



Search Terms: Rebecca James

FOCUS™

[Search Within Results](#)[Edit Search](#)[Print](#)[Email](#)[Document List](#)[Expanded List](#)[KWIC](#)[Full](#)Document 1 of 30. [next](#)▶▶Copyright 2005 Post-Standard
All Rights Reserved.

The Post-Standard

The Post-Standard (Syracuse, New York)

November 20, 2005 Sunday
FINAL EDITION**SECTION:** NEWS; Pg. A1**LENGTH:** 1367 words**HEADLINE:** EVOLUTION DEBATE GROWS ON COLLEGE CAMPUSES;
INTEREST SPARKED BY INTELLIGENT DESIGN CASES IN KANSAS AND PENNSYLVANIA.**BYLINE:** By **Rebecca James** Staff writer**BODY:**

Hannah Maxson is no intellectual slouch. She is a double major in chemistry and math at Cornell University.

She's also an advocate for intelligent design - the notion that biological systems are too complex to be explained solely by Darwinian evolution and show evidence of a higher intelligence.

She helped found the Intelligent Design and Evolution Awareness club at Cornell after hearing from people, including her teaching assistant in a biology class, who told her she was the first person he had met at Cornell who had doubts about Darwin's theory.

What particularly frustrated Maxson was that so many of her classmates and professors, "still believe that no educated person - no one except hillbilly fundamentalists - questioned evolution."

The debate over intelligent design, Darwin and God usually makes news at the public school level, in high profile cases like recent ones in Kansas and Pennsylvania. But interest in tackling intelligent design is growing at college campuses nationwide and around Central New York. For instance:

Future science teachers at the State University College at Oswego discuss how they might have to deal with the subject in their classrooms one day.

Le Moyne College in Syracuse is planning a lecture for next year with the premise that religion and evolution are not in conflict.

Cornell's president chose the topic of intelligent design as the focus of his state-of-the-university speech last month.

Several colleges nationwide have introduced intelligent design courses or seminars, according to a Wall Street Journal report.

Still, few places in American society are more skeptical of intelligent design than college campuses, according to several recent surveys. Scientists, from biologists to economists, are less likely than other Americans to be religious, the surveys show. While a majority of Americans advocate teaching creationism along with evolution, most scientists

and educators say that is a bad idea.

Our aching backs

Scientists speaking on campus are almost guaranteed a laugh if they poke fun at intelligent design. Pulitzer-Prize winning author Jared Diamond, speaking at Hamilton College Sept. 29, drew chuckles when he said true intelligent design would not leave him with an aching back.

"Many of us end up with back problems and hip problems and shoulder problems," Diamond said. "Why? Because we are walking upright with a body frame that for about 52 million years, evolved in order to get us going on all fours."

Intelligent design can be defined in many ways. Some say it is creationism repackaged. Other advocates, like Maxson, and the 80 members of her club, say they take a scientific approach that looks for complexities and patterns in nature. They don't dismiss all of evolution, but say some dramatic leaps in development don't match a theory dependent on incremental change.

But Hunter Rawlings, the interim president of Cornell, pointedly joined intelligent design critics in an Oct. 21 speech to say that the concept is not scientific and that the current effort to require it be mentioned in schools is dangerous. He did welcome discussion of intelligent design in nonscientific venues.

After the speech, the president's office received more than 100 e-mails in response and only about 15 opposed his stance, said Simeon Moss, speaking for Cornell.

The political debate over intelligent design makes the subject a topic of dinner conversations at Alpha Delta Phi fraternity at Cornell, said fraternity brother Kevin Barmish.

Barmish was charged with finding a fall semester speaker for a faculty lecture series and asked his fraternity brothers to pick from five topics.

"Intelligent design got nearly all the votes," he said.

Classroom conundrum

Those college students with a particular stake in the issue are those who expect to be leading science classrooms eventually.

Eric Olson, a professor in curriculum and instruction in the education school at State University College at Oswego, said his students have always had some concerns about handling challenges to evolution in class. But the subject has come up more often this semester.

