"IDEA Conference 2002" Hosted at USF

IDEA Center's first conference is also the first San Francisco Bay Area ID conference

On September 27-28, 2002, the IDEA Center co-sponsored the "Intelligent Design and Evolution Awareness (IDEA) Conference 2002" at the University of San Francisco (USF). The Conference was made possible through a generous grant from the USF Jesuit foundation and the hard work of USF business professor, by Dr. Stephen Huxley.

This two-day conference gave those attending opportunities to learn from experts about scientific evidence for intelligent design, irreducible complexity, biochemical design, cosmic design, the origins of life, as well as a metaphysical and philosophical understanding of the proper place of design. Speakers included authors and scholars of the "intelligent design movement" including Michael Behe, Edward Peltzer, Paul Chien, Cornelius George Hunter, Jay Wesley Richards, and Paul Nelson (see picture at right).

USF, a campus whose motto is "Educating Hearts and Minds to Change the World," provided an ideal venue for the conference. It opened with comments by USF President Fr. Stephen A. Privett, S.J., speaking in favor of the spirit of the conference and the legitimacy of discussing the topic of origins in both scientific and spiritual terms. He seemed to endorse a perspective which was open to intelligent design in the world.

The turnout exceeded expectations. Between 150 and 180 attended each day. Attendees included San Franciscans, but also individuals traveling from as far away as Idaho and Illinois. Over 50 students attended from campuses such as USF, Berkeley, UCSF, UC Davis, Stanford, Moody Bible Institute, and Sacramento State University. The attendance breakdown was approximately 50% general public, 40% student, 5% faculty, 5% pastors.

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IDEA Center News and Events:
“IDEA Course 2003” To Begin This Coming January
The IDEA Course is a 6-week course on intelligent design theory and the creation - evolution issue, which IDEA Center staff teaches in various venues. Our first IDEA Course was an 8-week series taught in 2002. Beginning in January 2003, the IDEA Course will start again! This year the course will be taught in conjunction with "The Rock University," a Bible College founded by The Rock Church. For more details about the class, please visit http://www.ideacenter.org/idclass.htm.

Two New Staff Members Join the Center!
Over the past few months, the Center has welcomed two new staff members: Ryan Huxley, and Tristan Abbey. Ryan is a licensed professional engineer, with a master of science degree in engineering from UCSD. Ryan was inducted as Chief Operating Officer and Director of Programming in July, and was instrumental in bringing the IDEA Conference to fruition. Ryan has a passion for understanding design from an engineer's viewpoint, and is currently working on a project relating system redundancy to intelligent design. Tristan is a student who is experienced in the intelligent design debate. Despite his relative youth compared to other staff, Tristan is years ahead of his age in understanding the creation-evolution issue. For a preview of some of Tristan’s writing, take a look at: http://www.idurc.org/itsm/itsm-081502.shtml. Tristan is currently our “E-mail Master” and helps with a variety of other projects.

IDEA Club Student Chapter Updates
With the beginning of a new school year, these past few months have seen an explosion of new IDEA Clubs, including:

• IDEA Club at Long Beach City College, founded by heavily involved student leader Chris Wright.
• An IDEA Club at the University of Texas, Dallas, founded by sophomore student Wilston Nkangoh.
• The IDEA Club at Cal State Sacramento is in the works by former UCSD IDEA Club member Lori Schleppenbach.
• Our first "teacher-founded" IDEA Club has begun at a high school in Little Rock, Arkansas.
• The first "non-campus affiliated" IDEA Club has been founded in Baraboo, Wisconsin by Ralph Krainik.

We are also working with students to help start clubs in other places. If you know of any students, or anyone, who might be interested in promoting intelligent design, please contact us! at info@ideacenter.org.

IDEA in the Media:
Since our last newsletter, the Center has received some more media exposure:

• The Center was mentioned in an article quoting co-president Casey Luskin in The Tennessean, "Evolution debate not key to textbooks" by Jennifer Barnett (10/6/02).
• The IDEA Center received much exposure while publicizing its "IDEA Conference." Publicity included links on websites such as “Discovery.org,” “Arn.org,” “Reasons.org,” “GodandScience.org," and also USF news.
• Center co-president Casey Luskin was recently interviewed for an intelligent design website, which can be seen at “trueintelligence.org/interviewluskin.htm”.

