

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P.O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

May 15, 2013

SENT VIA MAIL AND EMAIL TO President@bsu.edu

Ms. Jo Ann M. Gora
President, Ball State University
Office of the President
Administration Building, Room 101
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306

Re: Constitutional concerns with teaching methods

Dear President Gora:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to urge you to investigate disturbing reports of a Ball State professor proselytizing in the classroom. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization representing 19,000 members across the country, including more than 300 in Indiana. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our understanding that the Honors College offers “The Boundaries of Science,” a class taught by Prof. Eric Hedin. As we understand it, this course is meant to be an honest, objective investigation regarding the intersection of science and religion. No doubt this is an interesting and valuable topic for university students to explore. I would have been interested in such a class. However, we understand that this class is not being taught in an objective manner. Rather, it is our information and understanding that this class has been used to proselytize students and advance Christianity by using gaps in scientific knowledge — the “boundaries of science” — in an attempt to prove religious belief correct. We fully understand and support the need for academic freedom and free inquiry, particularly at the university level. But, *as taught*, this class crosses ethical and constitutional lines. Moreover, we also understand that Prof. Hedin holds biased discussions of his personal religious beliefs during his Introduction to Astronomy classes.

This class does not appear to be an honest investigation into the intersection of science and religion

An academically sound class investigating the intersection between science and religion would be a conversation exploring two sides to the issue. Hedin’s class does not appear to be conversation. Our reports indicate that it is a one-sided monologue by a government paid employee whose agenda is to show that science proves the truth of religion — in this case one particular religion, Christianity. The use of public money at a public university to proselytize to students is disturbing.

The partial bibliography listed in the class syllabus illustrates the one-sidedness of Hedin’s class. Many of the titles are by creationists (Behe, Dembski, Meyer, and Ross). Two titles are by Christian apologists who lack any scientific credentials whatsoever (C.S. Lewis and Lee Strobel). Properly taught, the class would include titles espousing the other side of the argument, such as books by scientists like Jerry Coyne (*Why Evolution is True*) and Richard Dawkins (*The Greatest Show on Earth*). The vast majority of scientists are nonreligious and many take the view that science disproves a creator-god.

Of course, it would be a valuable lesson for science majors to learn what rotten “science” the creationist/intelligent design proponents conduct. However, it does not appear that Hedin has included the creationism titles for that purpose. During the trial which proved that intelligent design is simply creationism rebranded, Michael Behe, a creationist author on Hedin’s syllabus, “admitted that: ‘there are no peer reviewed articles by anyone advocating for intelligent design.’” *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area Sch. Dist.*, 400 F. Supp. 2d 707, 745 (M.D. Pa. 2005). Creationists attacked this stumbling block by unscrupulously forcing their way into a scientific journal, generating a firestorm of controversy. That single published paper has been dismembered by reputable scientists and repudiated by the publisher of the journal, who called it “inappropriate for the pages of the *Proceedings [of the Biological Society of Washington]*.”¹ Yet, this article shows up on the syllabus for Hedin’s class. The article is a perfect example of how science should *not* be done, but the syllabus suggests it for its scientific merits not to critique bad “science.”

This course presents serious legal issues for Ball State

This course, as apparently taught, takes your school motto, “Education Redefined,” too far. This does not appear to be education, but inculcation cloaked in the guise of university education. It not only lowers the reputation and standards of this university on your watch, but poses serious constitutional problems. As a public university, BSU is subject to the strictures of the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment, which separates state and church.

There is a significant difference between teaching religion and preaching religion. The former suggests an objective investigation into religion, and “it might well be said that one’s education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion ...” *Abington Township School District v. Schempp*, 374 US 203, 225 (1963). The latter suggests a biased presentation about the “truth” of a particular religion.

