

Teaching That Influences Student Character Development: A Preliminary Investigation

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In September of 2015, BYU President Kevin J. Worthen gave a devotional address¹ on the importance of character building at BYU, in which he said, “Those who established the vision for this university at the highest levels have made it clear that character building is at the core of what we do here.” He then shared this statement from President Spencer W. Kimball:

This institution has no justification for its existence unless it builds character, creates and develops faith, and makes men and women of strength and courage, fortitude, and service—men and women who will become stalwarts in the kingdom and bear witness of the ... divinity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not justified on an academic basis only.

Past research conducted by the Faith & Learning Initiative, a program of the BYU Faculty Center, has focused mainly on what faculty influences contribute to an education that is both intellectually enlarging and spiritually strengthening—the first two aims of a BYU education². The third aim, character building, is the focus of the current study. In particular, this report is a preliminary attempt to illuminate what aspects of faculty influence seem to help students develop their character.

Gathering Data

In Winter semester of 2013, the Faculty Center collaborated with Dr. Bob Ridge’s undergraduate applied social psychology class to study the role BYU faculty members play in helping students develop character. Dr. Ridge’s 30 students each conducted interviews with two students outside their class, for a total of 60 undergraduate students interviewed. Prior to conducting interviews, student interviewers asked interviewees to read through the “Character Building” section of the *Aims of a BYU Education* document and spend some time reflecting on a few questions about the purposes of character building at BYU and their own experiences with it (see the interview protocol used to train interviewers and guide their interviews in Appendix A).

Student interviewers were instructed to ask the students they interviewed about professors who had been most influential in their interviewees’ character development and then explore what faculty attributes or actions had the biggest impact on their character development, and how their character changed because of these influences. As the student interviewers’ amount of experience varied, so did the quality and research utility of the interviews: some were brief and sparse, some were lengthy and detailed, and most were somewhere in between.

¹ See http://speeches.byu.edu/talks/kevin-j-worthen_building-character/

² See <http://aims.byu.edu/aims>

Data Analysis

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. It is these transcriptions that we have analyzed for the current report. Dr. Ridge's students also created their own reports of interviewee demographics, major thematic findings within their small groups, unique findings, and interviewer reflections. We have not included these in our analysis as we preferred to look at the data afresh and as a whole.

Having 60 interviews of varying length, structure, and quality to analyze has proven difficult. Our first few attempts at analyzing the data were unsatisfactory. Then in 2015 we discovered NVivo³, a qualitative data analysis software tool. This software has made possible new explorations of the interviews and helped us gain preliminary insights into what contributes to building students' character at BYU. At very least, it suggests some areas for further exploration.

Results

Students mentioned four kinds of professor influences on their character growth: the professors' example, the professors' relationship with students, how the professors connected their courses to students' lives, and direct invitations to improve. In practice, these influences are not completely separate; we have separated them somewhat artificially so that we can describe each aspect of character influence in some detail. In the first three of the following sections, we share briefly what students said about (1) the professors' example, (2) their relationship with students, and (3) how they taught for relevance to students' lives. In the later "Who Am I?" section, we discuss professors' direct invitations for students to improve their character, as well as indirect invitations that come through professors' example, relationships, and student-relevant teaching. We use the students' own words to connect each of these influences with how students reflected on their own character and made changes in their own lives.

"Who Are You?"—The Professor's Example

When students talked about what influenced their character growth, they frequently mentioned the example of their professors. Five aspects of their professors' example were mentioned by at least ten students: the professors were (a) caring, (b) genuine, (c) approachable, (d) had passion for their subject, and (e) showed great integrity. We will briefly touch on passion, integrity, and genuineness here; mentions of professors being caring and approachable were intermixed so much with language about relationships with students that we moved the caring/approachable discussion into the later relationship section.

The finding—that students' character growth is influenced by their professors' examples—connects well with what we have found in previous research, namely, that professors who influence students the most both spiritually and intellectually provide authentic and meaningful answers to questions that students seem to be asking of their professors, one of which is "Who are you?" Students want to know who their professors are, and especially whether they are people that the students can trust to take them on a journey of learning and personal growth.

