

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING AND TEACHING LITERARY AND VISUAL MATERIALS AT BYU

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The mission of Brigham Young University is “to assist individuals in their quest for perfection and eternal life” by providing “a period of intensive learning in a stimulating setting. . . enlightened by living prophets and sustained by those moral virtues which characterize the life and teachings of the Son of God.” In such an environment, BYU students “should receive a broad university education,” enabling them to “understand important ideas in their own cultural tradition as well as that of others, and establish clear standards of intellectual integrity” (The Mission of Brigham Young University). A BYU education should strengthen testimony, enlarge the mind, build character, and inspire life-long learning and service (“The Aims of a BYU Education”).

In keeping with the mission and aims of BYU, faculty should strive to select and teach “words of wisdom . . . out of the best books” (D&C 88:118) as well as visual images drawn from the best media. The best verbal and visual texts can powerfully communicate important ideas and sharpen critical faculties necessary to establish clear intellectual, aesthetic, and moral standards. At the same time, some of the best books and the best art deal with difficult issues and present them in thought-provoking ways. Faculty should use care to select works appropriate to BYU’s mission and teach them in ways that invite the Spirit of God into the classroom. It is important to help students not only to understand the world but to stand firm against its evils—prepared to respond to its challenges with love, testimony, wisdom, eloquence, and inspired artistry of their own. To this end, faculty are encouraged to teach literary and visual texts in the context of gospel values, to promote informed analysis, open discussion, and opportunities for students to disagree with both texts and teachers. In such ways, faculty prepare students for life-long learning by helping them develop their own discriminating, gospel-based standards for selecting and evaluating literary and visual materials.

In this process, it sometimes happens that faculty and students may disagree about the appropriateness of a particular work, or that an assignment may have an unintended negative impact on a particular student. In an effort to prevent these difficulties insofar as possible and to deal with such conflicts as may arise, the university has adopted the following guidelines for faculty, departments, and students:

Responsibilities of Faculty:

1. To choose both required and optional works with care and in keeping with the stated mission and aims of BYU, and to strive to create a climate which invites sensitivity to the Spirit of God and which recognizes that spiritual sensitivities will differ among individuals.
2. To read or view materials before showing or assigning them—realizing that, as is the case with film, MPAA and similar ratings may be unreliable guides.

3. Not to require students to view unedited R-rated movies, as a matter not simply of content but of obedience to prophetic counsel.
4. To provide a context for the study of literary and visual materials that will strengthen students' critical awareness of relevant historical, cultural, moral, and aesthetic issues—thus enabling them to understand the larger purposes served by studying works that may include potentially disturbing elements.
5. To respond to student concerns with openness and respect and, where feasible, to provide alternative assignments to students who have reasonable objections to an assigned work.

Responsibilities of Departments:

1. To ensure that assigned materials match course objectives and are consonant with department and university missions.
2. To guide new faculty in designing courses that are appropriate to a BYU environment and to counsel with faculty who repeatedly choose inappropriate materials or who present materials in inappropriate ways.
3. To assist students and faculty in resolving disputes about assignments or teaching styles, and to seek to avert reprisals or unreasonable demands by students or faculty.

Responsibilities of Students:

1. To make a good-faith effort to understand and accommodate the legitimate purposes of the course, remembering BYU's mission to provide a "broad university education" that is at once "spiritually strengthening," "intellectually enlarging," and "character building."
2. In the event that a particular assignment seems objectionable, to discuss the matter with the instructor and, if necessary, request an alternative assignment.
3. If the matter cannot be resolved with the instructor, to follow the prescribed procedure for dealing with concerns.

Resolving Concerns:

Students should first take their concerns to the teacher and attempt to resolve the matter together. Entered into with humility, openness, and mutual respect, these discussions can be an important learning experience for students and instructors alike. Students who feel that their concerns have not been satisfactorily handled by the instructor, or who feel unable to speak to the instructor, may take their concerns to the department chair. In some cases, the department chair may require a written statement of complaint. If the concern cannot be resolved at the department level, it may be referred to the college dean. Normally, a written statement will be required for any complaint that goes beyond the

department level. All parties in these matters should cultivate a spirit of patience and understanding. Approached in such a spirit, discussions about the propriety of teaching particular literary and visual materials can become occasions for serious reflection on what it means to study and teach academic subjects with the Spirit of God.