

pro•fes•or

\prə-ˈfes-ər\ *n*

one that professes special knowledge of an art, sport, or occupation requiring skill—

teach•er

\ˈtē-chər\ *n*

one whose occupation is to instruct—

If you were to ask any English speaking person about the words “professor” and “teacher”, a large number of those individuals would educationally tell you that these two words are *synonyms*. They are words that have similar meanings and connotations, and can often be substituted between each other within the same sentence.





Christopher Lowry, member of the BYU-Idaho Faculty, shows a number of his students different parts of the human brain in his Neural Biology class—



They intuitively may try to mention that there is a difference, however, and that a “professor” is only found within the walls of higher education—of colleges and universities—but not in anything lower. It is often a title given to the elite minds of the world; a title earned after many years of intense study and applied enlightenment.

These same individuals may say that a teacher can be found anywhere, from a middle-of-no-where-Kindergarten class, to a person who wrote a Wikipedia page, or to a man giving a tutorial on YouTube.

Teachers are *everywhere*. Once you have even a bit of knowledge and you unselfishly share that morsel of truth, then, even you can be a teacher.

This prods the problematic geometrical question every freshmen confronts sometime in their first year

of high school—you know, the one that goes “Is every square a rectangle? Is every rectangle a square?”— Are *all* professors teachers? Is *every* teacher a professor...? And after figuring *that* out, which of the two is better? These questions may not get so many synonymous answers.

In order to answer the first question, a study would have to be undertaken on the various universities our nation employs.

This study would unfortunately discover that the answer is not simply a “yes” or a “no”, but more like a “that would depend on the structure and design of the university”. The outcome would also find that there are essentially two types of universities: those focused on research, and those focused on making the above words synonymous.

BYU-Idaho, a recent newborn to the college world, takes on the latter view. To more deeply understand this, one must start at the college’s birth. In 2000, the governing body of the university, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, announced that the Rick’s Junior College would be transformed into a four-year institution. Then-President of the Church, Gordon B. Hinckley, said, “BYU-Idaho will [...] be teaching oriented. Effective teaching and advising will be the primary responsibilities of its faculty.” With this vision captured, then-President of the University



Research can be time consuming, often at the expense of students.

David Bednar gathered his faculty together and said, “For those who may have the mind-set of I need my time for my research, I frankly do not think you fit at BYU-Idaho... The attitude of ‘I need my [...] research’, and teaching is a hassle, and the more external funding I can get the more I can buy out my time, the less I teach, and the more ‘real work’ I can do... does not belong [here].” The current president of the university, Kim Clark, is adding to this ideal. The former dean of the Harvard business school has implemented much of his former employer’s methods and has made his new school the only university that has a full license to use the learning models developed at Harvard. This system invites the

faculty to build up their classes with the students in mind, often allowing the students to take part in the class instruction.

The faculty also has a unique task in comparison to other schools. BYU-Idaho uses a trimester system. While other schools have a Fall and Winter semester, with shortend and optional Summer and

Spring terms, BYU-Idaho uses three equally long and important terms in which the professors are actively involved in the teaching process on an everyday basis. The responsibilities they have differ greatly from that of a research institution. For example, Rhonda Seamons, a faculty member at BYU-Idaho, lists “six approaches” teachers should input in their jobs. The first is experience, for which she says, “experiential education is a method in which teachers ‘purposefully engage with learners in direct experience and focused reflection in order to increase knowledge, develop skills, and clarify values’”. The other steps include research, lecturing, facilitation of on-hand projects for students, and provision of “guided

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— GORDEN B. HINCKLEY**

practice, with feedback at appropriate intervals” in helping students to learn the skills taught in various courses. Through these applications, professors, rather than student teacher peers, get to know their students and interact with them daily, building a mentoring relationship with them and advising them in their academic pursuits. It is a full-time—often over-time—job.

Compare this to the list of teaching responsibilities for professors at research-focused universities such as Rice University in Houston, Texas. They are to “determine the curriculum, subject matter, methods of instruction, and other academic standards and processes, (b) establish the requirements for earning degrees, and (c) evaluate the appointment,

reappointment, promotion, and tenure of faculty members.” Faculty members are also “encouraged... to take part in college life as associates and masters, to serve on departmental and university committees.” While professors do engage time in teaching (especially graduate) students, research and publication remain pivotal requirements of

a tenure or professorship at these universities, and provisions are made in university faculty handbooks for extended leaves of absence from the classroom for research expeditions. Often in undergraduate classes teachers’ assistants head much of the day-to-day class time and student communication in order to enable professors to devote their time to researching and helping graduate students with their research and publication. The phrase “Publish or Perish” is especially applicable at a research-oriented university such as Rice.

