

What Students Don't Like: Distinguishing the Least from the Most
Successful Professors at Intellectually and Spiritually Strengthening

Faculty Center Report

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During winter semester 2012, we collaborated with Dr. Robert Ridge to conduct a survey and focus groups to investigate what separates the most from the least successful BYU professors in terms of being spiritually and intellectually strengthening. Previously, our research had described what the most successful faculty do to be both spiritually and intellectually strengthening, but we had never investigated what the faculty members who are least successful do and how the most successful professors differed from them. We hypothesized that some of the things students said in previous research might be said of both successful and less successful professors. For example, it might be said that a lot of poor teachers assign a lot of homework, but the same might be said about many great teachers.

This article is a summary of the characteristics of faculty who BYU students identify as some of the least successful in being spiritually and intellectually strengthening. It is important to place this research into context. BYU students, in general, are very happy with their education and their professors at BYU. We also know that most faculty would like to do even better. Our hope is that by identifying what students think gets in the way of a positive intellectual and spiritual student experience, this report might assist faculty in their efforts to improve.

We worked with two applied social psychology classes taught by Dr. Ridge. With his class of graduate students we developed a survey that they administered to a random sample of 1200 undergraduate students in their sophomore or junior year at BYU. As part of the survey, we asked respondents if they would be willing to participate in a focus group to further explore the issues in the survey. We used their responses to place them into specific focus groups, which were moderated by the students in Dr. Ridge's undergraduate class. These students also recorded and transcribed the focus group discussions. This report presents the most common themes from comments made by students (see Appendices A, B, and C for a description of how we formed and approached these discussion groups). We have tried to present these themes in the language of the students and wherever possible to offer concrete examples from their experience and perspective.

Our emphasis in this study was to get concrete descriptions of the characteristics and approaches of the least successful professors and to compare the most and least successful profes-

sors on these dimensions. What we discovered from the students we surveyed was that they did not rate the person they described as being their “least successful” professor low on every dimension. This is additional evidence that BYU students value many things in their professors, even those who weren’t their most influential professors. As a result we refer to the group of these professors as “less successful,” but since we asked students in the focus groups to compare their most and their least successful professors so far, when the students talk about them as individuals and when we are talking about the individual a student chose we call that individual the “least successful” professor.

Focus group themes

Students see BYU professors as much more than subject matter experts. They see them as role models and hope to see them as leaders and mentors (see Alan Wilkins and Jane Birch, “What Students Want: Spiritually Strengthening and Intellectually Enlarging Faculty,” at <https://bystudyandfaith.wordpress.com/projects/publications/>). As a result, professors “live in a glass house.” Students watch them closely. They are looking for examples from professors of how to integrate the spiritual and the secular intellectually and in their lives. Because of this, they seem to hold BYU professors to higher standards than might be the case for professors at other universities. Consider these relatively negative examples which illustrate how sensitive some students are to these issues:

It's not like I wanted her to stand up and say, “I know this Church is true,” but I wanted her to acknowledge it at least. It almost seemed awkward for her to say that she was LDS, like it was an obstacle. She had two [sets of] earrings, which is not that big of a deal, but was that an outward sign that you don’t care that the church is true? I came to BYU to come to a different university, because I wanted to be spiritually strengthened and mentally stretched

Another student said,

He was a bishop, so I know he was a worthy guy, but I wouldn’t have been able to tell that if I hadn’t known he was a bishop, because all he ever did was talk about how much money he had AND he kind of put down his wife a lot. So there [weren’t] very many girls in the class, and so all the girls hated him. We were like, “Are you kidding me?!”

We present below a list of the thematic categories we developed to capture reasons students gave to explain why their relatively low-rated professors were not **as** spiritually and intellectually strengthening **as their more highly rated professors**. Appendix D contains expanded definitions and examples.

