

The Zion University Reverie: A Quantitative and Qualitative Assessment of BYU's Academic Climate

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ON JUNE 5TH, 1996, Assistant Professor Gail Houston of the Brigham Young University English Department was denied tenure and promotion at BYU.¹ In compliance with typical university procedures, Professor Houston quickly appealed the decision.² Members of the BYU chapter of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP), upon hearing the reasons for Houston's dismissal, became concerned that Dr. Houston's academic freedom may have been violated and subsequently contacted the national AAUP for assistance in handling the matter appropriately.³ Within several weeks, the association's general secretary approved an investigation of the status of academic freedom at BYU.⁴ In their eventual January 23rd-25th, 1997, visit, Professors Linda Pratt of the University of Nebraska and Bill Heywood of Cornell College met with over 120 faculty, administrators, and students as part of the investigation.⁵

1. L. R. Pratt and C.W. Heywood, "Academic Freedom and Tenure: Brigham Young University" [electronic document] (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1998- [cited April 1998]). Available from <http://ucs.byu.edu/BIOAG/Botany/Rushforth/www/AAUP/natreport.htm>.

2. *Ibid.*

3. S. Abbott, B. Evenson, S. Howe, D. Jeffery, S. Rushforth, and B. Siegfried, "Report on the BYU Campus Visit by the National AAUP Investigative Committee" [electronic document] (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1998- [cited April 1998]). Available from <http://ucs.byu.edu/BIOAG/Botany/Rushforth/www/AAUP/invst.htm>

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

The AAUP investigative committee eventually published a lengthy report in the September/October 1997 issue of *Academe* (the AAUP's journal) with the following conclusion: Much more than an isolated violation of academic freedom, the investigating committee's inquiries into complaints at BYU have revealed a widespread pattern of infringements on academic freedom in a climate of oppression and fear of reprisals.⁶

As a result, debate between some of the university's faculty and several members of the administration over the status of BYU's academic climate has steadily increased. University leadership has taken several steps to counter the critical AAUP report. First, it has sought to defend its previous decisions by affirming that Houston's denial of promotion and tenure was not a simple case of dismissing someone who advocated unpopular ideas. Rather, they have argued that Houston engaged in a "pattern of publicly contradicting fundamental Church doctrine and deliberately attacking the Church."⁷ In a recent issue of *Brigham Young Magazine*, Associate Academic Vice President Jim Gordon reported that Houston "publicly endorsed the practice of praying to Heavenly Mother," and he implied that this was one of the reasons for her dismissal.⁸ He also said that "some of her students complained about her behavior in class."⁹ However, details in the AAUP report contradicted the implication that students disliked Houston. Houston, the AAUP reported, had an average student evaluation rating of 6.35 out of 7—an uncommonly high score.¹⁰

Second, the university has also chosen to undermine the significance of the AAUP's review. Both Alan Wilkins (the Academic Vice President) and Jim Gordon have repeatedly emphasized that only 5 percent of all professors in the United States are AAUP members.¹¹ Gordon has also drawn attention to the fact that, while it may censure a university's administration, the AAUP is not an accrediting body.¹²

Third, some members of the administration have not only under-

6. Pratt and Heywood, "Academic Freedom and Tenure."

7. "The Issue of Academic Freedom: an Interview with Jim Gordon." *Brigham Young Magazine* (Winter 1997): 30-31.

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. Pratt and Heywood, "Academic Freedom and Tenure."

11. "The Issue of Academic Freedom: an Interview with Jim Gordon." See also: A. L. Wilkins, "Campus Memorandum from Alan L. Wilkins to BYU Faculty and Staff, September 12, 1997" [electronic document] (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1998- [cited April 1998]). Available from <http://ucs.byu.edu/BIOAG/Botany/Rushforth/www/AAUP/wilkinsmem.htm>.

