

By Travis Searle

Seminaries and Institutes

In five simple words to his mother, “I have learned for myself” (Joseph Smith—History 1:20), the Prophet Joseph Smith taught a powerful lesson. Elder David A. Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said that this “simple scriptural phrase is something that should be embedded in each of our minds and hearts.”<sup>1</sup> Because a central purpose of Heavenly Father’s plan of happiness is to learn,<sup>2</sup> seminaries and institutes of religion have invited students to elevate their learning to learn for themselves the truths of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

So what are students being invited to do to elevate their learning?

Previously, students could graduate from seminary or institute by meeting the attendance requirement and receiving an endorsement from their bishop or branch president. Students now must meet two additional requirements: for each course, read the assigned scriptures and pass two learning assessments.

#### **“I have learned for myself” by reading the assigned scriptures for the course**

Seminary teachers have been asked to help the “youth do more on their own to understand the doctrines of Christ” and to “expect them to come to classes prepared and ready to engage in testifying and learning.”<sup>3</sup>

As students read the assigned scriptures for the course, they are seeking learning by faith. In doing so, they come to understand more clearly Heavenly Father’s plan of salvation. They develop “more confidence in the word of God and in their ability to feel the influence of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>4</sup> And they begin to feel the stirrings of the Spirit that lead to deeper conversion.

#### **“I have learned for myself” by passing two learning assessments during each course**

In a vision, Nephi was asked by an angel, “What beholdest thou?” (1 Nephi 11:14). This question prompted Nephi

*Seminary students have some new requirements for graduation. Here’s how the change is leading to greater spiritual growth.*

# HOW SEMINARY IS Elevating LEARNING





## FOR MORE INFORMATION

See an article on the same topic for youth on page 26 of this month's *New Era*.



about and turned it into something great and a positive experience. . . . It brought such a great spirit of learning.”

Students are encouraged to retake learning assessments if necessary. One mother said that her son did not pass one of the assessments the first time, but the seminary teacher had provided a study guide, so she asked her son if they could review the guide together. She said, “We did it as our family home evening. Going through the study guide together was a neat experience and brought us closer together. It was a spiritual experience. . . . I am glad he didn’t succeed the first time.”

### “I have learned for myself” by participating in institute

When students graduate from seminary, they are invited to continue learning for themselves by participating in an institute of religion program or religion classes at a Church university. There, students will participate in four new cornerstone courses: Jesus Christ and the Everlasting Gospel, Foundations of the Restoration, the Teachings and Doctrine of the Book of Mormon, and the Eternal Family, which are being introduced in 2015 and 2016. These courses will help young adults apply gospel principles to their current circumstances. Institute teachers are also beginning to implement the new graduation requirements, which will provide even greater opportunities for students to learn about the Lord and His gospel.

By accepting the invitation to elevate their learning, students will find that “learning for [themselves] that the restored gospel of Jesus Christ is true can be one of the greatest and most joyful experiences in life.”<sup>5</sup> ■

#### NOTES

1. David A. Bednar, “A Discussion with Elder David A. Bednar” (video, Seminaries and Institutes of Religion satellite broadcast, Aug. 2, 2011).
2. See David A. Bednar, “Learning to Love Learning,” *Ensign*, Feb. 2010, 26.
3. Bonnie L. Oscarson, “Greater Expectations” (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion satellite broadcast, Aug. 5, 2014), [lds.org/broadcasts](http://lds.org/broadcasts).
4. Paul V. Johnson, in “A Panel Discussion with Elder Dallin H. Oaks” (Seminaries and Institutes of Religion global faculty meeting, May 2014), [si.lds.org](http://si.lds.org).
5. Craig C. Christensen, “I Know These Things of Myself,” *Ensign*, Nov. 2014, 50.

to evaluate what he had learned. Similarly, the learning assessments in seminary help students evaluate what they have learned. After taking a learning assessment, one student said, “I was looking forward to it because I wanted to see what I had taken out of seminary.”

The learning assessments have resulted in something of a culture shift. Teachers are learning to implement the learning assessments in ways that deepen conversion. And students are learning to work more closely with their teachers in ways that are blessing the lives of both. Teachers are also learning to accommodate students with specific needs or disabilities so that all students who desire may meet this new requirement.

Teachers are discovering that a great way to use the learning assessments is to review them with students after they have completed them. In the words of one student, “The review [after the learning assessment] . . . took something that a lot of people were thinking negative