Keep your eyes out for articles regarding the IDEA Conference in other media! Reports to be in the next newsletter!

Brief Origins News Updates:
Ohio and Cobb County, Georgia: Two areas have recently adopted science standards which allow for evolution to be taught critically, and would permit (not mandate) intelligent design to be taught. The Ohio State School Board has called for students to be tested on "how scientists continue to investigate and critically analyze aspects of evolutionary theory." 1 Cobb County, Georgia, has also voted to permit its teachers to allow alternative theories which are truly scientific to evolution to be taught in the classroom. 2

Chimps 'n Humans: We've all heard that chimps and humans have DNA which is 98% similar, right? Take that number down to about 95% says Roy Britten, biologist at CalTech. 3 The original 98% statistic was determined back in the mid-1980's at the very beginning of the biomolecular DNA-sequencing revolution when DNA hybridization techniques were still being perfected. Despite the large error bars in those methods, the 98% statistic became public dogma. Perhaps that now will change.

Trashing Junk DNA, Part II: The latest genetic item to be crossed off the "Junk DNA" list may be ALU sequences which appear to have functionality for binding chromosomes together during mitosis (cell duplication). Though ALU sequences do not necessarily code for proteins (hence why they were previously thought to be "junk"), this evidence shows structural functionality for ALU sequences, providing anchoring points for chromosomes to link to one-another. ALU sequences have previously been cited as genetic garbage providing evidence for human ancestry with apes. If they are no longer meaningless sequences shared with apes, perhaps they have function and do not provide evidence for descent over design.

Disowning Homo habilis: Extinct Australopithecine apes have often been claimed as ancestors to our genus Homo through an alleged fossil "link" species called Homo habilis. A review in Nature used cladistic analyses to conclude that habilis does not belong in the genus Homo, because it is much more similar to apes than to humans. The study found habilis closely matched Australopithecines in body size, body shape, locomotion, jaws, teeth, development, and brain size. 5 This conclusion supports findings of previous studies which found that habilis' skeleton was more similar to modern apes than to Homo sapiens (modern humans) 6 and that habilis ear canals even suggest it actually "relied less on bipedal behaviour than the australopithecines." 7 The upshot is that habilis might even be more similar to modern apes than it is to the australopithecines! With such a morphology, habilis does not belong in our family tree, and is not a transitional form between australopithecines and our own genus, Homo.

References:
The conference also welcomed visitors from the National Center for Science Education (NCSE), a political activist group that opposes the teaching of intelligent design. Overall, all conference attendees were cordial and friendly, and everyone from all sides of the issue engaged in respectful debate.

The Conference Speakers

On Friday evening, the first plenary session was a video entitled the "Unlocking the Mystery of Life." With interviews from scholars in the intelligent design movement and stunning computer graphics, this video made it hard to walk out and question intelligent design.

Next, Paul Nelson spoke about the intelligent design movement, and what intelligent design is, and what it is not. Dr. Nelson discussed the way that intelligent design could be used as a pathway to discovery. This portion of his talk provided a brief glimpse into the ways that intelligent design can add to our knowledge and understanding of the world by uncovering and elucidating various aspects of reality. Dr. Richards closed the evening with a discussion of the "apologetic value" of intelligent design. This was admittedly a difficult topic to address, as intelligent design is not a religiously based theory (as many have wrongly asserted), but it does have metaphysical implications. Dr. Richards was frank about the metaphysical implications of intelligent design, but did not take the arguments further than possible. Intelligent design does not necessarily support Christianity, said Dr. Richards, for it does not name the identity of the designer and does not rule out options for the designer other than the God of the Bible. His conclusion, however, was more modest, saying, "[i]ntelligent design makes it possible to be an intellectually fulfilled theist." Perhaps of more importance was that Dr. Richards' openness about the implications of design made lucid that his support of intelligent design is not religiously motivated, for design does not necessarily provide any strong particular support for his Christian beliefs.