12. "The Issue of Academic Freedom."

mined the significance of the AAUP's judgement, but they have publicly speculated as to its motives. In a memorandum distributed to BYU faculty and staff, Vice President Wilkins revealed his belief that the AAUP has a "goal to impose a secular model on religious colleges and universities."¹³ Gordon has echoed this suspicion by suggesting that the AAUP's censure of both BYU and the Catholic University of America exposes their "antipathy toward religious colleges and universities."¹⁴ Of course, the administration's expressed negativity toward the AAUP and the AAUP's severe evaluation of BYU do little to prove whether BYU's academic climate is really satisfactory or whether this climate is maintained ethically. Realizing this, the BYU chapter of the AAUP has, in turn, criticized the administration's condemnation of the national AAUP. Professors who compose the BYU chapter of the AAUP have suggested that Alan Wilkins's and university President Merrill Bateman's statements implying that the AAUP and the media are conspiring to secularize BYU manifest "a certain paranoia."¹⁵ In another letter from the same group, several professors, apparently perceiving themselves on the defensive, expressed their hope that they would not be branded "advocates of the adversary" (a designation President Bateman used in a newspaper article to describe those who opposed the university's mission) as they sought improvements at BYU.¹⁶

In the midst of this debate, many of us in the BYU community wondered what BYU professors as a whole might have to say about these issues if they were given sufficient voice. In my judgment, an assessment of professors' attitudes toward the academic climate at BYU might tell us significantly more about BYU than either an evaluation by the AAUP or a series of memoranda from the university's administration. But strangely, in the midst of this controversy, no independent assessment of professors' attitudes had been conducted. Or, if such an assessment was ever conducted, the results have not been made public, so statements regarding BYU's academic climate have been tossed to the public without empirical support. Eventually, I determined that a careful collection of both quantitative and qualitative data could prove instrumental in revealing

13. Wilkins, "Campus Memorandum."

14. "The Issue of Academic Freedom: an Interview with Jim Gordon."

15. S. Abbott, G. Bryner, W. Evenson, S. Howe, D. Jeffrey, S. Rushforth, and B. Siegfried, "Memo to BYU Faculty, Staff, and Administrators from the BYU Chapter of the AAUP, 15 September 1997" [electronic document] (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1998- [cited April 1998]). Available from: <http://ucs.byu.edu/BIOAG/Botany/Rushforth/www/AAUP/facmemo997.htm>.

16. S. Abbott, G. Bryner, W. Evenson, S. Howe, D. Jeffrey, S. Rushforth, and B. Siegfried "Memo to BYU faculty, staff . . . 15 September 1997" [electronic document] (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1998- [cited April 1998]). Available from: <http://ucs.byu.edu/BIOAG/Botany/Rushforth/www/AAUP/facmemo997.htm>.

the opinions of BYU professors and, secondarily, provide some flavor of the strengths and shortcomings of BYU's academic environment. Furthermore, I supposed that if BYU's academic climate was in need of improvement, a carefully conducted study of this sort might prove helpful in suggesting goals for the university's progress.

METHOD

I randomly selected 295 BYU instructors holding the titles professor, associate professor, or assistant professor from a 1997-98 faculty list and invited them to respond to a 15-item questionnaire (see Table 1 for questions). Faculty from all departments (including the ROTC program, the law school, etc.) listed in the 1997-98 academic catalog were selected to participate. After collecting the responses, I eliminated one survey item from analysis because of its ambiguity, so only 14 items are analyzed and discussed here. For simplicity's sake and greater control, faculty holding titles other than those stated above, such as professor emeritus, associate clinical professor, research professor, part-time lecturer, etc., were not invited to participate. To prevent any possible complications, department chairpersons were not invited to participate either. Although this is unfortunate since department chairpersons might have a great deal of insight into the issues explored here, a negative reaction from any one in this position might threaten the rate of response from their entire department. The 295 faculty who received the surveys represent approximately 25% of all BYU professors who hold the three standard titles mentioned above.