The professor has a passion for the subject. Students often mentioned that their influential professors had a passion, excitement, or love for the subject they were teaching. One student said he gained a love of the literature he was studying because instead of his class feeling

³ See <http://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-product>

“like busy work, spouting off things that I’ve memorized,” his professor helped the students to feel excitement about the material. This student said of that professor,

When you’re in his class, you feel like you’re on a journey with him through this scholarly research that professional teachers and researchers would do. And it brings a lot more heart into the class than just “Here are the dates and names of all these books in history.” Another student mentioned a professor whose love for his subject was also an example of his love for people:

[In] my special education class, ... we talked about ... students with special needs. As [my professor] taught, I could see and feel his love for [these] kids that we talked about that had special needs.

The professor shows integrity and honesty. Students appreciated seeing their professors’ integrity in action, and this was manifest in different ways for different professors. For some it was the way they integrated their disciplinary and gospel identities. For example, one student said his professor showed “no distinction like ... ‘I need to be a humanities professor’ and ‘now I need to be a Mormon,’ but they’re both part of who he is and so they come together.” Another student said he saw integrity in the congruency between moral principles the professor taught and stories about when the professor lived those principles. This student said of his business professor,

I could tell from his example that he believed what he said. ... When you actually see someone who preaches something and you can tell that they’ve lived it ... that made him someone I could look up to and someone I could trust. I could talk to him about my concerns—because he’s been there. ... He had a lot of experiences he shared. ... [Once, he felt] a lot of pressure to not go the ethical route [at a job he held, but] ... he stuck with his ethics. It was good to have that example.

The professor is genuine and authentic. As mentioned in about one third of the interviews, students appreciated when their professors showed authenticity. The ways students talked about this ranged from “He was just so laid back” to “he was very open about his life” to “they are just like ... normal people that are talking to you.” One student said that his professor’s authenticity was obvious because of his consistency:

His testimony was so natural—it was just a part of him, and it manifested itself in all of his lectures. And I saw that as an example of ... consistency. ... Like I could trust him to always be himself, to always present his core values. In lectures, in the office, he was always the same; he never put on an act when lecturing.

This authenticity—being open about one’s life, showing consistency and integrity, and not putting on appearances—seemed to increase the professors’ ability to influence the students’ character. It looks like these professors acknowledge both their weakness and their striving.

In the later “Who Am I?” section, we will show how the professors’ example invited students to consider their own character and make changes to improve themselves.

“Who Am I To You?”—The Professor’s Relationship with Students

Students talked a lot about how their influential professors helped them see and reach for their potential by caring about them, appreciating and encouraging them, supporting them in their struggles, and being available for students who needed help of any kind. These professors put a high priority on the relationships they had with their students, and tried to treat their students more like junior colleagues than underlings.

This finding also has a clear connection with our previous findings, namely, that students seem to implicitly be asking professors, “Who am I to you?” These professors, through their relationships with students, showed them meaningful answers to this question.

A mentoring relationship. Several of these experiences look like mentoring. For example, one student was struggling to learn English, and her grades were suffering. She said of her professor,

He sent me an email and said “Hey, I noticed that you didn’t do too good on my midterm. Do you want to come to my office and talk? I can help you out.” He is the first professor that did that. I went to his office and he asked, “What is going on?” I said I didn’t study much. I am not motivated to read because I will not be able to memorize that many things [in English, her native language was Spanish]. Just him talking to me, and bringing up scriptures, and things that he went through, and hardships he was able to overcome ... really helped me do good in his class.

Another student said of a professor,

I was ... struggling with trying to decide on a major, so he was able to help me with these tough decisions in my life, to help me realize what I was good at. ... Lots of times I would stay after class and talk with him too, and just get his opinion on different things. ... He really cared about me.

The professor is caring and approachable. This last quote shows how caring about students and being approachable are key aspects of an influential professor-student relationship. This was mentioned by half of the students interviewed, without any specific prompting. Some mentions were brief—“He was just so kind,” or “she just seemed to genuinely care about us”—while others were more specific instances or descriptions of how the professor was caring and approachable. One student described how his professor showed care by being extra supportive of students:

It has a lot [of] impact to me when I see him staying after class asking people how they are doing. Or he would ask us how our personal goals were going, or when we would go talk to him, he would put everything down. He didn’t just do the bare minimum—he definitely showed us that he was willing to go outside of what was expected of him to help us out. He was definitely happy to do it. That helped me learn.

