

**An Explanation → An Interpretation → A Vision → A Charge**

What we seek to do through our admissions system is to admit those persons who will gain the most from a BYU educational experience and will contribute the most in the ways that we want our graduates to contribute. It is not an easy task, and no set of admissions criteria can perfectly draw the kinds of distinctions that ultimately need to be drawn. ...

Our current criteria focus on three things: (1) the applicant's worthiness and willingness to abide by our standards of personal conduct; (2) preparation to do academic work of the quality we offer, ultimately leading to graduation; and (3) personal characteristics suggesting that the applicant and BYU have something to offer each other in terms of our broader mission. The first and third of these general inquiries are quite subjective, and therefore partake of both the strengths and the weaknesses of subjective criteria generally. ... But they reflect our present conclusion that we can reach beyond strictly numerical criteria in making our admissions decisions

— President Rex Lee, 1991

**An Explanation → An Interpretation → A Vision → A Charge**

What that is saying in practical terms is that there was, with the board's enthusiastic support, a commitment to find a way to admit some students who will have done less well on tests and will have done less well on high school grades than their fellow students, with whom they will compete. There will be a wider range of what we call academic abilities. To some extent that has always been true. There have always been students here who have struggled, and you have all worked with them in various ways. This is a decision to seek to admit more students who will feel—at least as they begin with you—almost overwhelmed.

— Henry B. Eyring, Presiding Bishopric, 1991

An Explanation → An Interpretation → A Vision → A Charge



"I believe in the unlimited potential of every student. At first glance they range, like instructors, from mediocre to magnificent. But potential is invisible to the superficial gaze. It takes faith to discern it, but I have witnessed too many academic miracles to doubt its existence. I now view each student as 'material for a work of art.' If I have faith, deep faith, in students' capacities for creativity and growth, how very much we can accomplish together. If, on the other hand, I fail to believe in that potential, my failure sows seeds of doubt. Students read our negative signals, however carefully cloaked, and retreat from creative risk to the 'just possible.' When this happens, everyone loses."

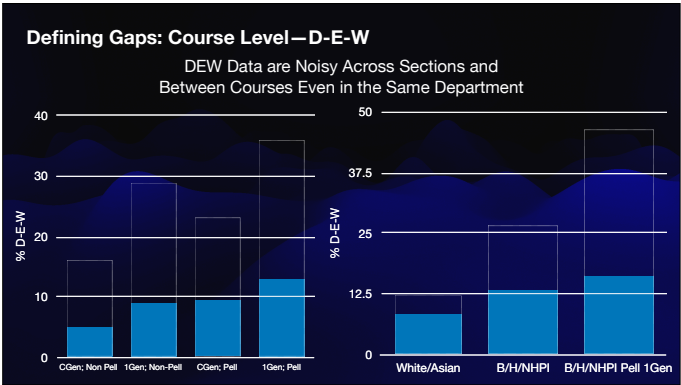
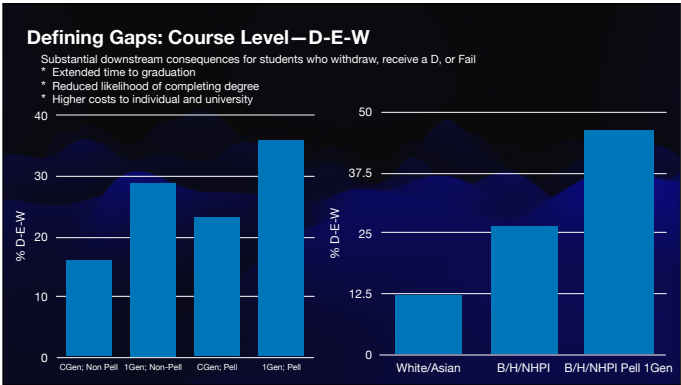
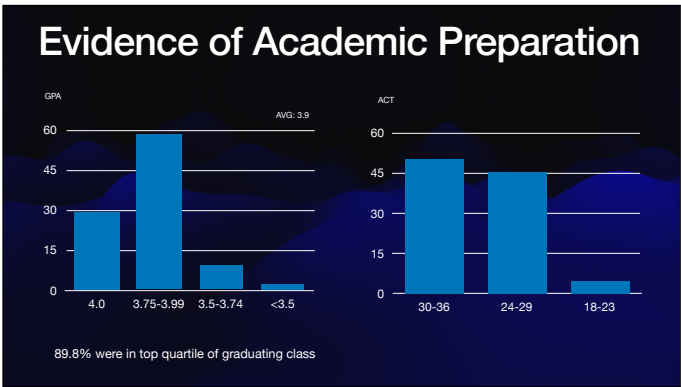
— Henry B. Eyring quoting Roland Christensen, HBS Professor

An Explanation → An Interpretation → A Vision → A Charge

"Did the attempt to admit students with a wider range of abilities work?"