To encourage adequate representation from different academic fields, I stratified the sample of potential respondents by department. Paralleling the general composition of my sample, I invited approximately 25% of the faculty in each department to respond. I also corrected the sample to insure that every department with 12 or more faculty members had at least one representative from each professorial rank. For example, in cases where two professors and one associate professor had been selected to represent a department, I randomly eliminated one of the professors and randomly selected an assistant professor in her/his place.

I addressed and stuffed 295 envelopes with the survey and a self-addressed, stamped envelope. All of these surveys were delivered either directly to the professors' offices or to their mailboxes over the course of four days. I received the returned surveys in a post office box over the course of four weeks.

While I authored the survey, I asked several friends to review it and point out any biases I had overlooked. These survey reviewers hold undergraduate and graduate social science degrees from BYU and have par-

anticipated in survey research before. I state this seemingly superfluous detail for the benefit of the small number of respondents who were apparently angered by the questionnaire and questioned my research competence. Of course, claiming bias in questionnaires is a fairly typical method that assumptive respondents use to belittle researchers engaged in controversial research (e.g., see Ester Yu's March 23rd, 1998, *Daily Universe* article for another example of a BYU survey that many faculty dismissed as biased).¹⁷

The survey I used has a forced-choice format (meaning that "I don't know" or "not sure" responses were not permitted). I hoped that this would make the data more meaningful by preventing respondents from ignoring subtle inclinations that they had in either direction. Each survey item was a statement leading in one direction or the other. I assumed that respondents would have an easier time expressing their level of agreement if each statement clearly advocated one side of the issue only. Of the 12 statements that ask respondents for their level of agreement, 7 might be interpreted as favorable to BYU leadership, and 5 might be interpreted as unfavorable to BYU leadership. Hence, the 12 statements used represent a near balance in statement directionality.

Some of the questionnaire items include quotations from other documents. The final item includes a quotation from the previously mentioned AAUP report. All other quotations were extracted from BYU's own academic freedom document.

To acknowledge BYU's position, I should make clear that the university did not approve this project. I conducted this study using my own finances, interest, and education as a social scientist. At the outset, it seemed unwise to try to approve the study through typical BYU committee reviews, and the reactions of a few angry respondents and two letters from the university's research office confirmed my doubts that I could ever conduct a fair assessment with the university's supervision. Hopeful of seeing the study through to fruition, however, I made sincere efforts to follow the ethical guidelines necessary for this type of research without endangering the anonymity of my respondents.

RESULTS

Quantitative:

Out of 295 distributed questionnaires, 221 were returned, representing a phenomenal response rate of 75%. As noted in Table 1, only 10% of the respondents surveyed were female. While this small female represen-

17. Ester Yu, "Faculty Question Survey," *Daily Universe*, 23 March 1998, Campus section.

TABLE 1.
 Percentages of Strong Agreement, Agreement, Disagreement,
 and Strong Disagreement Sorted by Item

<i>Item Content</i>	<i>Percentages</i>					
	<i>Male</i>			<i>Female</i>		
a. Sex [of respondent]:	88.7 (n = 199)			10.0 (n = 22)		
	<i>Yes</i>			<i>No</i>		
b. I have familiarized myself with the AAUP's report on the investigation they conducted at BYU.	91.9			7.2		
	<i>SA</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>[A]</i>	<i>[D][†]</i>
1. The administration has given adequate attention to the academic freedom concerns that arose after the AAUP's (American Association of University Professors) investigation at BYU.	72.4	13.6	6.8	5.9	86.0	12.7
2. I am satisfied with the methods that BYU Professors currently have to express their concerns to the administration.	68.8	15.8	7.2	7.7	84.6	14.9
3. Sometimes I feel that if I speak out for changes at BYU, I may limit my opportunities for continuation or advancement here.	7.7	10.4	14.0	66.5	18.1	80.5
4. Sexual discrimination probably occurs more at BYU than it does at most other universities.	2.7	8.6	21.7	66.1	11.3	87.8
5. BYU professors should not conduct even sound research that may draw into question church or university procedures.	54.3	11.8	21.7	6.8	66.1	28.5
6. The BYU administration adequately discusses and negotiates pertinent policy issues with faculty.	57.0	23.1	10.0	9.5	80.1	19.5
7. BYU leadership ensures a university environment where I have "the freedom to discuss and advocate controversial and unpopular ideas."	55.7	17.2	15.8	7.2	72.9	23.0
8. The ecclesiastical endorsement policy required of LDS faculty at BYU contradicts the "posture of trust" that university leadership has advocated.	5.4	7.2	14.5	71.5	12.6	86.0