Another student said her professor showed approachableness by becoming better acquainted with students:

I think the thing that really impacted me was that she was really outgoing and took the time to get to know all of us. And through that, we came to trust her and have a good relationship with her.

A third student said his professor “was always so sensitive to the needs of her students. Each student was not just another body in the room, but an individual that she cared about and prayed for and would listen to when you needed help.”

Students seemed to really appreciate being invited to talk to professors one-on-one, and that when they did that, they felt cared about. One student said, “I went to talk to him for the first time and I felt love. ... Even though he had TAs, he would help us personally.” Another said,

I felt I could relate to [my professor]. I connected with him. I felt he cared about my learning as a student. I think he is the only professor I had who asked the students to

come in and meet with him. He had one-on-one meetings with us at the beginning of the semester. I felt I [could] go and talk to him.

Of course, some classes are too large to have a one-on-one meeting with every student. Multiple students in this study did mention influential professors who taught a very large class, but often said they did not have a personal relationship with that professor. However, one student said of his class, “It was a class with like 300, so I did not have a personal relationship with my professor, but I felt that he genuinely cared and if I ever did need help I could have gone to him.” Unfortunately, the interviewer did not probe to discover how this student knew the professor cared about him.

Whether or not a professor is able to meet with each student individually, students seem to be more open to being influenced when they know that their professor cares about them and is open to talking one-on-one. One student stated clearly that this was the case for her professor:

I think also I trusted him more and believed him more, and he had more of an influence on me because he knew my name, and he was kind to all of us, and he encouraged us to come in, and he was very open about his life. He was just a very approachable person, and I think the same was true of other teachers that were influential to me.

We conclude that by getting to know students, trying to support them, and being accessible to them, professors show students that they care about them and that they can trust their professors to help them learn and grow. During these interactions with students, faculty have a great opportunity to encourage, inspire, and mentor them. Professors’ caring and helpful relationships with students also seem to function as an example of praiseworthy character that shows students who they can become. In the later “Who Am I?” section, we will show how students’ relationships with professors inspired students to become better.

“Why Does This Course Matter (For Me)?”—Teaching for Relevance to Students’ Lives

The third question we have seen students implicitly asking is “Why does this course matter?” For many students, professors answered this best by teaching “life lessons” or sharing their personal moral approach to their discipline. For example, one student said that as his dance professor “taught dance, it was not just dance that she was teaching but also life skills. She would weave within her lessons life skills. She would teach how to become a better person and a happy person.” Another student said her marketing professor “would always apply the topic in a way that would teach an overall lesson—things like being honest in the workforce, and being a good employee, and being someone your employer can rely on, regardless of where you are working.” A third student said her professor “would use examples of his own parenting—how it went well, how it didn’t go well—and I think it just put what I was learning into real life.” As a final example, one student said of her professor,

He makes an effort every lesson to just have a standalone spiritual thought that he wanted to share with us; and sometimes it relates to finance, like, you know, “You need to have integrity, no matter what your job is” ... and sometimes [it’s not related to finance]. But it’s always something uplifting that he has a testimony of. ... [And] in his regular discussions about class things, you can just see his testimony ... and how it’s shaped his career and his family and his life. He talks about things, and other people, who have been examples in his life and how those examples have had an influence on his character.

Another student elaborated and said about this same professor,

In his class he always gives personal insights ... [from] something that he has done in his life. ... He talked about when he was [getting] his PhD ... [and] was super busy. ...

Sunday was like an extra day that he could finish his work, [but] ... he decided that ... he was going to leave the Sabbath day for his family and for God. He said that by doing that and by praying, ... it really helped him. His life was more organized even though it wasn't supposed to be. He ended up getting really good grades and finishing everything and getting a really good job.

Interestingly, it seems that answering students' question about personal relevance is only sometimes about connecting the subject matter to students' lives; students also find personal relevance in the personal experiences and life insights that professors share. As a further example, one professor took time in class to look at a topic from his discipline's point of view and compare that with a gospel perspective. One student said of this professor, "He shared his personal philosophy on life, and he is not afraid to share his personal point of view and bring in the gospel aspect, which obviously helps in character building." Another student said that for three different professors,

There has been a point in class where they will take a moment to pause on the material and tell us how it has impacted them. They talk about gospel insights. I think those have been really the most influential moments with these professors.