On Saturday, four science lectures provided a broad technical introduction to intelligent design, including:

- Cosmic Design (by Dr. Jay Richards),
- Intelligent Design and the Origin of Life (by Dr. Edward Peltzer),
- Intelligent Design and the Origin of the Animal Phyla (by Dr. Paul Chien), and
- Irreducible Complexity and Biological Design (by Dr. Michael Behe)

Dr. Richards' talk on Cosmic Design was along the lines of his forthcoming book, *The Privileged Planet*, co-authored with Iowa State University astronomer Guillermo Gonzalez. Dr. Richards discussed how design can be seen in that the universe specifies that the very conditions which support life are those which optimize scientific discovery. This implies that, among other things, "the universe is designed for discovery." Future years of research may develop this argument even further.

Next, Dr. Edward Peltzer spoke on design and the origin of life. Dr. Peltzer obtained his Ph.D. at Scripps Institution of Oceanography, studying under well known origins-of-life researchers Stanley Miller and Jeff Bada. In his lecture, Dr. Peltzer critiqued origins-of-life scenarios in that chemical reactions between pre-biotic chemicals would cause any portions of a "primordial soup" to quickly degrade. These reactions, Dr. Peltzer noted, are similar to the reactions that take place when you cook food or watch an apple turn brown. Dr. Peltzer concluded by noting that many of the problems with origins-of-life scenarios point to life being irreducibly complex—a strong evidence for intelligent design.

Dr. Paul Chien spoke on the origin of the animal phyla—the Cambrian explosion. Again, here was a scientist, also a member of the USF Biology Department, with years of personal experience on his topic. He talked about the problem of the "evolutionary lawn" which the Cambrian explosion makes of the fossil record, and how it does not fit well with Darwinian theory. Traditional Darwinian theory would suggest that we should find a fossil record awash with transitional forms, of varying degrees, making classification a difficult task for a lack of consistency or stasis. With many personal slides and anecdotes from his visits to the Chenjiang Cambrian locality in China, the talk was filled with details, and quite compelling as evidence for design from the "quantum biology" found in the fossil record. Dr. Chien also noted that his Chinese colleague said, "In China we can criticize Darwin but not the government. In America you can criticize the government but not Darwin."

The final plenary session was given by Dr. Michael Behe, on biological design. Dr. Behe began by noting that he wished he had spoken first, and not last, because by the time he spoke, the audience had heard many of the terms
and concepts of his talk a few times. Regardless, Dr. Behe gave more depth into the concepts of irreducible complexity and biological design than had been given previously. Drawing upon examples such as the bacterial flagellum, Dr. Behe provided biological applications for the theory. Dr. Behe also expounded upon his ideas by responding to some of the dissent he has encountered, focusing on the irreducible complexity of the biological mechanism for blood clotting.

There were also five concurrent sessions.

Cornelius George Hunter, a biophysicist and author of Darwin's God: Evolution and the Problem of Evil, argued that the theological roots of evolution come not from a program for atheism, but something more like a Christian heresy. Hunter found that Darwin rejected traditional theological understandings of creation and anthropomorphized the God of the Bible into a God who could never permit natural evil. Natural selection became Darwin's solution to this "problem of evil." This unorthodox perspective on the socio-religious roots of Darwin's theory could even affect criticisms of how evolution is taught in the schools. Many Darwinists explicitly promote some of the very anti-teleological religious arguments that Hunter showed evolution is historically founded upon.

In another concurrent session, John Bracht presented on "TRIZ" (Theory of Inventive Problem Solving). This talk was key to arguments behind design because it shows that intelligent design is founded upon an empirical basis. IDEA Center co-president Eddie Colanter gave a concurrent session talk on the philosophical and theological implications of intelligent design. Paul Nelson also gave concurrent talks on measuring design in the fossil record based upon information increase. And finally, IDEA Center co-president Casey Luskin talked on how to promote design on a college campus by starting an IDEA Club. This was a similar talk to that given at the Darwin, Design, and Democracy Conference this past summer.