	SA	A	D	SD	[A]	[D] [†]
9. The phrase "... expression ... that contradicts or opposes, rather than analyzes or discusses, fundamental church doctrine or policy ..." clearly delineates what BYU professors may and may not express.	10.4	25.3	11.8	50.2	35.7	62.0
10. At BYU, hiring and rank and continuation procedures are conducted as fairly as can reasonably be expected.	67.4	21.3	5.9	5.4	88.7	11.3
11. "Much more than an isolated violation of academic freedom, [at BYU] there is a widespread pattern of infringements on academic freedom in a climate of oppression and fear of reprisals."	4.1	3.6	11.8	80.1	7.7	91.9
12. Lack of faculty academic freedom is probably one of BYU's most significant problems.	2.3	6.3	13.6	76.9	8.6	90.5

† The [A] column represents the combination of agreement and strong agreement percentages from the first and second columns. Similarly, the [D] column represents the combination of disagreement and strong disagreement percentages from the third and fourth columns. Where row percentages do not sum to 100%, some respondents had left the item blank.

TABLE 2.
Significant Sex Differences on Select Items

<i>Item Content</i>	<i>Percentages[†]</i>			
	<i>Male</i>		<i>Female</i>	
	<i>A</i>	<i>D</i>	<i>A</i>	<i>D</i>
Sexual discrimination probably occurs more at BYU than it does at most other universities.	10.3a	89.7a	23.8a	76.1a
At BYU, hiring and rank and continuation procedures are conducted as fairly as can reasonably be expected.	90.8b	9.2b	77.2b	22.7b
"Much more than an isolated violation of academic freedom, [at BYU] there is a widespread pattern of infringements on academic freedom in a climate of oppression and fear of reprisals."	6.2	93.9	13.6	86.4

† In this table, as in columns 5 and 6 of Table 1, agreement represents the combination of strong agreement and agreement as reported in Table 1, while disagreement represents the combination of disagreement and strong disagreement. Where row percentages do not sum to 100%, some respondents had left the item blank (a. $p = .08$, b. $p = .05$).

tation may seem to jeopardize the validity of the sample, 10% is not exceedingly distant from the actual percentage of female faculty at BYU (17%, according to the BYU Fact File).¹⁸ Also, it is likely that a noticeable portion of the 17% reported by BYU hold alternate titles (part-time lecturer, etc.) that I excluded from my sample. Hence, I am confident that my random selection of respondents resulted in an adequate representation of both female and male faculty holding assistant professor, associate professor, and professor titles.

The response data are summarized in Table 1 to demonstrate the number of respondents who answered "strongly agree," "agree," "disagree," or "strongly disagree." I chose to present the data in percentages so that the data are quickly interpretable by a wide audience. Table 2 outlines notable response differences between sexes on 3 items. The between-sex difference on the first item in Table 2 (related to sexual discrimination) was marginally significant ($2 = 3.06$, $df = 1$, $p = .08$), but the second (related to fairness in hiring and rank decisions) was even more so ($2 = 3.85$, $df = 1$, $p = .05$). The difference related to the third item in this table was not statistically significant ($2 = 1.74$, $df = 1$, $p = .19$).

The intriguing differences presented in Table 2 will be discussed in further detail later.