These student quotes demonstrate that when professors show students who they are and how they position themselves morally or religiously in their disciplinary endeavors, students are better able to see how the course matters in their own lives. Professors' answers to students' questions of "Who are you?" and "Why does this course matter for me?" are often related and can be demonstrated at the same time.

"Who Am I?"—Student Reflections and Character Outcomes

Thus far, we have shared three questions that students appear to implicitly ask professors—"Who are you?", "Who am I to you?", and "Why does this course matter?"—and discussed how professors seem to be answering these questions in ways that influence students' character. This includes being an exemplary person and making that example visible to students; developing caring, supportive, and mentoring relationships with students; and sharing personal life lessons and moral (often gospel-centered) approaches to one's discipline. When students were asked to connect each of these influences to their own character growth, they often talked about how the professor's influence invited them to reflect on where they were in their own lives and how they could improve. It seems that students were asking themselves a fourth question—"Who am I?"—and professors' examples, relationships, and life lessons acted as indirect invitations for students to reflect on this question and consider related questions about their purpose, their stance on issues, or how to live their lives. Some students also shared times when professors gave direct invitations for students to reflect on these questions.

In this section, we share what students said about professors' direct and indirect invitations for character growth. After sharing some direct invitations given by professors, we discuss how each of the implicit student questions might act as an indirect invitation for students to consider the fourth question ("Who am I?").

Direct invitations. Sometimes, professors influenced students' character growth by giving explicit invitations for students to take a certain perspective or improve in a certain way. These often came in the form of pep talks. One student said of a professor,

Probably every third class period or something, he'll give us a little pep talk for about 5 minutes, maybe 10. ... It's always spiritually based, and he'll talk about how ... we shouldn't get riled up over this really tough homework assignment that we have to do

today, or be totally anxious about a test, but we need to keep [an] eternal perspective. And that's usually the theme of it, and he is just always super effective about conveying that ... we can find fulfillment in our lives even if we don't really find fulfillment in his class.

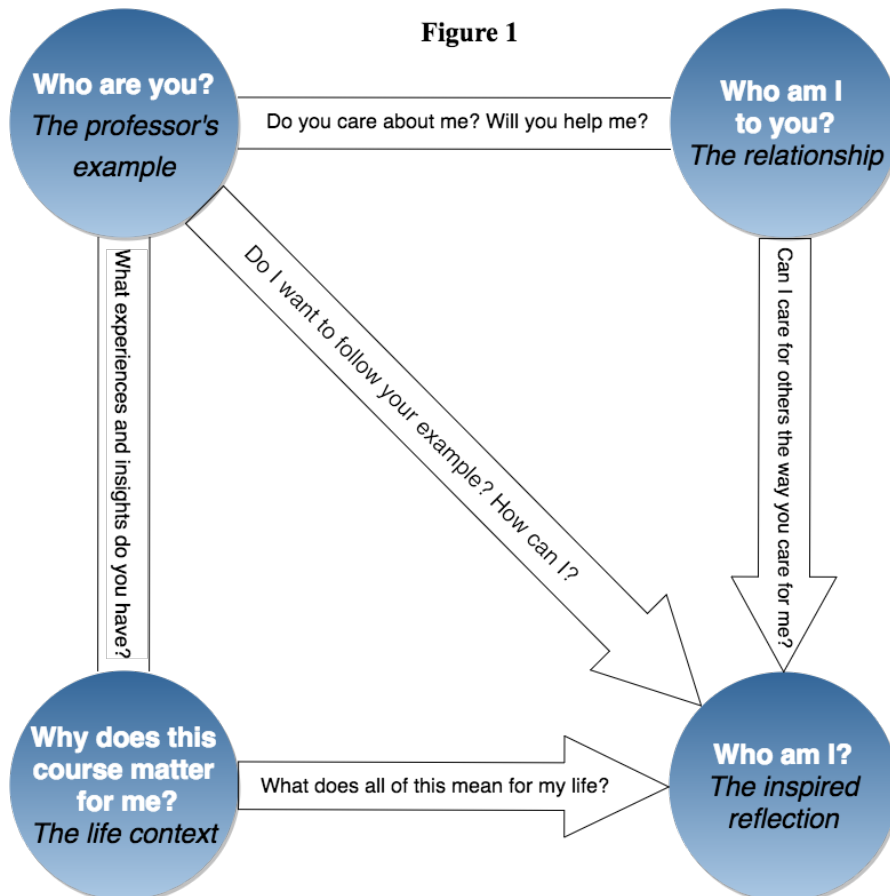
A student in a choir class said of his professor,

I guess the main thing that impresses me about her is that she builds our testimonies without having to have a testimony meeting. ... She says things like, "stretch as tall as you can. ... Okay, now stretch higher. ... Let that be a life lesson to you. You go as far as you can, and then you went farther than you thought you could."