- **Seems Arrogant, Condescending:** the professor seemed to view him/herself as better than the students and saw his/her opinion as the only valid one.
- **Demonstrates Poor Teaching Skills:** the professor was disorganized or had difficulty presenting material and engaging students in discussion.
- **Doesn't Seem to Care about Student Learning:** the professor did not seem to care what or if his/her students were learning. Many students saw lack of feedback and unclear grading expectations as evidence of this.
- **Isn't Approachable, Doesn't Encourage a Relationship:** the professor did not make an effort to have any type of relationship with students beyond formal classroom interaction.
- **Doesn't Bring Gospel into the Classroom:** the professor either explicitly avoided or missed clear opportunities for gospel integration in the classroom.
- **Integrates Gospel Inappropriately or Poorly:** the gospel was used to inhibit conversation, was raised but in unhelpful ways, or the professor's mention of it seemed insincere.

The rest of this report looks more closely at each of these themes and presents student comments as examples of what they experience.

Seems Arrogant, Condescending

One dominant theme that emerged in the focus groups was that students felt that some of their professors were arrogant. They felt demeaned or viewed as inferior. One student explained that when his professor was asked a question, she would “answer like a condescending way, like, ‘Oh, you’re so unintelligent for not understanding this material.’” Another said, “She would refute anyone else’s point of view; it was ‘her way, the end!’ and [she] made you feel stupid for anything alternative to her point of view.”

Often, arrogance is displayed in how a professor responds to questions or to students who are having difficulty. Since this is the case, what is interpreted as arrogance could be something else. In fact, the categories of Poor Teaching Skills and Doesn't Seem to Care about Student

Learning had a great deal of overlap with arrogance, suggesting that often what is perceived as arrogance may stem from something else (e.g., excessive reliance on content and PowerPoint presentations and lack of attention to student understanding). On the other hand, some students really felt they saw arrogance. For example, one student claimed, “When their ego barely fits through the door, it is hard to feel the Spirit.”

BYU undergraduate students in a 2010 survey were almost unanimous (means of around 6.5 on a 7-point scale) that the two most influential characteristics in faculty members that helped to strengthen them both intellectually and spiritually were that the professor showed that he/she believed in the student’s potential and that they were authentic and genuine (Alan Wilkins and Jane Birch, “What Students Want: Spiritually Strengthening and Intellectually Enlarging Faculty,” at <https://bystudyandfaith.wordpress.com/projects/publications/>). They seem to respond best to faculty who see and express their confidence in the eternal potential of each student in the class and who help them with something akin to the patience and promise God uses to teach all of us. They say they appreciate it when professors welcome student comments, questions, and even suggestions. Students do not expect them to know everything, and they appreciate it when they are humble enough to acknowledge what they do not know or when they make mistakes.

Demonstrates Poor Teaching Skills

Many of the problems in how spiritually strengthened and intellectually enlarged students feel are directly related to poor pedagogy. This poor pedagogy can be manifest in at least three ways: not inviting student interaction in the lecture; giving long, boring PowerPoint presentations; and not having a clear organization of the course.

One of the most important pedagogical skills students value is inviting student interaction in the lecture. One student spoke about a very engaging and interactive professor and then said, “But my other professor would have the slides and just read everything straight off the slides. Most times in class I would do something else.” Another said of her professors, “The good teacher would constantly ask questions and ask for our opinions, versus the other professor who never asked a single question.” The first of these quotes hints at a potential reason, mentioned

often by students, that some professors fail to engage students: the exclusive use of PowerPoint presentations in teaching. One student said,

It really bugged me that ... all that was ever done in class was PowerPoint presentations, and they were always extremely long and boring PowerPoint presentations. ... It was really hard to pay attention and stay focused and learn anything because I just kind of felt like they took the textbook, put it on a PowerPoint, and we were going over that in class. This can be frustrating to students. One said, “When they don’t bring anything new to the table that I couldn’t get through my personal study, if they don’t engage me, then I don’t learn spiritually or academically.”

Besides engaging students, the other significant pedagogical factor that helped students to feel enlarged academically and spiritually was the organization of the class. When classes were disorganized, students felt that it distracted from the atmosphere of the class and from what they were able to get out of it. One student said,

With my least successful professor the class was always unorganized and chaotic. I can vividly recall many class periods in which the professor was either late or nowhere to be found. TA’s seemed to have more say and power than the professor did. Because of this teacher’s lack of control and organization, there was a definite void of spirit and order in the class.

