



The North Texas

Skeptic

Volume 22

May 2008

Number 5

<http://www.ntskeptics.org>

ICR fails to obtain certification in Texas

by Glenn Branch

The following is from the NCSE newsletter. See the associated article.

At its April 24, 2008, meeting, the Texas Higher Education Coordination Board unanimously voted to deny the Institute for Creation Research's request for a state certificate of authority to offer a master's degree in science education, the *Houston Chronicle* (April 24, 2008) reported. The board's vote accorded with a recommendation issued on April 23, 2008, by the board's Academic Excellence and Research Committee, which in turn was based on a recommendation by Raymund Paredes, the Texas Commissioner of Higher Education.

According to a THECB press release, "Paredes based the recommendation on two considerations: 1) that ICR failed to demonstrate that the proposed degree program meets acceptable standards of science and science education; and 2) that the proposed degree is inconsistent with Coordinating Board rules which require the accurate labeling or designation of programs ... Since the proposed degree program inadequately covers key areas of science, it cannot be properly designated either as 'science' or 'science education.'"

Paredes's recommendation was echoed by a host of scientists in Texas. Recently, for example, a survey conducted by Raymond A. Eve for the Texas Freedom Network and NCSE polled 881 science faculty members at fifty public and private Texas universities for their opinions of the ICR's request for certification; nearly 200 faculty members responded, with 185 (95% of respondents) opposed to certifying the program.

At the committee meeting, the *Dallas Morning News* (April 23, 2008) reported, Paredes said, "Evolution is such a fundamental principle of contemporary science it is hard to imagine how you could cover the various fields of science without giving it the proper attention it deserves as a foundation of science." "In insisting on a literal interpretation of biblical creation," Paredes added, the ICR's science education program

EVENTS CALENDAR

May Program

Saturday 17 May 2008
2 p.m.
Center for Nonprofit
Management
2900 Live Oak Street in Dallas

Rodrigo Neely will present a film, *Marjoe*.

Hugh Ross Marjoe Gortner grew famous as an evangelical preacher at a very young age. He grew even more famous with the release of *Marjoe*, a film about faith healing. "You keep the faith, Marjoe keeps the money." Neely is a neuroscience major at UTD.

NTS Social Dinner & Board Meeting

Saturday 24 May 2008
7 p.m.
Don Mexico, 12225 Greenville
Avenue in Dallas

Let us know if you are coming.
We need to reserve a table.

NTS Hotline: 214-335-9248

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The North Texas Skeptics is a tax-exempt 501 (c) (3) scientific and educational organization. All members receive the NTS newsletter and may attend NTS functions at which admission is charged at no or reduced cost. In addition, members will receive mailings on topics of current interest or social events.

Our newsletter, *The North Texas Skeptic*, is published monthly by The North Texas Skeptics, P.O. Box 111794, Carrollton, Texas 75011-1794.

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“gives insufficient coverage to conventional science and does not adequately prepare students in the field of science education.”

The *Austin American-Statesman* (April 24, 2008) editorially applauded the board’s decision, writing, “We applaud the board for setting this precedent in what will surely be a long series of battles

“Evolution is such a fundamental principle of contemporary science it is hard to imagine how you could cover the various fields of science without giving it the proper attention it deserves as a foundation of science.”

— *Raymund Paredes, the Texas
Commissioner of Higher Education*

involving science education in Texas. After the wars over the teaching of both evolution and intelligent design that have splintered Kansas for the past nine years, Texans can breathe at least a momentary sigh of relief. ... Paredes and the coordinating board took a correct and principled stand in denying the creationist institute’s science course.”

Despite the board’s vote, the issue is not definitively resolved yet. The ICR will now have 45 days to file an appeal or 180 days to reapply for another certificate of authority. After the committee’s vote, the *Dallas Morning News* reported, the ICR’s chief executive officer Henry Morris III “said the institute may revise its application or take its case to court. ‘We will pursue due process,’ he told the board. ‘We will no doubt see you in the future.’”

References and Notes

For the story in the *Houston Chronicle*, visit:

<http://www.chron.com/disp/story.mpl/metropolitan/5729298.html>

For a press release about the TFN/NCSE survey, visit:

<http://www.tfn.org/site/News2?page=NewsArticle&id=5353>

For the story in the *Dallas Morning News*, visit:

<http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/dn/education/stories/042408dntexcreationscience2.917bf873.html>

For the editorial in the *Austin American-Statesman*, visit:

http://www.statesman.com/blogs/content/shared-gen/blogs/austin/editorial/entries/2008/04/24/creationism_is_fine_just_dont.html

And for NCSE’s previous coverage of events in Texas, visit:

<http://www.ncseweb.org/pressroom.asp?state=TX>

National Center for Science Education

by John Blanton

Wherever there is creationism, there is the NCSE. Since 1981 this non-profit has been working to protect the teaching of science from political encroachment. Eugenia C. Scott has headed it up since 1987.