And one professor was even more explicit about challenging the students to do their best. His student said,

Being perfect is hard, but it's an expectation—it's a commandment and we're supposed to do it, and [my professor] ... believes that slacking through life is ... not acceptable, especially here at BYU. He wants the best and he knows that you can do it.

Indirect invitations. Most invitations for character growth, however, were indirect invitations brought about by a professor answering one (or more) of the first three implicit student questions. Although many students never clarified *how* these things influenced their character, a few did explicate those connections. Their connections have helped us theorize a potential model showing how a professor's example, relationships, and "why this course matters" discussions may invite students to ask and answer "Who am I?" and thereby influence students' character growth. This model is shown in Figure 1 below.



“Who are you?” and “Who am I?”. The examples of professors invited students to reflect on or improve their own character. Students talked about the effects that professors’ passion, integrity, and charity had on them.

Passion. Passionate professors often engendered in their students a newfound enthusiasm for learning. One student was inspired by an elderly professor who faithfully taught his class despite ailing health. To the student it seemed that

... he was there because he wanted to be there, and as far as character goes, he was just honest with himself and doing what he liked. ... Call it optimism or call it doing what you love to do, ... he really liked being there, and it really helped me want to be there as well.

Another student said that her religion professor

... wanted us to be excited about what we were studying. She would just get so excited: “See guys! You can see where they went!” ... I guess this has bled over a little into some of my courses, like studying the body, like “Oh, hey, cool! That's exciting, now I can see how it happens!”

It appears that professors’ example of dedication to their work and excitement about their subject invited students to become more invested and excited about their learning and take a more active role in it—at least for that class. For at least one student, this change seemed to also transfer to other courses, which appears to be a change in her character.

Integrity. One student apparently got an opportunity to reflect on her own integrity during a religion class:

It was also interesting to hear about certain events in Church history that aren’t the most flattering—like the Mountain Meadow[s] massacre. I had never heard about that before. I really liked that [my professor] didn’t try to hide that part of Church history from us, even though it’s not the best it’s part of our heritage. It taught me about honesty. She definitely led by example.

Charity. When students saw how much their professors cared about other people, they had opportunity to consider and enlarge their own love for others. The student mentioned earlier who talked about her special education professor went on to say, “I could see and feel his love for [these] kids that we talked about that had special needs, and his love for us—his students. And that love ... helped us develop love for those students with special needs.” Another student said of her professor,

I just was really impressed by how personal she was with her students, and her support [and] love for us. ... Because she was one of the most Christ-like people I've ever met, [I've been] realizing that that’s actually a possibility to become that way. ... I've really tried to become more like that.

One particular student said that through the personal experiences his professor shared, he could tell his professor “was the kind of person that—he himself is trying to become more like Christ.” Because of this professor’s example and some specific insights he shared, this student said there has started to be a change in “how I view other people. I'm slower to judge other people.”

Another student said of her professor,

Something that helped with character development was that she often shared stories from her life—like ... [when] she had to make decisions that were hard [at work]. That helped me see the way that I want to be, because I could see the way she behaved in different situations, and it made me want to be like that and develop those attributes.”

When students see and experience the exemplary character of their professors it invites them to reflect on their own character and make changes. It is as if students watch their professors with an implicit question of “Should I become more like you? How could I do that?” As one student said, he is “just trying to emulate [his professors’] character in how they treat other people.”

“Who am I to you?” and “Who am I?”. The previous section highlighted instances where a professor’s love for other people invited students to consider their own relationships with other people and how they could be more caring and charitable in those relationships. Such invitations also came from professors showing care for students. Because caring is an aspect of relationship quality, the overlap of this phenomenon between the categories of professor example and professor-student relationship is considerable. Therefore, although quotes about caring professors are in both sections, we focus in this section on those invitations that seemed to come as part of a caring professor-student relationship.