It’s possible that part of the reason for some of the poor pedagogy is that many professors also have other projects they are working on, and teaching gets a lower priority. One student felt this way, and said:

A lot of the professors are trying to do their own research aside from trying to teach the class. I felt like a lot of them treated the teaching in the class like a side job, and they would really rather be doing something else.

Thus, when professors exhibited disorganization, a lack of engagement, and “boring,” lecture-style PowerPoint teaching, they came across to students as not caring about teaching. It seemed to students that they had not put the effort in to making their teaching effective. One student said it seemed “almost as though teaching had become boring to them and they seemed to have forgotten that teaching was meant to be based on learning.”

Doesn't Seem to Care about Student Learning

Many students felt that their least successful professor just did not care about whether or not what was being taught was also being learned. One student said, "My least successful professors simply didn't care that I was there." Another expressed, "The least successful professor constantly expressed disinterest if we succeeded or failed." Yet another said, "From right at the beginning, like, the student can tell whether the teacher ultimately wants them to succeed or not." Of course, we don't know whether these professors did or did not care about their students. However, students mentioned several things that contributed to whether they felt their professor had concern for them and their learning.

The most oft-repeated way students felt faculty demonstrated what appeared to be a lack of concern about their learning was in the way they gave feedback on student work. For example, one student said, "The one that I loved would give these page long responses on our papers ... and the other one would post our grades on blackboard and that was it." Several students commented that they were not afraid of high standards or getting assignments marked down, **but as one said,**

The [professors] who really care will give you feedback: "Here's where you went wrong. Here are some specific examples and here is how you can fix it." And ones who don't say, "This is wrong," and they can't tell you why.... If you can't give me a reason for why you are marking me down, then you shouldn't be able to mark me down.

Another student commented similarly:

I like it when they write things that aren't just "good job," and I don't like it when they just underline something and put "I don't like this," and then I'm just like, "Why don't you like it?" I like them to put [in] a little bit of effort and tell me what is it that they want me to fix here.

Students also felt cheated when assignments did not get graded in a timely manner and they made the same mistakes repeatedly before realizing that they were making mistakes. Often, the problem is not so much about grades. Students expressed how learning is really important to them, not just grades. For example, "he does put a huge curve on it; he is just making it so people can pass the class, but he is not trying to explain it to us and actually have us learn it."

Another major way that professors show they do or do not care is in the way that they respond when students have questions.

I had one teacher who I came up and said, “I’m totally lost,” and he said, “Oh, it’s just Set Theory.” And I thought, “Excuse me? I don’t know what that is either.” Apparently my question was so low on his totem pole he didn’t even think it was worth answering.

Another student said,

The one who does a poor job of this, he’ll overlook questions. And if you ask a question that he thinks is stupid, you’ll get the feeling that he thinks it’s a stupid question. And he won’t address it or he’ll act like he doesn’t want you to ask any questions.

When students feel that the professor doesn’t value their questions, they feel that the professor doesn’t value them or their learning.

An underlying theme from these comments was that professors who cared about their students demonstrated a belief in the students’ potential. One student said,

One professor that I can think of specifically, when a student asked a deep question or something that we may not know the answer to, you could see the professor light up and say, “That’s a good question and maybe you will be the one who will do the research to answer that question.” You could tell that the professor was definitely interested in our potential to answer these questions that we don’t know the answer to yet. So I thought that was really effective in his style of teaching. Other professors ... just go, “You’re right. You’re wrong,” and don’t really give you incentive or motivation to continue learning. It makes it hard to continue in that class.

Students who felt that their professors truly believed in them were willing to work harder and learn more. Students who felt that they were just “a number” or part of the grade “bell curve” that the professor was trying to get tended to learn less and were apathetic in response. Several students mentioned that professors who said that only X number of students get A’s and Y get B’s detracted from this feeling that they believed in the students’ potential. One student summed it up when he said the following:

In this life, God didn’t send us to earth to be alone and to say, “You are going to figure it out all by yourself.” He gives us as many resources as he sees fit in order to help us suc-

ceed. I'm not saying that the professors or everybody should be Christ-like and like God, but the setup of that is so perfect and why not emulate that? Professors are trying to help you out as much as possible and failure in the eyes of the professor should not be acceptable at all, except for students who are not going to do anything. There are always going to be a couple of them. If a professor has a student in a class that is getting a low grade, I think it should wrench the heart of that professor unless it's the student not doing the work and being lazy. But if the professor can help and he doesn't, I think it's the responsibility of the professor.

