

LDS Growth Encyclopedia on Missionary Work and Church Growth (Missiology)

>

Church Universities, Colleges, and Schools

Author: Matt Martinich

Posted: July 28th, 2014

The Church operates universities, colleges, and schools in several different areas of the world. Most of these institutions were founded and continue to operate due to large numbers of active Latter-day Saints desiring an LDS environment to complete their education. Some of these school operate in locations where there are sizable numbers of members but few opportunities for quality education. Many members of the Church in the United States and Oceania continue to obtain schooling or college degrees from LDS institutions due to the promotion of LDS teachings in an educational setting and the opportunities these schools present for socialization, dating, and marriage in the Church.

The first educational institutions operated by the LDS Church were in the United States. In 1875, the Church founded its first higher education institution in Provo, Utah called the Brigham Young Academy (later renamed Brigham Young University [BYU]). The Church started two more college or universities in 1886 (LDS Business College in Salt Lake City) and 1888 (Ricks College; later renamed BYU - Idaho). Founded in 1888 and based in the rural Utah town of Ephraim, Snow College also originally operated under the LDS Church until transferred to the state of Utah in the 1932.[1] In 1955, the Church started the Church College of Hawaii which was later renamed BYU - Hawaii. In early 2012, there were 21 young single adult (YSA) and student married stakes in Provo, Utah principally serving students at BYU - Provo, 12 YSA and student married stakes in Rexburg, Idaho principally meeting the needs of BYU - Idaho students, and three YSA and student married stakes operating in Laie, Hawaii to meet the needs of BYU - Hawaii students. At present, several public universities had sizable numbers of Latter-day Saint students which warrant the organization of YSA, student married, or student stakes such as at the University of Utah, Utah State University, Southern Utah University, Dixie State College of Utah, Idaho State University, Boise State University, Arizona State University, and Southern Virginia University.

//

With only a few exceptions, all other church-operated schools and colleges outside the United States have been in Oceania. There were 7,767 students enrolled in elementary and secondary education during the 2010-2011 school year and 659 staff, faculty, and administration personnel working in these church schools.[2] In New Zealand, the Church operated a secondary school named the Maori Agricultural College (MAC) from 1913 until 1931 when an earthquake damaged the school beyond repair. Although enrollment was less than 90 every year the school operated, Maoris and other Polynesian groups attended the school when it operated. Many Maori students later became some of the strongest church leaders in New Zealand.[3] Former MAC students advocated for the founding of the Church College of New Zealand, which operated from 1958 to 2009. The Church College of New Zealand provided high school education to 700 students at a time during its operation and roughly 10% of LDS high school students attended the school nationwide.[4] In Fiji, the Church opened the LDS Fiji Technical College in 1975. The school has since been renamed the Fiji LDS Church College, has 370 students enrolled, and 27 faculty and four administrators.[5] In 1969, the Church opened a primary school today known as the Fiji Primary School. At present, there are 345 students enrolled, 14 faculty, and one administrator.[6] In Kiribati, the founding of Moroni High School occurred almost in tandem with the establishment of an official LDS presence. Kiribati natives attending Liahona High School in Tonga were instrumental in opening Kiribati to missionary work and worked with teachers from Tonga to establish Moroni High School. At present, the school has the capacity for 476 students and accommodates boarding and day students.[7] In Samoa, the Church has operated at least two prominent schools in Pesega and Vaiola for several decades.[8] In Tonga, the Church attempted to open several primary schools in the early twentieth century with limited success. In 1952, the Church opened Liahona High School on Nuku'alofa. The school became one of the Church's largest educational institutions outside the United States with 1,070 students enrolled in 1997.[9]

In the twentieth century, the Church appeared to operate a handful of small schools in Mexico. In 1964, Church opened a preparatory church school in Mexico City called Benemérito de las Américas. The school had 125 students the first year and in 2012 the school had over 2,100 students.[10] In 2013, the Church closed the school to convert its campus to become the new Mexico Missionary Training Center (MTC). The Church operated a website that allowed interested individuals to register and

provided social media for students and alumni. There appeared to be no change in the number of students admitted to the school year to year during the last decade of the school's operation as there were 2,100 students enrolled in 1999.[11] The impact of the school on member activity rates and mission services has been significant. In 1999, the Church reported that 55% of students served full-time missionaries and that 75% of students remained active thereafter. At the time approximately half of students came from distant areas of Mexico and lived in small buildings that housed 18 students which were supervised by a resident family.[12]

In recent years, the Church has closed many of its smaller schools and colleges, and has not opened any additional institutions. Today seminary and institute, and LDS universities in the United States account for most of the Church's educational resources and institutions. In 2001, the Church announced the formation of the Perpetual Education Fund (PEF) to provide low-interest student loans to worthy, active members who would ordinarily be unable to obtain higher education. This program continues to serve as a method for the Church to help its members obtain higher education, but without exacting the costs of opening country-by-country or regional universities throughout the world.

