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Diversity In Discipleship

by [Gracie Romero](#) | Jun 26, 2025 | [Scroll Voices](#) | [0 comments](#)



Have you ever felt alone as a college student? Loneliness can be a common occurrence in the lives of students at Brigham Young University-Idaho. Even students who are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints experience this feeling outside of academic classes. Students have felt disconnected and isolated due to cultural differences in languages, resources and the environment.

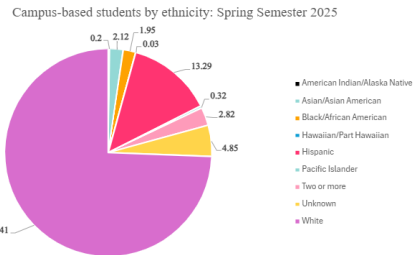
How racism impacts students on campus

One student, who wishes to remain unnamed, recalled his experience with racism. On an evening walk with his wife, several vehicles rolled down their windows and shouted racial slurs at him. Upset by this, he felt hate and anger. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints teaches against racism, hostility, violence and segregation, like this student experienced.

Perry Rockwood, Public Affairs Communication Manager for BYUI said, "It [racism] is completely against who God is, what He teaches, what the message and what the central message of the gospel of Jesus Christ is ... I would hope that the university would stand with the Prophet and The Church and the message of love to everyone that we are all God's children and nobody's better than anybody else."

Another student felt that the differences between her culture and that of her roommates made it difficult for her to be herself in her own home. These differences resulted in her needing to reach out to resources on campus, such as the Honor Office. Unfortunately, the issues were unable to be resolved, and she was told that "the school can't do anything about changing someone's way of thinking." Experiences like these make people realize that the resources BYUI offers to students are helpful, but could be improved.

Statistics



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According to the BYUI enrollment statistics, the total population of on-campus students this semester is 17,582. The majority of students on campus are Caucasian. Hispanics account for 13.29% of the total student population and are of Latin descent. The next largest group is Asian/Asian American, making up 2.12% of the total population, followed closely by Black/African American students at just under 2%. With this in mind, it's important to recognize that cultures can sometimes be misrepresented, which is why awareness and appreciation from the entire campus community are essential.

Being aware of cultural diversity is essential because we live, learn and work alongside people from many different backgrounds. Understanding one another's culture helps people develop empathy, respect and stronger collaboration with one another. Each person brings unique experiences and perspectives that can help improve our campus and spiritual community. By embracing diversity, we create a more inclusive environment where everyone feels valued and inspired to contribute. Recognizing these differences doesn't divide us; it strengthens us.

How religion impacts culture on campus

As a religious institution, church is such a big part of BYUI. Students know that to attend the university, they need to attend church meetings to receive their ecclesiastical endorsement. However, some students might avoid attending church because they feel this sense of disconnect, loneliness and isolation.

One of the school's main objectives is "To develop disciples of Jesus Christ who are leaders in their homes, the Church, and their communities," according to BYUI's [mission statement](#). Being a leader means standing up for the voiceless, loving one another, making connections, putting aside prejudice and taking proactive actions. Having the opportunity to attend church in your native language could help students connect and feel a sense of belonging.

BYUI teaches classes in Spanish, Chinese, French, Russian, German, and Arabic. Adding wards or branches in these languages would not only benefit native speakers but also students who are learning the language as well.

"It is comforting to be able to speak in your own language and to have the same cultures and beliefs that you have to be able to share in your testimonies in church," said Erick McPherson, the Bishop in the Rexburg Young Single Adult 97th Ward in the YSA 5th Stake.

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Unfortunately, making new wards and branches cannot be done overnight, but rather requires higher authority than students, BYU faculty, bishops and stake presidents in Rexburg have. This implementation would require approval from the Area Seventy, the Twelve Apostles and the First Presidency. In the meantime, BYU and the city of Rexburg can improve resources and events that can help us connect and belong better as a community.

Several leaders and students from the following places in the world were interviewed:

- Argentina
- Australia
- Bolivia
- Fiji
- Mexico
- Luxembourg
- Nigeria
- Various areas in the United States



Participants representing El Salvador at Cultural Night. Image courtesy of Gracie Romero

Of those interviewed, some mentioned that the best way to participate in different cultures is by attending Cultural Night. Cultural Night is a vibrant event organized by Student Activities, where students come together to celebrate and share their heritage through music and dance. Participants proudly represent their cultures by performing traditional songs and dances, often dressed in authentic cultural attire. It's an evening filled with energy, pride and unity, as students showcase the beauty and diversity of their backgrounds. This event provides a meaningful opportunity for the campus community to honor and appreciate cultural traditions represented at BYU. However, it is currently only held two semesters out of the year. Students have expressed concern that it should not be the only time and place culture is celebrated on campus. What if there were other resources and events to help students on campus embrace culture and diversity?

"We have international students among us, but [Cultural Night] is it," said Keithin Cabrales Meneses, a senior from Mexico majoring in Spanish Education and the Director of the Spanish Conversation Lab.

For Cabrales Meneses and others, just one day every few semesters is not enough to adequately celebrate diversity. She suggested bringing awareness to important dates of other countries in classes and around campus in general, such as the Chinese New Year. "It will be nice to know not just for the people from the culture, but for the other people that can be made aware that things are also happening outside their own little bubble," Cabrales Meneses said.

BYU can be a place of refuge to those affected by the current events in the world, but this can only be done if the campus community takes time to embrace cultural diversity. Some ways this can be done would be improving the resources and events on campus and off campus.

Resources and Events

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— Conversational Volunteer Drop-in Labs (e.g., Chinese, English, French, German, Spanish, Arabic and Russian).

— Societies (e.g., International Studies Society, Sociology, Interfaith Leadership Academic Society, etc.).

— Student Life (e.g. Crossroads, foods, Stadium Singing, BYU-I choir, and Campus Life).

Some resources the city of Rexburg has off campus are:

— Chamber of Commerce.

— Family Crisis Center.

— City Council (e.g., events).

Some improvements could be:

— Societies/Clubs.

— Spirit Week activities (Celebrating students' cultures).

— Student Life activities.

— Holding campus activities that celebrate holidays in different cultures.

— Rexburg Community Activities.

— Proposed solution letters (To specific leaders).

— Suggestions from Stake President Mark Skinner in the 5th Stake. (Having potlucks, several activities throughout the semester that we learn about people's culture, traditions, food, language, and dances.)

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The flags of international students' home countries were hung in the Hyrum Manwaring Center. Image Credit: Gracie Romero

"I feel like diversity means accepting everyone for who they are and accepting everyone's culture, because everyone's beliefs, traditions and whatever [they] align [themselves] with, are so different," said Priscilla Aror, a junior studying nursing from Nigeria. "So diversity means inclusion, especially the language inclusion ... You can't live in your own mindset. You have to embrace other people's mindset."

When we spread awareness, it helps people see the importance of making changes. A way people can be a part of this change is by participating in this [survey](#).

For more information, visit the Senior Showcase on June 26, held in the Taylor Chapel Overflow from 3:30- 5:00 p.m.



Gracie Romero

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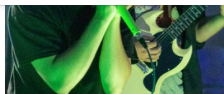
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