

*Will the Center teach the theory known as “Intelligent Design”?*

The short answer is: “as a scientific theory, ‘no’, but as an example of an effective political tactic in the debate over teaching creationism in public schools, ‘yes’.

A longer answer:

Intelligent Design is the name associated with the conjecture that life is too complex to have developed by the process of natural selection alone, and that therefore living things must have been designed by some unspecified intelligent entity. Many of intelligent design’s proponents are attracted by its perceived consistency with descriptions of creation in the Book of Genesis.

Posed as a scientific theory, intelligent design suffers serious flaws. It does not rest upon a foundation of experimental tests executed as part of the scientific method; and it makes few, if any, new testable predictions about the world we live in. In contrast, the theory of natural selection, steadily improved upon since its original formulation by Darwin, has survived countless observational and experimental tests; and it continues to provide many verifiable new predictions about nature every day. As is true of all scientific theories, natural selection does not provide an answer for everything. Indeed, questions concerning the explicit mechanism for the development of life remain areas of intense inquiry by biologist and other natural scientists. An overwhelming majority of scientists at K-State, in Kansas, in the USA, and in the world accept the theory of natural selection as the best current description we have for the evolution of life on earth. This stance is supported by all major US and world scientific organizations. Students taking classes associated with Center will study the central ideas behind, and the evidence for, the theory of natural selection.

On the other hand, intelligent design has enjoyed some success as a political and legal tool for groups across the USA opposed the teaching of evolution in public schools in its present form. In this political science context, it is an appropriate area of scholarship and education for the Center. Students taking classes associated with the Center will explore the rationale of social groups advocating intelligent design.

*Does the Center take a political position on the current debate over the teaching of evolution in Kansas public schools?*

Short answer: “no”. The Center is an academic unit dedicated to improving research, scholarship, teaching, and outreach on many aspects of the origin of the human species. It has no public policy role.

Longer answer:

K-State physicists, geologists, and biologists occupy the mainstream center of scientific thought. As such, they accept as adequately proven theories such as the “hot big-bang model” of the universe as a whole, and of the biological theory of natural selection based on substantially improved ideas originally put forward by Darwin. Consequently, the views of Center faculty members will tend to align with the “evolution” side of the current political debate in Kansas. Center members may enter this debate as private citizens, but the Center itself will not take a political position.

*Does the Center sponsor presentations of religious ideas?*

Short answer: “yes”. Contemporary scholars of religion continue a long and highly respected intellectual tradition throughout the world. Exposure to this scholarship is valuable to the KSU community.

Longer answer:

Questions concerning creation go to the very heart of nearly all religions. Religion influences science, and science influences religion. These relations remain, as they have long been, fascinating topics for study. Unfortunately K-State lacks a department of religious studies. For this reason, the Center will from time-to-time sponsor presentations by religious scholars on topics of interest. One should expect these presentations to be secular in nature with a strong intellectual bent.

The specific positions of religious groups in Kansas very much influence the current public debate over evolution in the state. An exposure to these views is valuable for both scholarship and education. Hence the Center may also sponsor representatives of local or state-wide religious communities for public events. Kansans share a wide diversity of religious beliefs. The Center will seek in its events to appropriately represent the population, within constraints dictated by logistics. Again, one should expect these events to be secularly and academically oriented.