The answer is: It all depends on you. If you simply drop them in the caldron of competition, give them the same kinds of tests, do the same kinds of things that perhaps made them predict to be a little poorer students, then they will turn out not to be good students. And you can brand them failures very easily. On the other hand, if you really believe that they are children of God, and that they are not that much below you, because you also are a child of God, then when you are with them, they will feel it. They will get your signal, and you will do something for them that goes beyond what the world calls teaching. You will have performed a moral act that will last a lifetime and into eternity.

— Henry B. Eyring, Presiding Bishopric, 1991

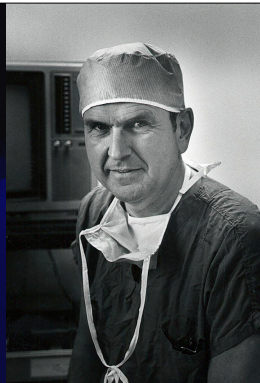




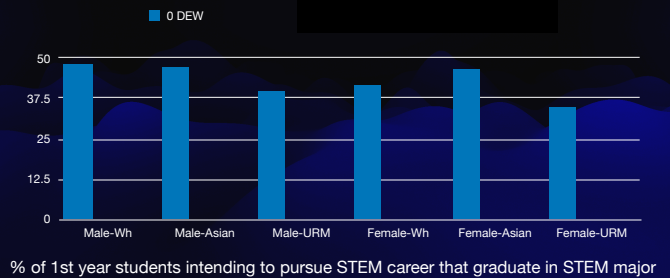
Are you willing to let God prevail in your life? Are you willing to let God be the most important influence in your life? Will you allow His words, His commandments, and His covenants to influence what you do each day? Will you allow His voice to take priority over any other? Are you willing to let whatever He needs you to do take precedence over every other ambition? Are you willing to have your will swallowed up in His?

President Russell M. Nelson

Are students free to seek inspiration to their life path or do we prematurely push them another way

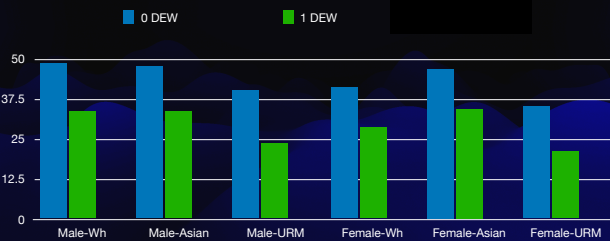


### Defining Gaps: Major Level—Risk Factors and D-E-W in first 3 semesters



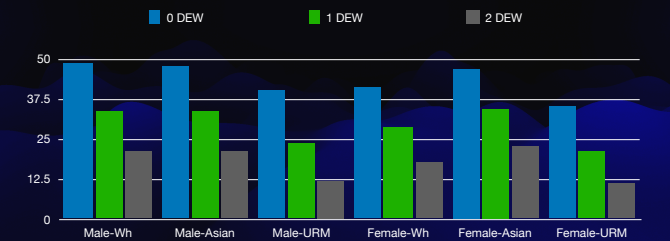
National Data, Hatfield et al. 2022, PNAS Nexus

### Defining Gaps: Major Level—Risk Factors and D-E-W in first 3 semesters



National Data, Hatfield et al. 2022, PNAS Nexus

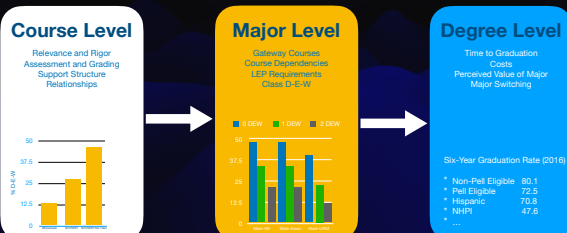
### Defining Gaps: Major Level—Risk Factors and D-E-W in first 3 semesters