The title seems a bit innocuous. "Science education" is too broad for the organization's central purpose. It's really all about creationism.

In 1981 the threat was from the young-Earth creationists (YEC), principally the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) in Santee, California, and the likes of Carl Baugh, with a nod to our own Don Patton. Those guys flunked out about eighteen years ago after a series of losses in the courts and in public opinion.

Federal Judge William Overton ruled in January 1982 that YEC is religion, not science, and a law to require "equal time" for creationism and evolution in Arkansas public schools was unconstitutional. In 1987 the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a law to allow the teaching of YEC in Louisiana public schools is also unconstitutional.

The work of Scott and the NCSE was not over. A new crowd moved in. Smarter, and fully aware of previous court rulings, they determined that living forms and maybe even the universe, itself, are too complex, too perfect, too suited for the ultimate creation (us) to have been an accident of nature. There must be some *Intelligent Design* involved. The designer (hint, hint) was not to be mentioned.

Seeing this might not be sufficient, Intelligent Design advocates, heavily identified with the Discovery Institute Center for Science and Culture (CSC), also promoted movements to cast doubt on *Darwinism*. Students should be encouraged to practice critical thinking and to question scientific orthodoxy. *Particularly the theory of evolution*. Not so much vector and tensor analysis, theories of fluid dynamics, the theory of gravitation, theories of quantum mechanics and physical chemistry. We are to presume those will come later.

All of this keeps the NCSE busy and gives Scott lots to do in her spare time. Scott holds a PhD in Physical Anthropology and is often in the forefront whenever creationism of any type hits the news pages. You have to think she must get tired of explaining again and again to network viewers and newspaper reporters that no, there is no growing army of real scientists who doubt evolution and that what is taught in the classrooms should be the consensus of the scientific community based on 150 years of peer-reviewed scientific research.

The NCSE is affiliated with the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which publishes *Science*, the premier journal for peer-reviewed science publications in the U.S. The list of NCSE supporters easily dwarfs the crew pushed forward by the CSC. While the CSC invests heavily in getting its message out and encouraging doubts about Darwin, NCSE fans show up for work every day and carry on the task of advancing scientific discovery.

The NCSE Web site is a treasure of information about creationism. You need to check it out. A recent project is a site devoted to Ben Stein's new movie *Expelled* [<http://www.expelledexposed.com/>]. I source a lot of what appears in this newsletter from the NCSE site.

You have a chance to make it all worthwhile. Send your spare cash, after you get through paying at the pump, to the NCSE. Also subscribe to *Reports of the National Center for Science Education*. I give the NCSE a little money, whenever my accountant (also the NTS treasurer) will let me have any. The NCSE also gives back.

Most recently they sent me a copy of *Doubting Darwin?* Sahotra Sarkar is Professor of Integrative Biology and of Philosophy at the University of Texas at Austin. The book is about the arguments of CSC creationists Michael Behe and William Dembski. I'm only part way through the book, but I can tell you that Sarkar spends a lot of energy digesting what Behe, Dembski and the other creationists have to say in the light of research done by that army of NCSE supporters I mentioned earlier. I promise a full review next month.

You can get your copy by giving the NCSE a lot of money. Give them a lot of money, anyhow. You can buy the book from Amazon.com. Here's the link:

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1405154918/thenorthtexas>

Here's the link to the NCSE site:

<http://www.ncseweb.org/>

Federal Judge William Overton ruled in January 1982 that YEC is religion, not science, and a law to require "equal time" for creationism and evolution in Arkansas public schools was unconstitutional.



Adventures in Web hosting

by John Blanton

So, we said, “It can never happen to us. We never have unprotected Internet access. We could never catch an NTD (network transmitted disease).”

Google alerted us first. “You’ve got a spam on your Web site,” said the voice on the phone. Naw, it couldn’t be us.

I checked. It was.

Four strange PHP scripts were happily ensconced in one of the subdirectories, dutifully serving up ad pages to suckers (obviously not skeptics) directed there, likely by links embedded in spam from another site.

No problem. As your fearless NTS Web master, I hit “Delete” four times, and they were gone. But not for long.

Later in the day they were back. This was getting tiresome. Delete, delete, delete, delete again. They came back.

The scene brought up memories of Mickey Mouse hacking at magical broomsticks only to have them multiply faster than he could hack, all to the music of Paul Dukas.