"I think that maybe there is a little more urgency, more of a desire to understand how they're going to want to grapple with the issue," Olson said.

This month, the issue has seen mixed developments.

The school board race in a Pennsylvania town became international news on Election Day, when voters in Dover replaced eight incumbents who supported teaching intelligent design in the science classroom with eight newcomers who disagreed.

The Dover school board's policy - which required teaching about gaps in Darwin's theory - was challenged in federal court in a trial that ended Nov. 4. The judge has said he expects to rule by the end of the year.

Meanwhile, on Nov. 8, the Kansas Board of Education jumped into the evolution debate for at least the third time in recent years. The board approved new standards that encourage teachers to teach evolution, but urges them to include a discussion of challenges to the theory.

'No basic contradiction'

Many college leaders who may have thought it made more sense to ignore the intelligent design debate are now considering tackling it to make a larger point.

Le Moyne College President Rev. Charles J. Beirne, who said it is absurd to consider teaching creationism in schools, said colleges need to encourage people to avoid simplistic thinking.

"We're trying to understand the bigger reality in more sophisticated ways," Beirne said. "There are ways of understanding religious experience and scientific experience as two very valid ways of coming at reality. There is no

basic contradiction."

Le Moyne's Sanzone Center for Catholic Studies and Theological Reflection is planning a public forum on the subject for this spring or next fall, said Nancy Ring, the center's interim director.

"The Catholic Church generally has in recent years stood behind evolution," Ring said. "Part of the purpose of the lecture is to say a belief in God doesn't require a belief in intelligent design."

But not everyone on campuses agrees that evolution and religion are compatible.

"Biology breeds atheism'

The speaker that Cornell's Alpha Delta Phi chose to speak Oct. 26 is famous for saying that studying biology breeds atheism.

Will Provine, a Cornell professor of the history of biology, has said, "One can have a religious view that is compatible with evolution only if the religious view is indistinguishable from atheism."

Scientists and theologians end up at odds when theologians dwell on finding meaning in life.

As Colgate physicist Vic Mansfield put it at an Oct. 14 Cornell conference on Buddhism and science: "There is no meaning or purpose in the laws of physics."

At the quantum level, action is random with no purpose or structure, Mansfield said.

That idea disturbs even religious leaders who generally support Darwinian evolution, including the Dalai Lama, the Tibetan Buddhist leader who recently authored, "The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality."

The meaning of life

"The Buddhist perspective, the idea of these mutations being purely random events is deeply unsatisfying for a theory that purports to explain the origin of life," he wrote.

Pure randomness isn't always a popular idea among young adults either.

"Nineteen- and 20-year-olds are interested in the purpose and meaning of life," said Joe Hoffmann, a professor of religious studies and human values at Wells College.

But the tough questions that challenge both science and religion are the ones that students should be considering, he said.

INSIDE

The poll: What people think about evolution?A-17

Definitions: Intelligent design vs. evolution/A-17

Resource guide: Where to find more information/A-16

"One can have a religious view that is compatible with evolution only if the religious view is indistinguishable from atheism."

Will Provine,

Cornell professor of history of biology

"The Catholic Church generally has in recent years stood behind evolution. Part of the (lecture's) purpose ... is to say a belief in God doesn't require a belief in intelligent design."

- Nancy Ring, interim director, Le Moyne College's Sanzone Center for Catholic Studies and Theological Reflection

GRAPHIC: PHOTO Stephen D. Cannerelli/Staff photographer INTELLIGENT DESIGN and Evolution Awareness club members pose in the Urin Library at Cornell: (from left) Seth Maxson; Rabia Malik; Rachel Staver, vice president; and Hannah Maxson, president. They formed the club to discuss intelligent design. **GRAPHIC:** God and evolution: various viewpoints. The Post-Standard. Note: For text see microfilm.

LOAD-DATE: November 22, 2005

Document 1 of 30. [next](#) ▶▶

[Terms & Conditions](#) [Privacy](#) [Copyright](#) © 2005 LexisNexis, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All Rights Reserved.