But this class is not an objective or comparative study according to our sources. For instance, we understand that Hedin, who is not a biologist, spends a good deal of the course teaching creationism or intelligent design (ID), a religious belief masquerading as science. The syllabus is rife with ID-speak. Teaching creationism or ID or any of the other misnamed creationist ilk as scientific fact in a public institution is unconstitutional. In *Edwards v. Aguillard*, the Supreme Court held that public schools cannot teach “scientific creationism.” 482 U.S. 578, (1987). The law that was challenged in that case purported to give “Balanced Treatment” but was still found to be unconstitutional. *See also McLean v. Arkansas Bd. of Ed.*, 529 F.Supp. 1255 (D.C.Ark., 1982).

In the most recent case to address this issue, *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area Sch. Dist.*, the court held that:

Creationism, intelligent design, and *other claims of supernatural intervention in the origin of life* or of species are not science because they are not testable by the methods of science. These claims subordinate observed data to statements based on authority, revelation, or religious belief. ... This contrasts with science, where any hypothesis or theory always remains subject to the possibility of rejection or modification in the light of new knowledge. 400 F.Supp. 2d 707, 737 (M.D. Pa 2005)(emphasis added).

Another legal issue with this class is Hedin’s active promotion of his personal religious views. In *Bishop v. Aronov*, the University of Alabama ordered a teacher, Dr. Bishop, to stop injecting religion into his classroom. Bishop lost a free speech lawsuit challenging the university’s order. Bishop said things like:

¹ Statement of the Council of the Biological Society of Washington, September 2004, available at http://web.archive.org/web/20070926214521/http://www.biolsocwash.org/id_statement.html

“[I] personally believe God came to earth in the form of Jesus Christ and he has something to tell us about life which is crucial to success and happiness. Now this is simply my personal belief, understand, and I try to model my life after Christ, who was concerned with people, and I feel that is the wisest thing I can do. You need to recognize as my students that this is my bias and it colors everything I say and do. If that is not your bias, that is fine. You need, however to, filter everything I say with that (Christian bias) filter. If you observe something in my life that is inconsistent with Christianity, please let me know, because, I believe that it is much more important than a pile of papers.” 926 F.2d 1066, 1068 (11th Cir. 1991).

The order telling Bishop to stop such remarks is constitutional. It said:

Foremost, I want to reaffirm our commitment to your right of academic freedom and freedom of religious belief. This communication should not be construed as an attempt to interfere with or suppress your freedoms. From discourse with you and others, I feel that certain actions on your behalf are unwarranted at a public institution such as The University of Alabama and should cease. Among those actions that should be discontinued are: 1) the interjection of religious beliefs and/or preferences during instructional time periods and 2) the optional classes where a “Christian Perspective” of an academic topic is delivered. *Id. at 1069.*

The court specifically held that the university classroom is “not an open forum” and upheld the university’s order that the professor “separate his personal and professional beliefs and that he not impart the former to his students during ‘instructional time’ or under the guise of the courses he teaches in so-called optional classes.” *Id. at 1071.* The court was “not persuaded that, even in the remotest sense, Dr. Bishop’s rights of free exercise or worship as those concepts are comprehended in constitutional parlance are implicated.” *Id. at 1077.*

No doubt if you take the time to survey students in Hedin’s classes (all his classes, not just the class at issue), you will find he talks to his students much as Bishop did. BSU students have publicly cited Hedin’s inability to keep his religion to himself:

- “... the class had an extremely Christian bias and he [Hedin] does not believe in evolution.”
- “Constantly talks about religion, as an atheist, I was slightly concerned my science teacher is a devout [C]hristian.”
- “The one thing I didn’t like was his constantly bringing religion into class.” (see enclosed for full quotes)

These comments, from ratemyprofessors.com, go back to 2006 and reference both the class at issue and Hedin’s intro Astronomy class. There is no reason why a legitimate investigation into the intersection of science and religion should have “an extremely Christian bias” or why an astronomy professor should “constantly talk about religion” or “constantly bring religion into class.” It is clear that Hedin does not understand the boundaries set by the Constitution. Not only should he be reminded, but he should not be permitted to teach a class touching on religion given his inability to separate his teaching duties from his religious sensibilities.