Isn't Approachable, Doesn't Encourage a Relationship

Another way that professors show their concern for students is in their efforts to establish a personal relationship with them. Students feel invited into such a relationship when professors are flexible with their office hours, take time to get to know students, and share with students personal experiences. Many students felt that their professors did not care about fostering a relationship when the professors would not make time to talk with them. One student said, "I never visited with him, but I knew some people who tried to and he wasn't flexible in his office hours and he wouldn't respond to emails. He wasn't really interested in talking to people after class." Another said, "I hate when professors say, 'You can email me anytime you need or come during my office hours,' but then they're not available like they say they will be."

Students also felt that professors who communicated only through TA's and emails were ineffective at having relationships with them. In contrast, one student said that his most successful professor "made himself available during office hours. It was a big class but he still gave everyone his personal cell number and put himself out there so you could feel that he cared about us." Other students said in big classes some of their professors would invite the students to eat lunch with them in small groups. It is clear that when a professor sets aside time to talk with students, the students feel like they can have more of a personal relationship with the professor.

Another thing that separated professors who had poor relationships with students from those who had good relationships was how much the professor shared of him or herself. One student said of a professor, "He was always willing to share personal experiences. He would deviate from the lesson if he felt that something was more important to talk about." This is in contrast to

another student who said, "My professor that was disappointing, he didn't talk about himself at all and didn't try to establish anything. There was a big divide between the students in the classroom and the professor up at the board." Students felt that when the professor did not relate personally with them, it detracted from their learning and their spiritual enlargement.

Doesn't Bring Gospel into the Classroom,

In addition to being fed intellectually, students come to BYU to be fed spiritually. "I came to BYU to come to a different university, because I wanted to be spiritually strengthened and mentally stretched," was the comment of one student we cited earlier. Because of this expectation, students are often disappointed when professors fail to integrate the gospel into the subject matter. This is especially true when the subject lends itself to gospel integration. One student said,

I thought of one professor who, if he had included the gospel more, I think I would be more excited about my major. I'm an economics major. Because it's something I'm considering as a career, I'd like to know how the spiritual connects to what I'm learning.

We're trying to get a feel for what I'm going to do and it would be great to know how the spiritual could connect with what I'll be doing later on.

Another student said,

I had an archeology class one time, and whenever we're studying Mesoamerica and those kinds of things everyone is hoping we talk a little bit about the Book of Mormon and that kind of stuff. She never brought any of that and of course it's hard because no one knows exactly where these things are, but I was hoping she would try to tie the book of Mormon a little into the study of archeology, which she never did. When it seems like the subject should have gospel ties, it is frustrating for the students when it doesn't happen.

In addition, some students wish that prayer would be used more in class as a minimum for gospel integration in class. One student said, "Yeah, it would be nice to even just start with a prayer. Because in science it's kind of hard to get [the gospel] in" This student recognizes that integrating the gospel can be difficult in some subjects, but prayer is a simple method to invite the spirit and the gospel into the classroom. However, some students do not want professors to use prayer as their only gospel integration, as voiced by one student:

There are times when they call for an opening prayer, but aside from that the gospel doesn't get brought up in class. They really don't make any attempts to tie it in. At times there are opportunities to do it and they don't.

Another student said, "Others do the opening prayer just to be spiritual, but lack any real passion."

Integrates Gospel Inappropriately or Poorly

Another problem that students saw in the way professors integrated the gospel was that they sometimes felt professors were insincere in the way they brought it up. Some students saw their professors including spirituality just because they were "supposed to," rather than out of a sincere desire to help their students grow spiritually as well as intellectually. One student said, "A teacher that I had that was pretty ineffective was constantly making fun of BYU: 'Oh, this is the Lord's university so I should probably say this now.' And it kind of felt like it was really insincere."

Another theme we found was that students felt professors who said something about the gospel just to "check the box" and get a good rating on the student survey seemed inauthentic and uncaring:

I have also had a professor that would say stuff like, "Now this is for the evaluation, remember I was spiritual" and then they will say something about God. It just makes a difference being genuine and caring about the students.