Church universities, colleges, and schools have accelerated real membership growth and improved convert retention in many locations where they operate. For example, all countries where there are over 100,000 inhabitants and where nominal LDS membership constitutes 10% or more of the population have LDS educational institutions, namely Tonga, Samoa, and Kiribati. The impact of church schools on recent LDS growth trends has been most stunning in Kiribati. The Church founded Moroni High School in the 1970s and at present the school is one of the most prominent secondary schools in the country. In 1970, there was no LDS presence in Kiribati and few if any Latter-day Saints. In 2010, nominal LDS membership comprised 15% of the national population and two stakes operated on Tarawa. At present, only four countries or territories had a higher percentage of Latter-day Saints in the population: Tonga, Samoa, American Samoa, and Niue. The operation of an LDS school, college, or university provides local members with the opportunity to obtain education in an environment with fellow members and improves prospects for members marrying within the Church and becoming lifelong active members. Countries with LDS institutions number among the most self-sufficient in meeting their own ecclesiastical and administrative needs by reducing the emigration of active members and creating a stronger sense of LDS community.

There are good opportunities for opening additional LDS learning institutions in countries or regions currently without their own LDS schools, colleges, or universities. In Latin America, six cities appear most favorable for a church college or university (Buenos Aires, Argentina; Guatemala City, Guatemala; Lima, Peru; Mexico City, Mexico; Sao Paulo, Brazil; and Santiago, Chile) as the Church has 200,000 or more nominal members in the country where each of these cities is located and all six of these cities have between 18 and 45 stakes. Latter-day Saint professionals trained and qualified to teach in a secondary or tertiary educational setting within their discipline appear to reside in each of these cities in sufficient numbers to staff small church colleges or universities. Many Latter-day Saints in Latin American countries have access to established schools, colleges, and universities run by government or other institutions especially through the Perpetual Education Fund. However, non LDS-affiliated universities do not provide the sense of community and permanency to local and regional membership as do church schools in Oceania and the United States. Founding schools in several Latin American cities that are affiliated with the Church may also reduce convert retention challenges and accelerate outreach expansion and growth in a manner similar to the Church in Tonga, Samoa, and Kiribati. There are also good opportunities for the Church to open primary and secondary schools in locations with less-developed education systems such as in some countries in Oceania and Sub-Saharan Africa.

The outlook for the Church opening additional educational institutions appears unlikely considering the trend of closing smaller LDS schools and colleges, and emphasis on the Perpetual Education Fund and seminary and institute. The centralization of church administration in North America has likely dissuaded church leaders from opening a church college or university in South America, Europe, Asia, or Africa. The potential benefits of opening additional higher learning institutions in these regions deserve serious consideration from international church leaders in an effort to help curtail emigration, rectify inactivity problems, and remedy the poorly developed sense of LDS community present in some nations.

[1] "Snow College," en.wikipedia.org, retrieved 28 March 2012. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Snow_College

[2] "The Seminaries and Institutes of Religion Annual Report for 2012," Seminaries and Institutes of Religion - Intellectual Reserve, Inc., 6 February 2012. http://seminary.lds.org/content/languages/english/Seminary%20Materials/General/SI_Annual_Report_2012.pdf

[3] Britsch, R. Lanier. "The Church in the South Pacific", Ensign, Feb. 1976, 19

[4] "Church College of New Zealand," en.wikipedia.org, retrieved 28 March 2012. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Church_College_of_New_Zealand

[5] "Fiji LDS Church College," soe.byuh.edu, retrieved 28 March 2012. http://soe.byuh.edu/node/275

[6] "Fiji Primary School," soe.byuh.edu, retrieved 28 March 2012. http://soe.byuh.edu/node/278

[7] "Moroni High School," soe.byuh.edu, retrieved 28 March 2012. http://soe.byuh.edu/node/276

[8] Britsch, R. Lanier. "The Church in the South Pacific", Ensign, Feb. 1976, 19

[9] Weaver, Sarah Jane. "Liahona High: a foundation for life," LDS Church News, 13 September 1997. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/29262/Liahona-High-a-foundation-for-life.html

[10] "Background," Sitio dedicado al Centro Escolar Benemerito de las Americas, retrieved 17 March 2012. http://www.benemerito.com.mx/introduccion.php?titulo=Introduccion

[11] Juarez, Tarcisio R. "Benemerito! Church's vanguard school in Mexico," LDS Church News, 27 November 1999. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/32865/Benemerito-Churchs-vanguard-school-in-Mexico.html

[12] Juarez, Tarcisio R. "Benemerito! Church's vanguard school in Mexico," LDS Church News, 27 November 1999. http://www.ldschurchnews.com/articles/32865/Benemerito-Churchs-vanguard-school-in-Mexico.html