This also raises serious ethical issues for Ball State. Non-Christian students are unlikely to feel comfortable giving an honest answer to a test question if that answer disagreed with Hedin’s Christian bias. They would rightly feel that their grade might be in jeopardy if their religious answers did not agree with the religion of the professor controlling their grade — particularly when the professor goes out of his way to let students know about his Christian bias.

The Ball State reputation is at stake

Legal issues aside, this class threatens the integrity of a Ball State degree. BSU appears to offer a class that preaches religion, yet gives students honors science credit. BSU appears to have a class with a non-biologist undermining the genuine science and scholarship of the Ball State biology department by teaching creationism, a religious belief with no evidentiary support.

You also have a class that claims to be an honest investigation into religion but somehow minimizes the bulk of the world's religions. Hedin heavily favors Christianity. If it were truly about science and religion, Judaism (aspects other than its influence of Christianity), Islam, Hindu, Buddhism and other religious faiths would be represented too. Hedin would also present views of scientists, like Richard Dawkins, Stephen Hawking, Albert Einstein, Victor Stenger, and Jerry Coyne, who think that science disproves the existence of god. But Hedin appears to have no interest in an honest investigation; his interest appears to be inculcating students in *his* religion.

We request that Ball State thoroughly investigate all Hedin's classes and his teaching/preaching methods and if your investigation bears out these allegations, to remove Hedin from the class at issue. It is not appropriate for someone with "an extremely Christian bias" to teach a religion and science class. "Just as women students would find no comfort in an openly sexist instructor, an Islamic or Jewish student will not likely savor the Christian bias that Dr. Bishop [or Hedin] professes." *Id. at 1072.*

Hedin ought to be instructed to "separate his personal and professional beliefs and that he not impart the former to his students during 'instructional time' or under the guise of the courses he teaches in so-called optional classes." *Id. at 1071.*

May we hear from you at your earliest convenience as to what steps Ball State is taking to correct the violation of the Constitution and the breach of its trust to offer quality, higher education?

Sincerely,



Andrew L. Seidel
Staff Attorney

mmaggiotto@bsu.edu

Michael A. Maggiotto, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Sciences and Humanities
North Quad (NQ), room 193
Muncie, IN 47306

Sjohnso2@bsu.edu

Susan Johnson
Associate Dean, College of Science & Humanities
Professor of Biology
North Quad (NQ), room 193
Muncie, IN 47306

jruebel@bsu.edu

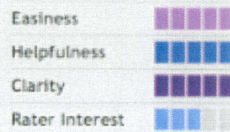
James Ruefel
Dean of Honors College
Ball Honors House (BA), room 104
Ball State University
Muncie, IN 47306

kbadger@bsu.edu

Kemuel Badger
Chair, Department of Biology
Ball State University
Cooper Life Science Building, CL 121
Muncie, IN 47306

6/7/10

HONRS296 😊 Good Quality



Extremely nice guy and an easy class. However, the class had an extremely Christian bias and he does not believe in evolution. Many of his views do not quite jive with those of mainstream science. Class consisted of weekly journals, short article review, and a 6 page paper.

Report this rating

4/9/09

Astro100 😊 Good Quality



Great teacher, nice guy. Constantly talks religion, as an atheist, I was slightly concerned my science teacher is a devout christian. If you have astronomy at Ball State, get Dr. Hedin. He is willing to help with just about everything in class, and gives out more extra credit. Gave me 20 ec points just for showing up one friday. Great guy.

Report this rating

5/9/06

Astro 100 😊 Good Quality



He is very nice and overly willing to meet outside of class. He likes to interact with students and is very friendly and always smiling. The tests were hard for me, but I missed quite a few classes b/c I hate science. The one thing I didn't like was his constant bringing religion into class.

Report this rating