Qualitative:

All respondents were encouraged in their instructions to write helpful comments on the back of their questionnaires. I have presented these comments below and have categorized them by item number. (Of 12 items, numbers 9 and 12 did not elicit helpful comments.) Other miscellaneous and humorous comments are listed last in the section labeled "General Comments." I have included every written comment I received, although some were edited (i.e., I retained the main ideas and details, but eliminated redundant or unnecessary explanations). The only comments I have totally excluded are a few complaints about my questionnaire and several insults I received.

I have a number of reasons for supplementing the survey data with these added remarks. Hopefully, the significance of these issues for many BYU professors will become evident as my readers examine the respondents' comments. Also, many of the comments may serve as suggestions for improvement in administrative procedures, faculty attitudes, or both.

I should forewarn my readers and ask them to be cautious in their consideration of the generalizability of any individual remarks; each

18. "BYU Faculty, Staff, and Administrative Personnel," *BYU Fact File* [electronic document]. Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1998- [cited April 1998]. Available from: <http://www.byu.edu/news/factfile/faculty.html>.

comment is best understood in the context of the quantitative data presented earlier.

Item #1: "The administration has given adequate attention to the academic freedom concerns that arose after the AAUP's (American Association of University Professors) investigation at BYU."

1. "The administration's only visible efforts have been justification of their actions rather than solving the problems that resulted in the AAUP investigation."

Item #2: "I am satisfied with the methods that BYU professors currently have to express their concerns to the administration."

1. "There are no methods!"
2. "The FAC [faculty advisory committee] is a slow-moving bureaucracy with no more than advisory authority. It should always be used, but trying to express concerns now by any other way is viewed as disloyal."

Item #3: "Sometimes I feel that if I speak out for changes at BYU, I may limit my opportunities for continuation or advancement here."

1. "I can honestly say that being sensitive to the politics of the administration was far more an issue for me in my previous faculty position than it is here at BYU . . . The politics and policies of the administration is [sic] always an issue regardless of one's place of employment. When we make a decision to join an institution, we have made a decision to abide by certain policies. If I were not content with the policies here, I would find another university that had a better fit for me . . . That isn't to say the administrative policies are perfect at BYU, but they aren't at other universities either."
2. "Anyone who does not have continuing status or wishes to be promoted in rank is advised to keep their [sic] mouth shut and be viewed as a loyal supporter of the status quo."

Item #4: "Sexual discrimination probably occurs more at BYU than it does at most other universities."

1. "As a woman, if I aspired to a high-level administration [sic] position, I would probably leave and go elsewhere, because leadership here is intrinsically linked to the priesthood and Church leadership. One should expect in an institution such as BYU the mirroring of Church doctrine and policy."
2. "Curiously, your missive follows directly upon the 'closure' of a gender matter I was forced to bring to the attention of certain BYU officials. Official results of the 'investigation' record that I imagined everything."
3. "The view that LDS mothers should not work outside of the home is an added burden."

4. "I expect that sexual discrimination at BYU is probably comparable to that at other universities. Sexual harassment, however, occurs more at other institutions—I have been there and heard the comments and seen the joking by both genders about both genders."

Item #5: "BYU professors should not publish soundly conducted research that may draw into question church or university procedures."

1. "Responsible research should not reach such a conclusion."
2. "... I suppose if I were asked not to publish my research, I would be disappointed, but I would trust that there is a good reason and that those in authority would carefully discuss with me the implications of my research and that my findings would be addressed at some level. It seems to me that those faculty who may have been disappointed in this regard have, as a priority, an axe to grind rather than supporting the mission of BYU."
3. "Those [so] inclined should move on and not draw their livelihood from sacred tithing funds."

Item #6: "The BYU administration adequately discusses and negotiates pertinent policy issues with faculty."