One student said that her character growth was affected by how her professor showed genuine interest in the well-being of the students and sought to help them. She said, “He took the time to get to know every single one of us,” and added that he would “really take interest in you and how you were doing, even outside of his class; he could tell if you were having a bad day and would ask if ... things were going okay.” For this student, perhaps what made the biggest difference

was realizing that [he was] taking the time to help me, and I know [he’s] crazy busy ... and [he’s] still willing to help me understand and grasp this subject. ... That made me want to help my fellow students. ... If my professor can take time out of his craziness to be like, “Here, [student’s name], let me help you step by step,” then I should be able to do the same. Maybe it took a little more time [for me] in developing that courage to go and offer my help, but ... I could see that he was trying to encourage us and be there for us. She said that his genuine interest in the students “made me want to get to know people,” and that from this professor, she “just learned how to be serviceable to people, show charity, and genuinely care about someone.” Another student said that her professor “acted like he cared about every single one of [his students], and took time to talk to them. His ... attitude made us want to be like him and ... to help others the same way.”

One student talked about how a caring and supportive professor helped her in a mentoring relationship. There was no transcript for this part of the interview, but the interviewer summarized the student’s comments about one particular experience. The professor had entrusted a research project to the student and was there to support her

... every step of the way. Even when she messed up and basically ruined some data, he used it as an opportunity to teach [her] about research and learning from your mistakes. [The student] explained that after she emailed him to apologize, he wrote her back the nicest, most understanding email. He helped her learn how to handle negative situations and turned it into a learning experience for everyone in the lab.

The way this professor showed patience, love, and support to his student, coupled with whatever he said in that email, seemed to have an effect on her character.

By showing their genuine interest in and love for students in their caring, helpful, and supportive relationships with them, professors invited students to consider how they see and treat other people and helped them grow in character.

“Why does this course matter?” and “Who am I?”. Some students gave specific examples of how they grew in character as a result of a professor sharing how students’ lives related to either the course matter or something the professor had experienced. Regarding the professor who shared his experience of being blessed for not studying on Sundays, one student said, “I’ve been striving really hard to get to that point,” and another said, “I have it in my mind that I should try to do better and do as little as possible on Sunday. Hopefully by the end of the semester, I won’t do it. I think it is improving, which is good.” Sharing his experience seemed to be an indirect invitation to students to reflect on their own behavior; whether he also made a direct invitation to do so is unclear.

One psychology professor talked about how an understanding of psychological disorders should help students be less judgmental toward people. His student said,

He talks a lot about ... how we should treat other people ... [who have] disorders ... or like why ... people are on short tempers sometimes, and ... we never know what's going on in their lives. And so we're very quick to judge people. But he said when someone snaps at you, or someone does something that you would think is their fault, ... just try to understand ... what's going on in their lives, so you can see them like Christ would see them.

In a public speaking class, the professor had students do exercises that would help them in their personal lives, beyond the course subject. One student said this professor

... made us get out of our comfort zone, which ... really made me grow and it helped me a lot for my mission too. [Once,] we had [to] team up with someone else in the class that we didn't know, and then we had to introduce them. So we really had to get to know them. And that activity really helped me to realize ... that people all over campus—although I may not like them at first glance—they're really cool people.

A finance professor also helped his students apply the topic to their personal lives. His student said,

I kind of hate financing and budgeting. ... [but this professor] teaches how to make it relevant in our lives. ... If he is teaching investing, he is talking about investing in a house and things like that. [This pulled] me out of my comfort zone, but he is showing me how I can apply it into my life.

Two students talked about how religion professors helped students have personally relevant applications of course material. One said that a professor

... had us write a paper on how the Old Testament helped us understand the plan of Salvation. So there was not a right or wrong answer to this paper, it was an assignment that we could answer personally. ... I was able to really express my feelings, and ... [I saw] how much I had learned, [and that] I grew spiritually [and] also did well on my research paper. So you can imagine the happiness that brought to me in my personal life.

Another student said that in her class,

We would go over principles that we found in the Book of Mormon ... [and] look for ways that principles could apply to your life. ... At the end of class [the professor] would give us these challenges that implanted that principle.

She then described how the principle of “Here am I, send me” helped her be more willing to volunteer to do things.

When professors related their own experiences, the subject matter, or class assignments to students’ lives, it seemed to help students see and experience new possibilities for character growth.

