments.

Students’ comments about their gallery assignments have been overwhelmingly positive. The vast majority come away saying things such as “I never realized the impact of education in Church history,” or “The most important thing I learned was that education is important to the Lord,” or “This assignment actually turned out to be one of the best experiences I have had all semester.” Other representative student comments include:

- “As I was walking into the Education in Zion exhibit, I was expecting to see some nice displays and read some interesting histories and just obtain facts for this paper, but what I found turned out to be much different and even more valuable.”
- “I visited the Education in Zion exhibit my freshman year, but as I visited it again for this assignment I was surprised how much I did not notice the first time around.”
- “I am not much of a museum guy, but I actually learned some interesting things and made some connections I hadn’t thought of before.”
• “I must admit that I was not looking forward to going to the Education in Zion exhibit because I had gone before. . . . However, it was just like the scriptures in that I may read something nine times but on the tenth time I find something different, and that’s exactly what I needed.”

• “Initially I was a little bit skeptical of having to spend an entire hour touring the exhibit. Surprisingly however, the time flew by and I ended up staying beyond the required hour. Every wall of the exhibit was so crowded with so much new information that I absolutely loved taking in!”

• “As I wandered around the different displays, I felt a great appreciation for the opportunity which I have to attend this university. Although they were just exhibits, there is a precious spirit there.”

• “The principal insight I gained during my visit to the exhibit was the importance of inviting the Spirit into the learning process to aid my comprehension and further my knowledge.”

• “As I began my journey through the Education in Zion exhibit, I started to realize that knowledge is something that doesn’t come quickly, and it is something that needs to be worked for in order to receive.”

• “I learned so much while walking through the Education in Zion exhibit that a better question would be, ‘What did I not learn?’”

The opportunity to tour the gallery, whether in or out of class, provides a kinetic learning experience that can impact students positively. And while walking through the exhibition, many undergo a process of self-discovery, learning how important education is to the Lord and gaining new motivation to study harder and take their education seriously.

In addition to being integrated into various course curricula, the gallery also hosts a variety of programs to engage the campus community. For example, each Friday during fall and winter semesters, student musicians perform live at noon. On the second and fourth Mondays of each month from September through April, the gallery has a Family Home Evening program; the content changes each month, with the two most popular programs being Christmas in Nauvoo and Vignettes of Black Saints. Twice during the academic year, the gallery holds a Date Night, which ranges from activities such as scavenger hunts to Old Nauvoo dances. Also twice during the academic year, we hold gallery talks given by professors from across campus. Past speakers were Mikaela Dufur (Sociology), Ron Saltmarsh (Music), Patricia Ravert (Nursing),
and Margaret Blair Young (English). Perhaps the best-attended program is the gallery’s New Student Orientation, which takes place each year in January, June, and August. In 2012, nearly 4,500 new students participated.

Rotating Exhibitions and Partnerships

It seems logical that departments would collaborate and work together often. However, professors and administrators are busy fulfilling their individual duties, so collaboration and partnering does not happen frequently. Based on my seventeen years’ experience at BYU, I think university employees sometimes take Matthew 6:3, “let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth,” too much to heart. Consequently, it is especially noteworthy that the gallery has partnered with so many colleges, departments, and centers on exhibitions and programs in its short five-year history.

Exhibitions. The previous curator, Ann Lambson, partnered with visual arts classes to organize three student exhibitions: Inheritance, Clarity, and After Eve. These were well attended and helped inform the campus community of exhibition opportunities.

Shortly after I arrived in 2011, I hosted another exhibition by upper-division visual arts classes titled Let Virtue Garnish Your Thoughts. In winter 2012, I partnered with the College of Nursing to produce The Healer’s Art: A Celebration of the College of Nursing; this exhibition opened in time for the college’s sixtieth anniversary. In fall 2012, I opened Cosmo: The Credentials of a Cougar, which had a loose affiliation with athletics because it showed Cosmo, the BYU mascot, exemplifying the four aims of a BYU education. In 2013–14, I will do exhibitions with the Center for Service and Learning as well as the Ballard Center for Economic Self-Reliance in the Marriott School of Management. I am partnering with the Museum of Peoples and Cultures, also known...
as BYU’s Teaching Museum, to design and install an exhibition in the
fall that will be co-curated by Barbara Morgan (Religion) and Vance
Randall (Education) about Benemerito de las Americas, the LDS high
school in Mexico City that will become a Missionary Training Center in
July 2013. Future exhibitions are also being planned with anatomy and
biology professors.

Programs. In fall 2011, the gallery partnered with the Faculty Devel-
opment Center to cohost an ongoing lecture series titled “My Journey
as a Scholar of Faith.” Faculty and students have had the opportunity
to learn about various individuals’ integration of the religious and the
secular. Elements from each presenter’s life resonate to varying degrees
with those in the audience. The gallery also runs a program called
Hidden Photo Challenge, and since winter 2012 we have partnered on
it with the BYU Bookstore, which has generously donated half of the
prizes. In winter 2013, the gallery began a partnership with the student
association in the School of Music for the Music Fridays program. And
in February 2013, for the gallery’s Date Night activity, I invited Colleen
West, a dance professor, to teach a few steps from popular dances in the
1830s and 1840s.

A section of The Healer’s Art: A Celebration of the College of Nursing, on display until
November 2013. Courtesy Education in Zion Gallery.
Conclusion

The first five years at the Education in Zion Gallery have been very productive. When it opened in fall 2008, there was a burst of excitement and attendance, which has steadily grown. In the first four months the gallery was open in 2008, it hosted over 4,000 visitors; in 2009 there were just over 18,000 visitors; and in 2012 there were just over 28,000. First visits to the gallery are often casual, but with increased interaction students have deeper and more meaningful experiences. Many more exciting events are on the horizon. Everyone is invited to attend the gallery to experience it personally, and be sure to check out EducationInZion.byu.edu.

Heather M. Seferovich (byustudies@byu.edu) worked on The Story of Masada and The Dead Sea Scrolls exhibitions at BYU in 1997 and was Senior Executive Editor at BYU Studies for twelve years before becoming the curator at the Education in Zion Gallery in June 2011.