The conference ended on Saturday evening with a panel discussion among conference speakers fielding questions from the audience. NCSE Director Eugenie Scott came forward, and made a number of contentions against intelligent design, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Intelligent design does not have a coherent model, and therefore should not be taught in schools.
2. The intelligent design community does not have a consensus on the age of the earth or common descent.
3. Intelligent design theory attacks only natural selection, and treats natural selection as if it were the only mechanism for evolution, when there are other mechanisms.
4. Intelligent design proponents have an "obsession with Darwinism" that has "not scientific roots" but "theological roots" and such objections represent "freedom of religion [or] freedom of speech" but are not scientific.

In response to contention 1, Dr. Richards noted that intelligent design theory as a science is quite young and in many ways is in its formative years, and that disagreement within the community is understandable. However, there are many points that the vast majority of design proponents do indeed agree upon, such as William Dembski's general methods for inferring design and some of Michael Behe's examples of designed systems in biology. One could easily argue that there is enough agreement on these core issues to provide plenty of material justifying a science curriculum on design. If Scott's idea that consensus is required before something can be taught, evolution itself would be thrown out as many evolutionists disagree about "how" (i.e. specific mechanisms) evolution occurred.

As for point 2, one speaker noted that disagreement among scientists does not imply a theory is wrong, unpromising, or should not even be taught. Dr. Nelson reminded the audience that even evolutionary biologists disagree over whether or not common descent is true, which Scott conceded as a valid assertion. Nelson continued saying, "[f]reedom of religion for evolutionary biologists is intellectual freedom for design theorists. Don't expect the degree of unanimity among us that you don't find in your own community." Issues related to the age of the earth have nothing to do with intelligent design theory in the first place. One might as well demand that all proponents of design to have the same favorite breakfast cereal.

Jay Richards had some telling remarks regarding Scott's 4th point, saying, "[T]he point is, Eugenie, since you're talking here publicly, you ended with an ad-hominem comment about our motivations. And, this would be such a more enjoyable discussion to have publicly if we didn't talk about each other's motivations ... unless, the motivations have become a premise in an argument. ... I think that's just
Even if some design theorists do have theological motivations, what of it? Dr. Peltzer noted, "Kepler and Newton, because of their belief in a Divine Creator, looked for order and regularity in the universe. As a consequence, 300 years of scientific advances have followed." In science, what matters ultimately are not motivations, but rather if arguments are based upon supporting observations and evidence which lead to well-supported conclusions.

Though most of Scott's contentions were not over scientific issues, her third contention did have a scientific slant. Though Scott is correct to claim that there are other mechanisms for evolutionary change besides natural selection, she misunderstands that the other mechanisms are not adaptive, and it is primarily in the origin of complex biological adaptations that intelligent design theory takes interest. Indeed, Douglas Futuyma in his textbook *Evolutionary Biology* recognizes two principle causes for evolution:

Change [evolution] in genotype proportions within a population can occur by either of two principle processes: random fluctuations in proportions (random genetic drift) or nonrandom changes due to the superior survival and/or reproduction of some genotypes compared to others (natural selection). *(Evolutionary Biology, pg. 26)*

Nonrandom adaptive evolution is therefore supposed to proceed only by natural selection acting upon variation. There are other mechanisms for change, however natural selection acting upon variation is the ONLY possible explanation Darwinism offers for how organisms adapt in the complex ways that design theorist argue they cannot. Other mechanisms for change exist: extinction, neutral mutations, and genetic drift--but none are claimed as mechanisms to bring organisms atop the sharp inclines of the adaptive peaks in morphospace upon which they sit. Only natural selection is adaptive in this manner. Intelligent design concerns itself with how organisms come to exist on the top of adaptive peaks, not with how non-adaptive change occurs.

Scott's criticisms are actually ill-founded, for she argued that the primary argument presented at the conference against evolution was directed against natural selection. This is not the case, for it is not the differential survival of organisms against which intelligent design takes issue. Rather, intelligent design inquires into the origin of biological diversity the first place.