Lacking Dukas, I resorted to dynamite. In a few minutes the whole site came down so I could reload it—without any offending code. Glossing over the details, we are back on line, hopefully with fixes in place to keep us out of trouble in the future.

Skeptics, keep us straight. Check out the Web site and drop us a note if you find anything amiss. We also welcome your suggestions and your gripes. My mail link is on the Web site.

If you are visiting, here is what you can find:

- What’s New—What *is* new, including our schedule for the month and future meeting dates
- Newsletter—The newsletter you are now reading is available, as well as all back issues
- Skeptical News—News items of interest to skeptics, scavenged from the Internet, e-mail, and other dark places

- Challenge—All the news that’s fit to print about the NTS Paranormal Challenge: How to get our \$12,000, who’s going for the prize, how are they doing?
- Cartoons—Our wacky skeptical cartoonists have been putting a humorous spin on skeptical issues for over 15 years. Read, enjoy. Some are even funny.
- Fact Sheets—Astrology, ESP, and graphology, so far, are explained. NTS co-founder John Thomas provided all the current content. We need more.
- Contact NTS—How to find us if you want to complain, or just chat
- NTS Officers—Who’s responsible
- Books and Merchandise—Click and shop at Amazon.com. The NTS gets a commission.
- Search—Find what you are looking for on the NTS site.
- Links—Start here, find more skeptical stuff on the Internet.
- Join—We are glad to have you. Even creationists are invited. Click on the links and make pay dues through PayPal. The button is labeled “Donate,” because that’s how PayPal handles it.
- More—Need I say “more?”



Meeting Notice

Skeptics in the Pub: North Texas

The first meeting of Skeptics in the Pub: North Texas is

June 17th at 8:00pm at the Absinthe Lounge.

The Absinthe Lounge is at 1409 Lamar, Suite 8, Dallas TX.

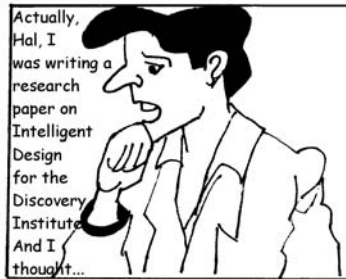
Contact Rodrigo Neely at rodrigoneely@gmail.com if you would like to attend.

The June meeting of the North Texas Skeptics will be June 21, 2008

Skeptic Ink

by Prasad Golla and John Blanton.

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Letters

I am writing to call your attention to my book *The Undercover Philosopher: A Guide to Detecting Lies, Shams and Delusions* (forthcoming in May, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, UK).

The book is about obstacles and hazards we face on the road to knowledge, both as individuals and as communities of investigators. Most of it is about the ways that socially authoritative sources go wrong. I present an accessible but systematic way of thinking about this that applies to everything from juries and newspapers, to academic and other research communities (drug researchers, psychotherapists, cosmologists, etc.). There are many interesting examples and cautionary tales. Although I am a philosopher by profession, the book draws on work in psychology, social psychology, brain science, sociology, and history as well as philosophy. It also criticizes work in these areas.

You can find brief descriptions of the book on a number of webpages (just google *The Undercover Philosopher*). You can

also find an online pdf of the Introduction on that list (it's the only pdf listed; I can't seem to copy a working url). If you'd consider reviewing the book for a publication, I'm sure Oneworld would be happy to send you a review copy (I can contact them for you if you'd like). I thank you for your time.

best regards,

Michael Phillips

[Editors note – From Amazon.com –

“A great book! Writing with clarity and good humour, Michael Phillips reminds me of a great philosophical collector, an Aristotle of errors, as he enthusiastically categorizes specimens of every kind of mistake, con and self-deception and describes how we can guard against them.”

— Rick Lewis, Editor of *Philosophy Now*]

The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal

encourages the critical investigation of paranormal and fringe-science claims from a responsible, scientific point of view and disseminates factual information about the results of such inquiries to the scientific community, the media, and the public. It also promotes science and scientific inquiry, critical thinking, science education, and the use of reason in examining important issues.

The Skeptical Inquirer

is published bimonthly by the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal. Subscriptions should be addressed to SKEPTICAL INQUIRER, Box 703, Amherst, NY 14226-0703. Or call toll-free 1-800-634-1610. Subscription prices: one year (six issues), \$35; two years, \$60; three years, \$84. You may also visit the CSICOP Web site at <http://www.csicop.org> for more information.

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Membership agreement:

Yes, I agree with your purposes in exploring paranormal and pseudoscientific claims from a responsible and scientific point of view, and while I do not endorse the a priori rejection of paranormal phenomena and pseudoscientific claims, I believe that such claims must be subjected to the fair and systematic testing which rational enquiry demands.

Signature _____ Date _____

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