

EDUCATION

## **Texas scientists challenge proposal to teach weaknesses of evolutionary theory**

**Science curriculum draft that would remove ideas "based upon purported forces outside of nature" from what Texas students are taught in biology classes.**

By [Laura Heinauer](#)

AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Wednesday, October 01, 2008

Armed with stacks of scientific journals, a group that says it represents more than 800 Texas scientists is challenging the idea that discussion of the weaknesses of evolutionary theory belongs in science classrooms.

The group of professors held a news conference Tuesday in the lobby of the Texas Education Agency in Austin and said that they would be watching while a state board rewrites the state public school science curriculum next year.

"Not a single one (of the articles in these journals) gives us reason to believe evolution did not occur," said Dan Bolnick, an assistant professor of integrative biology at the University of Texas, pointing to stacks of the scientific journal *Evolution*. "So where are the weaknesses? Simple: They don't exist. They are not based on scientific research or data and have been refuted countless times."

Last week, the state released an early committee recommendation for the new science curriculum that would excise ideas "based upon purported forces outside of nature" from what Texas students are taught in biology classes. The curriculum, once approved, will outline what will be taught about science to every public school student in the state.

Organizers of the 21st Century Science Coalition said the group formed about two weeks ago and blossomed in membership in response to comments by State Board of Education Chairman Don McLeroy, R-Bryan, who opposes a committee proposal to remove the requirement that the "strengths and weaknesses" of all scientific theories be taught in biology classes.

McLeroy has also said he wants to spell out in the curriculum that there are limits to what science can explain.

Critics of the teaching of intelligent design and creationism — ideas that hold that the universe was created by a higher power — say such language has been used to undermine the theory of evolution.

"It's clear he wants to promote a particular religious agenda," said David Hillis, a UT integrative biology professor. "Texas public schools should be preparing our kids to succeed in the 21st century, not promoting political and ideological agendas that are hostile to a sound science education."

In an interview after the news conference Tuesday, McLeroy said he "totally rejected" the idea that he or anyone on the board wants to inject religion into science classrooms. "I'm not arguing for supernatural explanations, only testable ones. When I look at the evidence, I see lots of problems," McLeroy said.

William Dembski, a senior fellow for the Discovery Institute, a think tank devoted to challenging aspects of evolutionary theory, said the fossil record defies the theory of evolution in several instances. Because of the inconsistencies and other reasons, Dembski said, "I'd argue that constitutes a weakness."

The institute promotes intelligent design.

Coalition member Richard Duhrkopf, who teaches introductory biology at Baylor University, said that although one might expect his university — the largest Southern Baptist and second-largest Christian university in the country — to teach creationism in science classrooms, it does not.

Creationist theories, Duhrkopf said, "just don't make the grade as science, and to teach them would be to teach a lie to our students."

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