1. "I object neither to the written policy nor the standard, only the way it is implemented."
2. "After negotiation and approval of the policy on temple worthiness, the Board of Trustees unilaterally changed the implementation procedure without any consultation, rendering useless months of careful work. Then, when administration implements policy differently than had been expected, there is no adequate way to handle problems. Policy is one thing but implementation is more important since the administration is answerable only to the Board of Trustees rather than to the faculty as well. There is no faculty governance at BYU! Faculty are just employees."

Item #7: "BYU leadership ensures a university environment where I have the 'freedom to discuss and advocate controversial and unpopular ideas.'"

1. "No, and that is good!"
2. "Why should it?"
3. "'Advocate' too nebulous"
4. "[Yes,] such as religion and God."
5. "Should we have a university where one could promote drug addiction?"
6. "Faculty are free to discuss and advocate whatever they wish, as long as they are prepared to go elsewhere."
7. "I found the BYU leadership to be a lot more open-minded than the AAUP investigators!"

8. "I have taught at state universities in two other states. It has been my experience that BYU offers more academic freedom than other universities. BYU faculty are free to discuss much in the classroom that would be censored at other universities."

Item #8: "The ecclesiastical endorsement policy required of LDS faculty at BYU contradicts the "posture . . . of trust" that university leadership has advocated."

1. "There is a total lack of trust on the part of the administration towards faculty."
2. "The written policy is fine, but interpretation and implementation are wholly vested in the administration and the Board of Trustees and, thus, open to capricious action based on rumor and incomplete information. BYU professors must always assume that someone will be offended by their work and complain to the Brethren. One person I know was called in by their Stake President to justify a paper that defended the church's position, but some did not understand it this way. This creates a climate of self-censorship which prevents much useful work."

Item #10: "At BYU, hiring and rank and continuation procedures are conducted as fairly as can reasonably be expected."

1. "The review process is never fair at any university. The departmental reviews by those who personally know the candidate are mostly fair. College and university committees who reverse lower decisions based on ignorance, hear-say, and prejudice are the biggest problems."

Item #11: "Much more than an isolated violation of academic freedom [at BYU], there is a widespread pattern of infringements on academic freedom in a climate of oppression and fear of reprisals."

1. "This is patently ridiculous."
2. "I can honestly say that I have more academic freedom at BYU than I had in my previous appointment. . . I feel much freer now to talk about values because I can include spiritual and religious values, and I can share more of my own personal feelings. BYU is a good fit for me."
3. "The AAUP conclusion is no surprise. The surprise is the administration's attempt to belittle the AAUP (whose recommendations they have carefully followed for years) rather than solve the problems."

General Comments:

1. "Which enemy of the university helped you put this together?"
2. "I hope you can make your results and these comments available

- to the BYU administration. Under the present climate, faculty members are not able to register their opinions and complaints without fear of reprisal, or at least being viewed as disloyal.”
3. “After 31 years teaching at BYU and 4 years at [a state university], I am totally satisfied and pleased with BYU.”
 4. “Do you have an axe to grind?”
 5. “I feel perfectly free to do my research and indeed well supported by the university. However, there is a severe lack of communication between faculty and administration. I do feel restrained in the opinions I can voice relative to the performance of the administration . . . To me there are two main issues: 1) lack of trust by the administration of the faculty and 2) lack of communication between faculty and administration. I can give examples of each. To purchase a computer one needs 8 signatures on a purchase order form. This is even with a researcher’s own grant money. Clearly a lack of trust.”
 6. “Private problems do not need public airing.”
 7. “If you don’t get the inflammatory results you want, I assume you won’t publish [this study] . . .”
 8. “Many administrators consider their procedures church doctrine.”
 9. “BYU still has many advantages. My department has no problems related to academic freedom, but many of my friends are looking to find positions elsewhere.”
 10. “I was a tenured faculty member at [a state university] before coming here. They have a proud tradition of academic freedom. I feel as much or more academic freedom here. That BYU is criticized by the AAUP tells me more about the AAUP’s arrogance and alienation from principles of fairness, tolerance, and objectivity than it does about BYU’s status. That BYU occasionally fails to grant continuing status to probationary faculty who fail to merit it is a sign of BYU’s growing maturity and higher expectations . . . I feel that the expectations of faithfulness and loyalty found here are appropriate in light of the institution’s dependence on mine and others’ tithing, as well as the expectations of students and parents of students who come here.”
 11. “Although my answers may reflect somewhat negatively on BYU, my responses stem mainly from a general feeling rather than so much a personal one in some instances. In other words, I have been relatively little affected by lack of academic freedom at BYU when other colleagues have been greatly affected.”
 12. “Having been on the faculty of three very ‘prestigious’ universities before joining the BYU faculty, I have more academic free-