Another problem that students cited was professors who used quotes from Church leaders in ways that limited discussion.

[The professors] say, "We're going to talk about this aspect of the gospel, keep in mind Joseph Smith said this" and it completely shuts down the debate because who's going to argue with an out of context quote from a prophet?

Another student followed by saying, "I've had that experience, usually you may have a point of view, but after they say something like, 'This is what this person from the Church said,' it makes me afraid of asking or talking about the topic."

Often students felt that their professors did not do enough to expound upon the integration that was brought up. One student shared this experience:

I can think of two examples, a good one and a bad, that are kind of similar. Both professors had a quote on PowerPoint slides. The first professor read the quote and moved on; the second professor that shared a quote from a slide read it and then opened things up for discussion and then said, “How does this compare to what we’ve learned in the gospel and the plan of salvation?”

Another student said,

There was a professor who was talking about ... how the past determines what happens in our lives. He kind of brought up agency as a side note and left that subject completely. He talked about agency for a minute and then went immediately back to determinism. So you can believe one or the other and he didn’t really explain how you can fit [it] ... into your gospel perspective and that was kind of offensive. ... He brought up the gospel as a side note on a regular basis.

Two additional related concerns were raised by individual students so we don’t know how common they might be. One student claimed that his professor would bring in the gospel in overly dramatic ways that detracted from the spirit. Another said that a professor would use the gospel only to play devil’s advocate in philosophical discussions.

Conclusion

This focus group study cannot inform us concerning how widespread or relatively important each of these themes is in describing the differences between most and less successful professors. Nevertheless, these student perspectives can help us develop hypotheses we can test further through survey and other means. In the meantime, we hope this research can be useful to faculty and others who wish to understand the BYU experience better from the student perspective.

We were interested to note that while students could easily identify really successful professors and rated them similarly on a variety of dimensions, they were much more varied in how negative they were about their least successful professors. Even if some faculty were rated low in some dimensions, they were often, at the same time, rated relatively high in other dimensions. We believe that much of the teaching at BYU is very good and from what we see in these focus group comments, most of the concerns students attributed to their least successful professors

seem relatively easy to address. We hope that the examples and themes from this report will encourage thoughtful responses as we all work together to create a better student experience at BYU.

Appendix A

How Focus Groups Were Formed

The Qualtrics survey asked students to identify and describe their most and their least successful professor at BYU at strengthening them both spiritually and intellectually. The survey had two major shortcomings in terms of generating responses that we could reliably attribute to the entire BYU undergraduate student body and analyze using statistical methods. First, perhaps because of the length and complexity of the survey, the response rate was just 17%. Second, there was a rather pronounced “ceiling effect” for the highest-rated faculty such that the variance was truncated, making regression and other statistics somewhat unreliable.

Because of the low response rate and limited statistical usefulness of the survey, we decided to use the survey as a means of organizing focus groups that would represent a broad cross section of students. We also wanted to learn from students whose most successful and least successful professors were quite different so that we would have a better opportunity to see differences. Our goal was to get students to describe these differences concretely as a means of generating hypotheses we can test in subsequent research. We realize that our ability to carefully generalize our findings to the larger population of undergraduate students is limited as a result. Nevertheless, focus group data can give us more concrete understanding of the way students see and describe faculty members who are most or least helpful to their spiritual and intellectual development.

Appendix B presents the greatest differences we discovered using simple T-tests between the most and least successful professors on dimensions we derived from previous studies and focus groups (see for e.g. Alan Wilkins and Jane Birch, “What Students Want: Spiritually Strengthening and Intellectually Enlarging Faculty,” at <https://bystudyandfaith.wordpress.com/projects/publications/>). We placed these differences into three general categories that made conceptual sense to us as a way of forming focus groups and developing questions for them to explore: 1) how professors make gospel connections; 2) how they relate with students; and 3) how they facilitate student learning.

