

# 'Intelligent Design' not smart

People need to face the facts; "Intelligent Design" isn't science

E.E. West  
Copy Editor

"In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. For centuries these words and the stories that follow them served Europe as the sole explanation for the origins of the world we live in. But this was during the Dark and Middle Ages, when empirical observation was taking a long siesta. In the centuries since the Renaissance and Protestant Reformation, Europe and the rest of the world has learned to take notice of the world around them; to learn through careful observation the processes by which life and the universe works and apply the knowledge gained for the benefit (and yes, occasionally the detriment) of humanity.

To this end a procedure has been developed by which we can be reasonably assured that our own biases and a priori assumptions do not insinuate themselves into our investigations, giving us potentially faulty and harmful conclusions. We call this the "scientific method," and it has produced astounding results.

Today the process of scientific method is under attack in the biology labs of public education, the very place it should be center stage. Education boards across the nation have been inundated with the cries of a vocal minority of Americans who wish to see Creationism

reintroduced into our schools under the guise of a "scientific theory" called Intelligent Design. School boards in more than half a dozen states from Pennsylvania to Montana have considered altering their curriculum to incorporate ID. One state in particular has gone further than mere consideration.

On Nov. 8 the Kansas Board of Education voted 6 - 4 that students will be expected to learn that a variety of evolutionary concepts are "controversial," a battle-cry of Intelligent Design advocates who stress that sympathetic educators should "teach the controversy" in order to undermine Darwinian evolution. The board does not have the authority to directly set cur-



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riculum for local school districts, but by setting standards for statewide testing they can do so in effect.

In order to allow ID in Kansas schools the board has had to do a bit of creative reworking of the definition of science. The phrase "a search for explanations of observable phenomena" has been dropped from the school board's definition.

The reasoning behind this is fairly logical: the emphasis on "observable" would make the inclusion of ID glaringly contradictory. This is because the best that proponents of ID can offer by way of proof is that one can infer a creator from the complexity of life. The proponents of ID are overwhelmingly fundamentalist Christians, and for them to suggest that God can be observed directly would undermine their claim that blind faith in Jesus Christ is the only path to salvation.

Take the empiricism out of empirical science, they reason, and one has a definition of science that will allow even religious dogma as fact.

The effect of all this is that students in Kansas public schools will not be taught the central concept of scientific inquiry; that useful and revolutionary things can be learned through patient and unbiased examination of empirical data.

The supposed "theory" of Intelligent Design meets almost none of the criteria for an acceptable scientific theory. The idea has been rejected as a working hypothesis by a vast majority within the scientific

community who agree that evolution through natural selection best explains our current understanding of life, and who further see the question of a Creator as standing outside the purview of proper natural science.

The Kansas Board of Education was well aware of this fact before their action. In voting in the changes the board was ignoring the recommendations of a 26-member science committee, the National Academy of Sciences, the National Science Teachers Association and 37 Nobel laureates who wrote an impassioned plea for the board to maintain a more mainstream stance on evolution.

This debacle of bad politics and even worse science is fueled by a gross misunderstanding of science and scientific method itself. Since most scientists agree that it's rather difficult to see God through even the most powerful of telescopes, only the most rash and arrogant of scientists will declare that God does not exist. After all, it is a maxim of science that absence of evidence is not the same as evidence of absence.

Science properly pursued can make no claims about those things that are above or beyond the natural, phenomenal world. Because of that, theology and other pursuits that do make claims about the supernatural have no place in science curriculum.

God belongs in our investigations of literature, philosophy and ethics, where we contemplate the allegories and stories that guide us as moral creatures. He does not belong in the biology lab.

## Join the forces of darkness: offer observational astronomy

Laura Cameron  
Commentary Editor

Wasting resources is never a good thing. Polluted rivers, extinct species and outrageous gas prices are all proof of this. Nobody likes to see something useful go to waste, but that is exactly what's happening here at Clackamas Community College.

We have a beautiful, fully functional astronomical observatory located right

here on campus. The Haggart Memorial Observatory, tucked away among the trees of the Environmental Learning Center, is a fantastic resource for every student who has ever looked up at night and been filled with wonder. A 24-inch refractor - perfect for viewing deep-sky objects - and a host of smaller telescopes exist there for our viewing pleasure.

With a facility like the Haggart Observatory at its disposal, most people would expect the college to be

offering a host of astronomy courses centered around the Observatory. I was shocked upon my arrival at Clackamas last year to discover that the college offers not a single observational astronomy class.

Astronomy is not completely lacking from the course list - two or three classes can be found in the catalogue each term. But astronomy is really a twofold science, and Clackamas only offers one part of it: the physical side.

Take a look in the course

catalogue. Astronomy is almost always listed under "physics." Now, the physical side of astronomy - orbital dynamics and the like - is both important and fascinating. But there's more to studying the heavens than math.

If I take an astronomy course, I don't want to spend it looking at pictures of stars in books. I want to bundle up in a heavy jacket, pour up a thermos of hot chocolate and spend a cold, clear night in intimate contact with an eyepiece, drinking in the wonder

of the universe.

Only three astronomy courses were offered this term. All were physical astronomy. All were online courses. Meanwhile, the 24-inch refractor sits idle most nights, when it should be introducing another generation of starry-eyed students to the wonders of the Orion Nebula, the jewel-like binary system of alpha Scorpii, or the crenulated terminator of the moon.

What a shame. What a waste.



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