- dom here than any of the other three universities. No one has told me what my research interests should be here at BYU. They did at the other universities!"
13. "I have been on the faculty of 3 other institutions. BYU is by far my favorite work place."
 14. "One concern I have is that there are several members of the administration who seem to stretch or bend the truth to fit their own agendas. Too much is done in secret."
 15. "The problem with some faculty is they don't know how to present and discuss. Too many want to have all their positions taught dogmatically and fully accepted and teach that way."
 16. "We have several real turkeys on campus."
 17. "... Fortunately, I feel comfortable with my faculty position. I feel respected and valued by my Chair, Dean, and Academic Vice President. I also feel that they would listen carefully to anything I had to say, but that is because they know that I am completely supportive of the mission of BYU."
 18. "The belly-achers should teach somewhere else."
 19. "The problem of academic freedom is mostly a problem of the administration being out of touch with the faculty. This is expected in a top-down hierarchy, but the administration can easily take steps to improve the situation. They think the problem is a few dissidents when it is actually the way we treat each other."
 20. "I believe that BYU has the procedures and the mechanism to provide academic freedom. I also believe that its mission can be interpreted as defending and promoting academic freedom. There are, however, several problems with academic freedom at BYU. One, there is a significant minority that believes that any "new" or discomfoting information will bring down the university and the church. Second, there are administrators who see their main function as being gate-keepers who stand between the integrity of the church and the infidels seeking to destroy. Thus, everything is seen in that light. Third, there is a large group of students and professors who are intimidated by what they believe will happen to them, and they create an environment of fear. Fourth, there is a minority of professors who have a social, political, doctrinal, or personal conflict with the church and they use every opportunity to embarrass the church. . . . These four elements then create a dilemma for what I believe is the largest group at BYU—those who believe in academic freedom that is responsible and honest!"

DISCUSSION

In this section, I will review several important trends evident in the data, consider the limitations of this study, raise a few considerations regarding sundry perceptions of BYU's academic climate, and suggest several additional questions that should be addressed in future research.

A Response to Some of the Preliminary Assessments of BYU's Academic Climate:

In light of the results reported here, it is difficult to believe either of the extreme notions of "a widespread pattern of infringements on academic freedom" or "a zion university"¹⁹ with respect to the academic climate at BYU. As one who put considerable time and finances into this study, I feel the need neither to exaggerate the challenges present at BYU nor to ignore the reality of problems that deserve more attention than they have received in the past.

The data presented in this article provide little support for a perception among BYU faculty of "a widespread pattern of infringements on academic freedom in a climate of oppression and fear of reprisals." What the data do seem to suggest is that the majority of BYU professors do not, in a general sense, feel that their academic freedom is restricted or that academic freedom is a significant problem at BYU. A minority, however, does report perceiving some instances of academic freedom violation, and comments indicate some agreement over what these problems are. Clearly, the definition of academic freedom varies among respondents; however, a notable minority of respondents (23%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had the freedom to "discuss and advocate controversial and unpopular ideas"—and this very notion is a part of the definition of academic freedom that is provided in BYU's own academic freedom document.