Based on students' responses to the survey, we formed groups of students to explore each of these three general areas. To ensure that we had students with truly low-rated professors or both very low- and very high-rated professors, we based our categorization of professors on the same questions used in the university student ratings. We developed two overall categories using student ratings variables: spiritually strengthening and intellectually enlarging. The spiritually strengthening measures included these three questions from the BYU student ratings survey: "My testimony was strengthened," "The professor was spiritually inspiring . . .," and "The professor integrates the gospel into the subject." We averaged the responses to these three variables to form a spiritually strengthening measure. The intellectually enlarging measure was based solely on responses to the question, "I learned a great deal." These measures were combined to find students who rated their professors as the most and the least successful in being both spiritually strengthening and intellectually enlarging or students who had rated at least one of their professors as relatively low compared with the other professors rated in the survey.

We formed 11 focus groups, as described in Appendix C. The first four groups were composed of students who had less successful professors, whom they rated in the lowest third on spiritually strengthening and intellectually enlarging compared to all low-rated faculty in the survey. The next six groups included students who had both high-rated (most successful) professors and "below average" professors (below 50% of the other low-rated faculty—we found that in many cases students didn't rate less successful faculty as being very poor in the overall measures).

Group 11 included students who rated their most successful professor in the top third of professors in the survey and their least successful professor in the bottom third of the ratings in this study so we could have at least one group of students who could compare professors who were as different in performance as we could find from the survey.

The questions we asked in each group are described in Appendix C. We selected some of the groups to focus discussions on only one of the three categories of greatest differences between successful and less successful professors (groups 1, 5 and 6 focused on gospel connections; groups 2, 7 and 8 on forming relationships with students; and 3, 9 and 10 on facilitating

student learning). We assigned groups 4 and 11 to engage in more open-ended discussion as noted in Appendix C.

Three members of our research team read the transcripts and proposed possible thematic categories that represented comments of several students. We developed agreement about categories and the kinds of comments that would fit within each one and then individually looked for examples of them in four of the focus groups transcripts. Next we met and worked through the examples we found to determine the level of agreement between them and find where we needed to clarify or alter the categories. Next, one of our group members used these categories and attempted to assign student comments in the rest of the focus groups to one or another of them. Finally, when that group member had questions about where comments fit we discussed and reworded or re-shaped some categories to accommodate new ideas.

Appendix B

Significant Differences and Categorization of Questions

The following themes were identified in the survey results as having the largest differences between successful and least successful professors:

- Shared personal experiences
- Brought up the gospel in the classroom in a very natural way
- Shared his/her testimony in class
- Helped me feel the Spirit when he/she taught
- Shared examples of gospel living from his/her own life
- Openly expressed commitment to the gospel with the class
- Provided constructive feedback
- Held me to high standards and showed concern for me at the same time
- Guided students through difficult assignments
- Believed in my potential
- Made me feel comfortable getting to know him/her

Categories of Differences

We grouped the variables above into three categories that would help us focus questions in group discussions:

1. **How they (professors) make gospel connections:** natural way, shared testimony, helped me feel the Spirit, shared examples of gospel living from own life, openly expressed commitment to the gospel.
2. **How they relate with students:** shared personal experiences, provided constructive feedback, held me to high standards and showed concern for me, shared examples of gospel living from own life, believed in my potential, made me feel comfortable getting to know him/her.

3. **How they facilitate student learning:** provided constructive feedback, held me to high standards and showed concern, guided through difficult assignments, believed in my potential.

Appendix C

Focus Group Methodology

Focus Group Composition

- **Groups 1-4:** students with less successful (low/low) professors (below tertile cutoff if possible)
- **Groups 5-10:** students with both successful (high/high: above tertile cutoff if possible) and “below average success” professors (lowest 40% or 50%)
- **Group 11:** students with most successful (high/high) and least successful (low/low) professors (below and above tertiles)

Instructions for Group Moderators

Questions for Groups 1-4

Start each of these four groups with, “Think of the professor you rated as least successful in strengthening you both intellectually and spiritually,” and then ask, “Were there things this professor did specifically that detracted from you experiencing the class as being both spiritually strengthening and intellectually enlarging? If so, can you give use examples of what he or she did and how it detracted from those goals?” Probe for specific examples and for why that detracted or was unhelpful.

Group 1: focus on gospel connections. After the initial 15 minutes on the first question, say, “Now we would like to focus on specifically how this professor talked about the gospel, if at all. Did this professor ever bring the gospel into his or her lecture or into the class discussion? If so, how did he or she talk about the gospel and bring it into discussions or lectures?”