Discussion & Questions for Possible Future Study

From these results, we can see a range of invitations being made for students to grow in character, with some invitations being more direct than others. Regardless of the kind of invitation—whether through having exemplary character, sharing personal stories, having a good relationship to students, making course material relevant to students, or simply giving pep talks—students really seemed to appreciate it when professors invited them to become better, to consider their own character trajectory, and to make moral changes in their lives.

In future research about character building at BYU, we hope to explore our tentative model linking various kinds of faculty influences to how students reflect on and pursue their own character growth. The model seems to hold true in light of this and prior research, but much needs to be done to clarify and flesh out both some themes we are starting to see and the connecting relationships between different parts of the model. We have a number of specific questions about the model, but we want to start by asking the following general questions:

- Is this model borne out when we use observational and survey methods?
- To what extent does the model apply across disciplinary settings?
- Does the model apply in various sizes of class and modes of delivery (for example, online as well as face-to-face settings)?
- Are both indirect and direct invitations similarly influential?
- To what extent is allowing and encouraging students to reflect and to exercise their agency to develop themselves influential in student development of character?

Appendix A

Preparing for the Interview

The purpose of the interview is to study the role BYU faculty members play in helping students develop character.

Please think about your responses to the following questions as you read the section on character building from the Aims of a BYU Education on the back side of this sheet:

- Why is character development so important at BYU?
- What sort of character is BYU hoping students will develop?
- Which attributes or aspects of character in the Aims are most meaningful to you?

After reading the character section, please jot down some notes about:

1. Specific professors who have been influential in helping you develop your character:
2. Specific things these professors did that helped you develop your character:
3. What BYU professors could do to be more influential in helping you to develop your character:
4. What some professors are currently doing that discourages your character development:

[Back side of "Preparing for the Interview"]

Character Building

*A firm, unchangeable course of righteousness
through life is what secures to a person true intelligence.*
--Brigham Young 6

Because it seeks to educate students who are renowned for what they are as well as for what they know, Brigham Young University has always cared as much about strong moral character as about great mental capability. Consequently, a BYU education should reinforce such moral virtues as integrity, reverence, modesty, self-control, courage, compassion, and industry. Beyond this, BYU aims not merely to teach students a code of ethics but to help them become partakers of the divine nature. It aspires to develop in its students character traits that flow from the long-term application of gospel teachings to their lives. This process begins with understanding humankind's eternal nature and ends with the blessing of eternal life, when human character reflects in fully flowered form the attributes of godliness. Along the way, the fruits of a well-disciplined life are augmented and fulfilled by the fruits of the spirit of Jesus Christ--such as charity, a Christlike love for others, which God "hath bestowed upon all who are true followers of his Son, Jesus Christ" (Moroni 7:48). Students thus perfect their quest for character development by coming unto Christ through faith, repentance, and righteous living. Then their character begins to resemble his, not just because they think it should but because that is the way they are.

President David O. McKay taught that character is the highest aim of education: above knowledge is wisdom, and above wisdom is character. "True education," he explained, "seeks to make men and women not only good mathematicians, proficient linguists, profound scientists, or brilliant literary lights, but also honest men with virtue, temperance, and brotherly love."⁷ Consequently, a BYU education should bring together the intellectual integrity of fine academic discipline with the spiritual integrity of personal righteousness. The result is competence that reflects the highest professional and academic standards--strengthened and ennobled by Christlike attributes.

Thus understood, the development of character is so important that BYU "has no justification for its existence unless it builds character, creates and develops faith, and makes men and women of strength and courage, fortitude, and service--men and women who will become stalwarts in the Kingdom and bear witness of the . . . divinity of the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not justified on an academic basis only."⁸ Rather, it fulfills its promise when "the morality of the graduates of this University provide[s] the music of hope for the inhabitants of this planet."⁹

Every part of the BYU experience should therefore strengthen character--academic integrity in taking a test or writing a research paper; sportsmanship on the playing field; the honest reporting of research findings in a laboratory; careful use of university funds derived from the tithes of Church members; treating all other people with dignity and fairness; and wholehearted acceptance of commitments made to bishops and parents. Character is constructed by small decisions. At this personal level of detail, BYU will realize its hope of teaching "those moral virtues which characterize the life and teachings of the Son of God" (Mission Statement).