Response Differences Between the Sexes:

As summarized in Table 2, three particularly interesting differences emerged between men's and women's responses. The first two items, when considered in concert, might be understood as a measure of the perceived level of fairness in advancement (or promotion) decisions made about women at BYU. With the two items considered together, these data support the dismaying conclusion that nearly a quarter of BYU's female faculty perceives a lack of fairness in hiring and advance-

19. Bateman, Merrill. "A Zion University and the Search for Truth," *Brigham Young Magazine* (Winter 1997): 25.

ment decisions made on their behalf. There are at least two ways to consider this finding. First, a quarter may be high or low depending on how it compares to similar data from other universities. Second, a quarter is too high regardless of what is occurring at other universities. For those who believe that data from other universities should be considered before interpreting this percentage, an avenue of telling research is open.

A Climate of Self-Censorship?

Through the many interesting results to emerge from the data, hints of faculty self-censorship also deserve further comment. At least one respondent felt that what he or she perceived as a climate of self-censorship prevented "much useful work." Another respondent, commenting on the appropriateness of conducting research which may draw into question church or university procedures, implied that self-censorship should be expected: "Those [so] inclined should move on and not draw their livelihood from sacred tithing funds."

Indeed, 66.1% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that BYU professors should not conduct research that calls into question church or university procedures. If this item is representative of a pattern of self-censorship, the academic climate at BYU becomes a little more complex than some might have realized. This is an important avenue for future study on these issues. How prevalent is self-censorship at BYU, and what sorts of ideas might be restricted? If self-censorship is common in BYU professors' work, does it influence their scientific or creative as well as their religious thought? Is such self-censorship beneficial or detrimental to the university's mission? All of these are intriguing questions that, if addressed, might clarify the nature of BYU's academic climate and spark an intriguing dialogue on the ethical considerations associated with self-censorship at religious universities.

Other Limitations of This Research and Suggestions for Future Study:

Because I did not want my respondents to feel jeopardized in any way, they did not indicate either their professorial rank or their department on the survey. As a reviewer of this article pointed out, it is extremely likely that both the department that one belongs to and one's academic rank strongly influence faculty perceptions of academic freedom problems at BYU. For example, do faculty in the humanities and biological and social sciences hold a poorer perception of BYU's academic climate than those in mathematics or business? This question and others related to it could illuminate some avenues of improvement in faculty-administration relations at the university.

Also in need of attention is the reason or reasons that women perceive greater unfairness than men in hiring and advancement decisions at BYU. As suggested earlier, it may also be helpful to compare data from BYU to that of other universities when considering women's perceptions of the university's academic climate.

In fact, most (if not all) of the data reported here are difficult to interpret in the absence of similar data from other universities. Many will undoubtedly read this report and wonder how BYU professors' responses might compare to those from professors elsewhere. On the other hand, many other readers may interpret these findings through comparison to some institutional ideal--perhaps a mental conception of a "Zion-like" university.

Is BYU Progressing in the Fulfillment of Its Mission?

In my judgement, it is naive to suggest that BYU has graduated above the problems that are typical of faculty-administration relations at most other universities. Even if there are only certain groups that appear to have been affected, there is some degree of agreement that BYU, in spite of its affiliation with the church, has from time to time strained or even violated the academic freedom of its faculty. However, in any dialogue concerning BYU's academic climate, one must also acknowledge the obvious fact that the majority of BYU professors do not feel that BYU has serious academic freedom problems.

Recently, an issue of *Brigham Young Magazine* carried a telling script under a photograph of a statue of Brigham Young on the cover.²⁰ Unlike the title of the cover story within the magazine which reads "A Zion University and the Search for Truth," the script on the magazine's cover reads "*Toward a Zion University*" [italics mine].²¹ BYU is, of course, continuously growing. It has not arrived at some ideal, and some would even question whether it is growing toward an ideal. Given the stakes for this institution, however, those of us who care about its future would do well to consider what BYU is becoming and by what means it is getting there. These two matters involve choices for which administrators, faculty, alumni, parents, and students should all feel responsible.

20. *Brigham Young Magazine*, Winter 1997.

21. Bateman, "A Zion University," 25.