- Probes: Can you give us an example? Did this approach help your learning or inhibit it?
Why do you say that?

- Provide a list of the survey items in this category to suggest possible probes. Frame them in ways that apply to less successful professors: e.g., if the professor ever mentioned the gospel, was it brought in naturally, did he/she bear testimony, help you feel the Spirit, share examples of gospel living, etc. If so, were these efforts helpful spiritually and intellectually? Why or why not?
- Follow up whenever they mention an effort to bring in the gospel that was not helpful: what made this effort unhelpful and how might it have been made more helpful?
- If this professor never referenced the gospel or testimony or personal gospel-related experiences, etc., ask, “How did not having any references to the gospel in the class affect your relationship with (or feelings about) the professor?”
 - o Were there questions you had about the subject matter as it relates to the gospel that went unanswered as a result? For example, what questions?
 - o To what extent would explicit references to the gospel by your professor have changed your attitudes about the professor, the subject matter, and changed your interest in learning in this class?

Group 2: focus on relationships with students. After the initial 15 minutes on the first question, say, “Now we would like to focus specifically on the relationship this professor developed with students. How would you describe his or her relationship with students?”

- Probe for examples of how he/she treated students and related with them. Always ask how that relationship helped or hindered student learning and spiritual growth (or lack of such growth).
- Provide a list of survey items in this category and suggest possible probes based on them that apply to less successful professors: e.g., to what extent did this professor share personal experiences (including experiences related to gospel living) that helped you feel closer to him or her, how did this professor deal with providing feedback, to what extent did this professor hold you to high standards and at the same time show concern for you, to what did this professor make you feel comfortable getting to know him or her?

- Follow up on any mention of efforts to build a relationship or actions that distanced the professor from students and ask why that effort wasn't helpful. Ask how the relationship with students might have been improved.

Group 3: focus on facilitation of student learning. After initial the 15 minutes on the first question, say, "Now we would like to focus specifically on the ways this professor helped (or didn't help) you to learn. How would you describe the ways this professor tried to facilitate student learning?"

- Probe for specific examples and ask how a particular approach helped or hindered intellectual and/or spiritual learning and growth.
- Provide a list of the survey items in this category and suggest possible probes based on them that apply to less successful professors: e.g., how did this professor provide feedback to students, to what extent did this professor communicate high standards and show concern for your progress, to what extent did this professor guide you through difficult assignments, to what extent did this professor believe in your potential?
- Follow up with any mentions of efforts to facilitate student learning with why that was/wasn't helpful and what might have been more helpful. Ask how helping students learn might have been improved.

Group 4: exploring, open-ended. Ask the first question and probe for examples with every comment. Ask if others had a different experience. Whatever is mentioned, follow up to find out why a particular practice, approach, attitude, characteristic, etc. of the professor seemed to detract from learning and spiritual strengthening and what might have been done to improve.

Questions for Groups 5-11

Start each of the groups with, "Think of the professor you rated as most successful and the one who was least successful in strengthening you both intellectually and spiritually," and then proceed according to the following:

Groups 5 and 6: focus on gospel connections. How did your most and less or average successful professor differ in the way they talked about the gospel or shared their experience or their testimony?

- Probes: Can you give us an example? Did this difference you observed in the most successful professor help your spiritual and intellectual growth or inhibit it? Why do you say that?
- Provide a list of the survey items in this category to suggest possible probes. As time permits, ask how their two professors differed with respect to each of these items: e.g., how naturally they brought in the gospel, whether/how they bore testimony, whether/how they helped you feel the Spirit, whether/how they shared examples of gospel living, whether/how they openly expressed commitment to the gospel.
- Follow up whenever they mention a particular contrasting example with why/how that contrast made the class more spiritually and intellectually strengthening.

Groups 7 and 8: focus on relationships with students. How did your most and least successful professors differ in the ways they related with their students?

- Probe for examples of how he/she treated students and related with them. Always ask how that difference in relationship made a difference in student learning and spiritual growth (or lack of such growth).
- Provide a list of survey items in this category and suggest possible probes based on them: e.g., how did these professors differ in the way they got to know students, in how comfortable they made you feel about getting to know them, in how they shared personal experiences, in how they provided feedback, in how they held students accountable for high standards and yet showed concern from them, in demonstrating a belief in students (your) potential.
- Follow up whenever they mention a particular contrasting example with why/how that contrast made the class more spiritually and intellectually strengthening.