National Data, Hatfield et al. 2022, PNAS Nexus

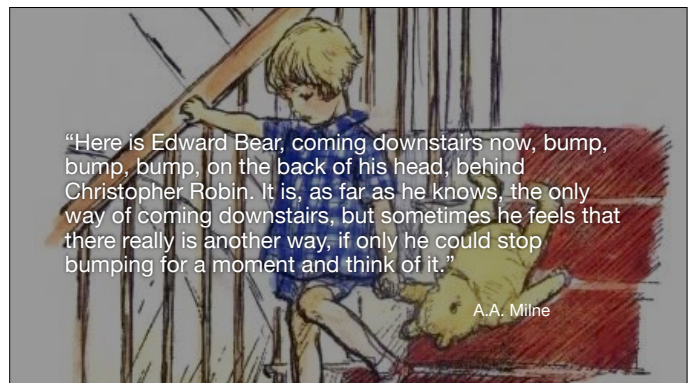
### Gaps Compound

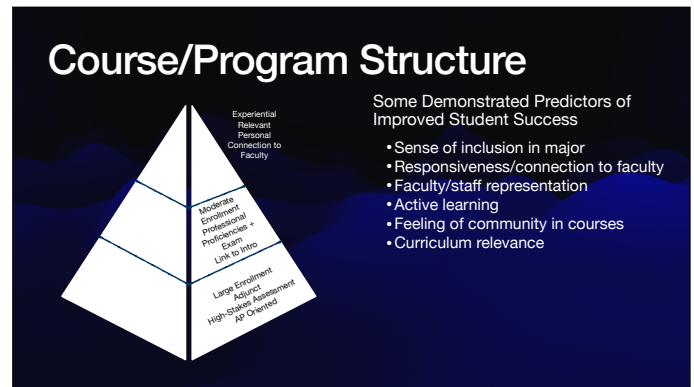
A student's personal history and demographic characteristics should not predict success at Brigham Young University.



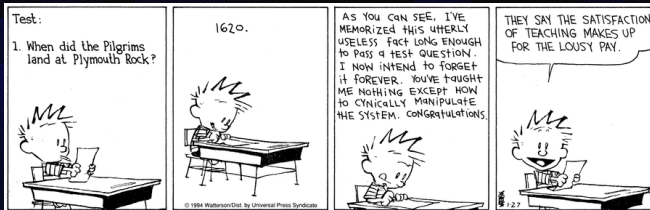
"Here is Edward Bear, coming downstairs now, bump, bump, bump, on the back of his head, behind Christopher Robin. It is, as far as he knows, the only way of coming downstairs, but sometimes he feels that there really is another way, if only he could stop bumping for a moment and think of it."

A.A. Milne





## What is the role of assessment?



*If you simply drop them in the caldron of competition, give them the same kinds of tests, do the same kinds of things that perhaps made them predict to be a little poorer students, then they will turn out not to be good students.*

- Henry B. Eyring

## What is the role of assessment in equity gaps?

## Why do we grade?

## Pillars of Assessment

**Aligned:** Measure learning connected to your outcomes and student-centered relevance.

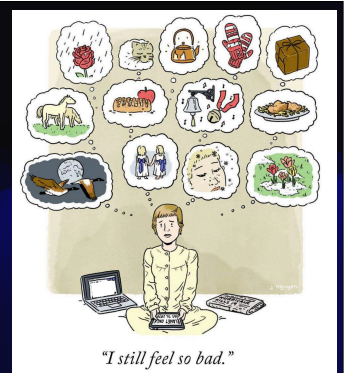
**Bias-resistant:** Measure knowledge/ability independent of instructor interpretations or cultural expectations; don't test "hidden curriculum"

**Motivational:** Promote learning rather than filtering; access to redemption with additional learning

**Supportive:** Access to materials and people for preparation; deliberate feedback to improve future performance

## Hidden Biases

**Raise your hand  
when you get  
this cartoon**





## Some Examples

Reduce stereotype threat by reducing high-stakes exams

- \* Drop lowest score
- \* Two-stage exams (individual then group)
- \* First major assessment reduced value
- \* Retake if < 80% to get to that threshold

Create authentic exams

- \* Model on professional practices
- \* Personal connections

Record & post a 3-5 minute video providing tips for success

Offer choice (topics, artifacts, approach) to showcase learning

Formative quiz prior to exam

Imagine a point in their future lives (academic, personal, professional) when they will use this; lean into forward-looking scenarios

