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*Author’s name:* Dustan Kraus

*Email address:* dustan.kraus@gmail.com

*Phone number:* (208) 540-0284

*BYU graduation date:* Anticipated graduation in August 2018

BYU graduation degree: Anticipating master’s degree in mechanical engineering (robotics)

*Which question I address:* 3. Does higher education enhance or undermine religious faith?

*Title of essay:* Higher Education Encourages an Enduring Religious Faith

**Higher Education Encourages an Enduring Religious Faith**

As a young missionary in Jamaica, I came across many people whose illiteracy severely impeded their ability to learn about and develop faith in Jesus Christ. Conversely, I had many discussions with a well-educated man whose skepticism of anything without empirical evidence was similarly hindering to his development of religious faith. Is the likelihood of developing and maintaining deep faith then a bell curve with illiteracy on one extreme and higher education on the other? While illiteracy may make it more difficult to heed Christ’s invitation to learn of Him, I believe that higher education can actually facilitate the development of religious faith.

A common belief known as the secularization thesis indicates a negative relationship between level of education and various measures of religiosity. [1, 2] In a recent 2017 study, the Pew Research Center examined different measures of religiosity—such as weekly service attendance and daily prayer—and found that for most religions there is no change in the percentage of people exhibiting high religious commitment between various level of education. Mormons (members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints) were the exception to this trend with 92% of college graduates demonstrating a higher level of religious commitment compared to only 78% of those with only a high school education or less. [3] In the case of Latter-day Saints, I believe that there are several reasons (discussed below) that higher education leads to an increased level of religiosity, and I have personally felt a rise in my religious commitment through my pursuit of a master's degree in mechanical engineering.

President Gordon B. Hinckley taught, “The pattern of study you establish during your formal schooling will in large measure affect your lifelong thirst for knowledge.” [4] The pattern of study I have established during my higher education is the process of developing questions, then searching for answers. I’ve found that the more I learn, the more questions I have. Often, the only way to find satisfactory answers to questions and tough research problems is through earnest prayer coupled with intense study. There have been many instances where I’ve been stuck on a seemingly insurmountable problem in my research, and have received divine inspiration that helped me overcome my roadblocks. We often discuss this fact in lab meetings, and pray for the Lord to guide our research efforts. While the discussion of faith and prayer in lab meetings may be unique to a church sponsored school like Brigham Young University, the act of receiving divine inspiration to solve a difficult and specific problem generalizes to all universities. Faith is developed through personal experiences with the Lord, and the challenges associated with higher education often drive me to my knees seeking help. Feeling the Lord’s inspiration in my research has led to an increased trust in His guidance and a desire to seek more of His all-knowing counsel. This pattern of seeking answers to research questions through prayer has shaped how I approach religious questions. When I have doubts or concerns about church doctrines and policies, rather than despair or turn to unreliable sources, I know that I can find the answers I seek through focused study of ancient and modern scripture and through earnest prayer. I believe that higher education teaches us to rely on the Lord and pursue answers rather than quit when we have doubts or questions. In this way, education encourages an enduring religious commitment.

In addition to a good pattern of study, higher education also helps us become more aware of the intricacies in the world around us. My thesis work is specifically in the field of humanoid robotics, and my efforts to push the envelope have majorly expanded my faith. Everything I learn about state of the art robotics builds my faith in the fact that there is a loving God who designed our bodies. The human body is so far beyond the current capabilities of even the most advanced robotic systems. Simple tasks that we do every day like walking on two legs, opening a door, manipulating objects, healing, and making decisions all present a serious challenge for robots. Other majors have similar examples that elicit awe in a loving God. Learning more about the Earth around us inspires faith in a divine creator.

During higher education, students develop good habits of and a lifelong commitment to learning which fosters an enduring faith. Higher education cultivates a generation of Latter-day Saints who address their doubts and questions by going to the source of all truth, God. Additionally, higher education enhances our view of the world which inspires faith in a divine creator. Higher education enhances religious faith.

**Citations**

1. Caplovitz, David, and Fred Sherrow. “The Religious Drop-Outs: Apostasy among College Graduates”. Sage Publications, 1977.
2. Stan L. Albrecht and Tim B. Heaton, “Secularization, Higher Education, and Religiosity,” in *Latter-day Saint Social Life: Social Research on the LDS Church and its Members* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1998), 293–314.
3. Mitchell, Travis. “In America, Does More Education Equal Less Religion?” *Pew Research Center’s Religion & Public Life Project*, 26 Apr. 2017, www.pewforum.org/2017/04/26/in-america-does-more-education-equal-less-religion/#.
4. Gordon B., Hinckley. “Way to Be! 9 Rules For Living the Good Life”. New York City: Simon & Schuster, 2002. Print.