Groups 9 and 10: focus on facilitation of student learning: How would you describe the ways these professors differed in their efforts to facilitate student learning?

- Probe for specific examples.
- Provide a list of the survey items in this category and suggest possible probes based on them: e.g., how did these professors differ in how they provided feedback to students,

communicated high standards and while showing concern for their progress, guided you through difficult assignments, believed in your potential.

- Follow up on each contrasting approach by asking how it helped or hindered intellectual growth and/or spiritual growth.

Group 11: exploring with students who had most successful (high/high) and least successful (low/low) professors. Compare and contrast your most and least successful professors in the ways they helped to strengthen you intellectually and spiritually. What were the primary differences?

- Probe for specific contrasting examples.
- Ask how these contrasts made a difference in the student's spiritual growth and learning.

If [there is] time, probe for gospel connections, relationships with students, ways they facilitated learning/improvement.

Appendix D

What Distinguishes High- from Low-Rated Professors

Themes and Specific Examples from Transcripts

1. Seems arrogant, condescending (better than students)
 - a. Hierarchical (talks down to me, believes he/she is better or more important than me, flaunts knowledge/expertise, treats us like junior high or high school students, makes us feel dumb)
 - b. Critical
 - c. Doesn't care about our opinions and ideas
 - d. Thinks his/her point of view is right; doesn't encourage multiple points of view
2. Demonstrates poor teaching skills
 - a. Very disorganized, unprepared
 - b. Syllabus changed 5 times, not clear which applied, students confused
 - c. Read from textbook
 - d. Expectations unclear
 - e. Doesn't invite discussion
 - f. Boring
 - g. Doesn't encourage/facilitate student interactions
3. Doesn't Seem to Care about Student Learning:
 - a. Not aware of, and not checking, my understanding
 - b. Doesn't comment on my work (papers, exams, etc.) or very slow in responding
 - c. Doesn't reach out when I/others do poorly
 - d. Isn't flexible when I have problems
 - e. Seems to agree with everything, doesn't help us to move to higher insights
 - f. May give ridiculous amounts of work but doesn't put in effort to help us learn material or understand the importance of/reasons for assignments
 - g. Lectures or works with back to class

- h. Grades on completion rather than preparation/performance/understanding
 - i. Doesn't make the course relevant/interesting
 - j. Not inclusive (only speaks to certain students; leaves others out)
4. Isn't approachable, doesn't encourage a relationship with students (separate from arrogance):
- a. Uninviting personality
 - b. Not accessible (office hours inconvenient or inflexible, leaves after class, doesn't respond to my emails)
 - c. Hides behind TAs
 - d. Doesn't know my name or anything about me
5. Doesn't bring the gospel in at all or recognize opportunities to integrate it into the discussion
- a. Discourages or avoids gospel connections (e.g., all about scholarship, not religion class)
 - b. Ignores gospel connections when they seem obviously important (e.g., questions about evolution, gender choices/feelings, Book of Mormon has much to contribute, etc.)
 - c. Doesn't make use of/apply/explore connections when gospel does come up
 - d. Doesn't allow students to explore the meaning of the scripture or quote; assumes the meaning is transparent
 - e. Doesn't even invite prayer
6. Brings up gospel inappropriately/poorly
- a. Raises theme of agency but doesn't really discuss or address
 - b. Puts a quote on board but doesn't explore/apply
 - c. Uses quote from scripture/church leaders out of context
 - d. Introduce gospel even when doesn't apply well
 - e. Seems to be bringing up gospel for the ratings rather than because it is sincere
 - f. Hymns in non-religion class may seem out of place
 - g. It doesn't feel sincere or from the heart

- h. Doesn't walk the talk (not a good example)
- i. Uses gospel or quotes from Church leaders to shut down conversation:
 - i. "Take it or leave it" interpretation of doctrine/Church authority's statement
 - ii. Implies that questions or disagreements demonstrate lack of faith or support for Church or its leaders