## Eliminate GPA Targets & Curving



## Curriculum

**Relevance:** Student can see their goals, interests, or experiences reflected in their learning

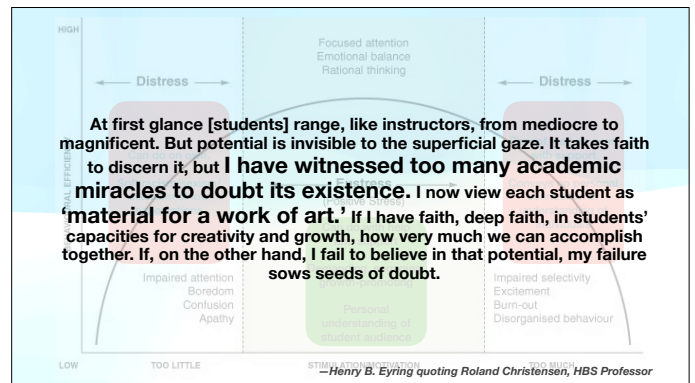
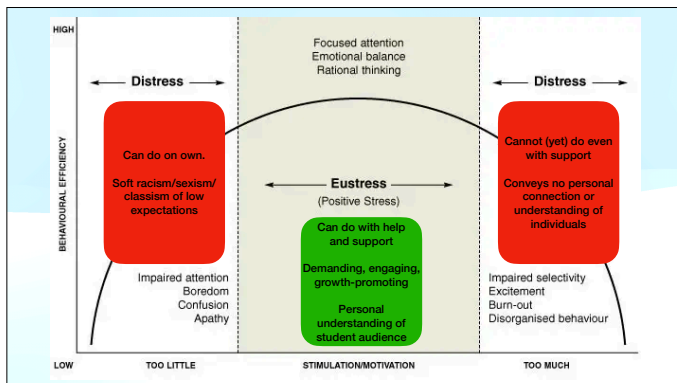
**Rigor:** Taught at a level that supports student learning and growth

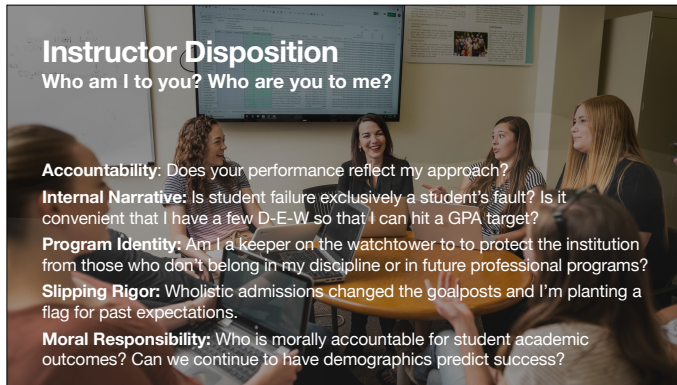
## Misunderstanding Rigor

Not Volume (# of assignments or time spent)

Not Curricular Level (300-level more rigorous than 100-level)

Not an obstacle course where difficult tasks placed in front of students with limited information, time, or capacity where only a few can finish.





## Instructor Disposition

Who am I to you? Who are you to me?

**Accountability:** Does your performance reflect my approach?

**Internal Narrative:** Is student failure exclusively a student's fault? Is it convenient that I have a few D-E-W so that I can hit a GPA target?

**Program Identity:** Am I a keeper on the watchtower to protect the institution from those who don't belong in my discipline or in future professional programs?

**Slipping Rigor:** Wholistic admissions changed the goalposts and I'm planting a flag for past expectations.

**Moral Responsibility:** Who is morally accountable for student academic outcomes? Can we continue to have demographics predict success?

## Checklist for Instructors

- ☐ Is my curriculum relevant and rigorous, accounting for "variety of individual characteristics, life experiences and circumstances, perspectives, talents, and gifts of each member" of my course?
- ☐ Are my assessments focused on learning rather than creating an artificial distribution?
- ☐ Do our daily behaviors convey a "genuine concern for the welfare of our [students]"?
- ☐ Have we identified necessary support structure for student success?
- ☐ Do I have faith in "students' capacity for creativity and growth"?

## Checklist for Administrators

- ☐ Do I maximize the likelihood of student success by putting introductory students in small classes with excellent teachers?
- ☐ Have I eliminated unnecessary course dependencies? Is the path to graduation clear and unencumbered?
- ☐ Have I communicated that GPA targets or curving are NOT a university expectation?
- ☐ Have I communicated the relevance of courses in the curriculum? Can I justify all the courses in a major (given credit hour constraints)?
- ☐ Am I using available data to identify areas for improvement or of excellence?
- ☐ Do I have faith in "[faculty members'] capacity for creativity and growth"?

"if you really believe that [students] are children of God ... then when you are with them, they will feel it. They will get your signal, and you will do something for them that goes beyond what the world calls teaching. **You will have performed a moral act** that will last a lifetime and into eternity."

— Henry B. Eyring