BYU-Idaho certainly has a unique method of education, one that no doubt leads to a much more personal learning environment for any

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student. This one-on-one education is rare in the higher learning world, and can invite experiences not found at most other schools. *Unique* isn't always a good thing, though. The question has been asked that if the teachers at BYU-Idaho focus so much on teaching, how are they to stay mainstream with the constant change that happens in their individual fields? While professors at Stanford, Yale, Texas, or Ohio State are publishing the newest finds that then trickle down to the undergraduates, teachers in Idaho are stuck with only the experience they were hired with. Is this lack of research detrimental to the student's education? Is being a "teacher" enough to compete with the high adaptability of a "professor"? Wade Huntsman, a member of the Art Department at BYU-Idaho has expressed a few concerns over that matter. He says that "The main focus at this university is teaching, not developing as professionals ourselves...For example, at BYU professors teach 3 classes, 2 classes, then 1 class in three semesters. This allows the professors to do research and develop their current skills. At BYU-Idaho a lot of us professors teach 4 classes each semesters. 4, 4, then 4—you do the math—that does not allow time for professional development. This heavy teaching load puts us in the classroom almost all of our time, in my discipline that hurts my skill, development, current standing, and ability to pass along vital, cutting edge information to students."

He goes on to mention that "The only hope here is that the Lord will make up the difference [in not having personal time]. If the Lord does not do this, our students are being thrown to the wolves. The real world is a brutal, competitive, cutthroat place."

Another professor, Chris Lowry, from the Psychology department, agrees with Huntsman. He states that as a professor, teaching the same thing each semester, you can easily burn out without developing or researching something new. The research keeps them fresh. When asked what can be done to compensate, Lowry simply says, "Reading. A lot of reading. Which requires a lot of time I don't have."

With problems like this arising, it would seem like BYU-Idaho's view is a short term solution that will soon fall too far behind and will, as



Huntsman says “cheat the students from professors who are not allowed to develop their skills and keep current.”

One student, Jessica LeBaron comments about the difference in BYU and BYU-Idaho. “[BYU’s] campus walls are often covered with published articles, lecture announcements, fairs, etc. I appreciate the emphasis they place on continuing *their* learning so that they can become even better, well rounded, educated instructors. [And] although I have had professors that are not excellent instructors and simply lecture and test, I find their enthusiasm and passion for the subject still echoes through [to me] and I learn a great deal.”

Is the sacrifice really worth it? Is BYU-Idaho on track to become a college of obsolete knowledge? Lowry sees a very bright future, despite the fogging questions. He mentions that although there is a lack of “standard” research from the faculty, the school is far from void of research. Currently, as BYU-Idaho is set up, Lowry is overseeing a major research project on Autistic children. He proudly explained that everything but the medical scanning of the children has been reared by BYU-Idaho students, including the planning, the delivered proposal, the gathering of data, and in the upcoming semester, the analyses and documentation of the results. He says that “this is a true educational experience where both teacher and student (and the world) benefit greatly,” and adds that it is something not found at an undergraduate level on a majority of the nation’s campuses.

The students would agree that this type of education is “not about grades anymore, it’s about *learning*.” They feel much closer to their teachers and feel that they are more than just another nameless face. Christian Hagge, a student of BYU-Idaho who spent time at Arizona State said that, “one of [his]chemistry teachers was doing a large project on the human DNA. You could tell that once he started teaching, he was doing it because he had to. My teachers here (at BYU-Idaho) never appear to be burdened in their instructing.” Lisa Lindow, a BYU-Idaho to BYU transfer student says of BYU-Idaho, “[the teachers] really have a focus on helping everyone become a master learner... [they are] more personalized, and



it feels more like home. I feel like BYU is all about just getting a degree... and more focused on the prestige and test scores.”

Although it is time consuming, Professor Huntsman has seen the benefit of a “student first” university. Of this he says, “Where I do teach up to three times more classes than other university professors, I also get a lot more than three times more one on one time with my students. I, for one, teach my classes, then I also set aside conferencing, tutorials, and just time to chat for each student. I only wish I had that during my undergrad studies.”

The faculty of BYU-Idaho will admit that they are not your normal professors. They don’t get to spend half a year deep in the Amazon identifying unnamed species, nor do they get to climb Mt. Kilimanjaro to take test oxygen levels. They won’t be found deep sea diving with exotic marine life, or in an underground lab ambushed by beakers and fizzing chemicals. No, they do their battles with eager and open minds, trying to pave a path of assistance to a bright and pleasant future. The faculty at BYU-Idaho knows that their titles of “professor” and “teacher” are, indeed, safely synonymous.



Professor Huntsman teaches one of his many art classes.