Natural selection is simply non-random death: it is a mathematical certainty given variation in a species and some selection pressure from the environment. But evolution is more than just natural selection--there must be variation upon which selection can act. As Douglas Futuyma states:

"Natural selection is not the same as evolution. Evolution is a two-step process: the origin of genetic variation by mutation or recombination, followed by a change in the pattern of variation ... Natural selection is one agent of change in the pattern of variation; genetic drift is another. Both can be responsible for the spread of traits throughout populations, but neither natural selection nor genetic drift accounts for the origin of variation." *(Evolutionary Biology, pg. 365)*

But where did this variation come from in the first place, and are the mechanisms for originating variation sufficient to account for irreducibly complex structures? The problem lies in the mutation mechanism, where mutations--the ultimate originator of all genetic variation--must somehow account for the origin of the vast and often irreducible complexity of life on earth. The need for mutations to build the great complexity upon which natural selection supposedly would act remains the Achilles heel for evolution.

Scott's final point asserting that ID is religiously based brings to mind one of Jay Richards' main points from his talk on Friday evening. Dr. Richards noted that arguments for intelligent design are not necessarily going to convince everyone. He asked the question, "If intelligent design fails to convince some people, does that mean it is a bad argument?" No, not at all, Dr. Richards said, since two preconditions are necessary for a person to accept the conclusion of design: (1) that a person is open to the possibility that things were designed and (2) that a person is open to the possibility that we can empirically detect design.

If one of these two criteria is not fulfilled, then of course a person will reject design. And these two criteria are almost like choices a person will make--will they choose to consider certain possibilities? There will always be plenty who will not entertain the possibility of design, but that should not be our primary concern. As long as arguments for design remain logical and subject to refining, design will make an impact upon those for whom it ultimately exists: those who are open to the possibility it is true.
IDEA Swept Up in Kansas Tornado


On July 26-27, 2002, the Intelligent Design Network (unaffiliated with the IDEA Center) hosted the annual "Darwin, Design, and Democracy III Conference" in Kansas City, Missouri. Leaders of the intelligent design movement met to discuss the teaching of origins science from an intelligent design perspective.

The theme of this year’s "DDD III" centered around lectures for a public high school biology class. Speakers such as Jonathan Wells, William Harris, and Michael Behe molded concepts from intelligent design theory into succinct lectures which could provide a model science curriculum incorporating criticisms of evolution, and promotion of intelligent design.

The IDEA Center was also given an opportunity to present at this conference on "How to Start an IDEA Club." This provided an opportunity to meet many students interested in starting IDEA Clubs and promoting intelligent design at their schools. In preparation for the presentation, the Center prepared its long-awaited official "IDEA Club Startup Packet." These extensive packets are like manuals that can help anyone interested in starting and running an IDEA Club.

Meaning Purpose and Value: The Philosophical Implications of Intelligent Design and Neo-Darwinism

By Eddie N. Colanter, IDEA Center Co-President

In the early 1990’s, as an undergraduate student at the University of California, San Diego, I can still recall sitting in my first biology class. The confident biology professor began his course by asking the following question: “How many of you still believe in creation?” I remember the awkward silence that followed as I reluctantly raised my hand for a nanosecond (seemingly lasting forever and the Seventh Day). The question did not shake my warranted belief in and commitment to God and the life that has meaning, purpose, and value. However, it did cause me to pause as I witnessed the efficaciousness of Neo-Darwinism’s gravitational pull on the hands of nearly all of the young undergraduate students. This event is indicative of the philosophical implications of Neo-Darwinism (ND).

ND claims that all living organisms are solely the result of purposeless random chances, given time and matter, through the processes of natural selection and mutation. In contrast, Intelligent Design (not creationism) claims that intelligent causes are necessary to explain the complex, information-rich structures of biology and that these causes are empirically detectable (Access Research Network Frequently Asked Questions about Intelligent Design, 2001). The philosophical implications of these two contrasting theories seem obvious. If ND is true, how can one ground any objective notions of meaning, purpose, and value, if human beings are merely the products of this purposeless random materialist naturalistic method? If this were the case, than human beings are not intrinsically valuable and the only rights they have would be those that we construct. Here, ND has no place for objective morality to condemn the evils in this world as we see perpetrated by snipers, terrorists, and the like. Philosopher and theologian William Lane Craig illustrates this point in his book Reasonable Faith (Crossway, 1994) when he states that life can have no objective meaning, purpose, or value in a merely material universe without God and immortality. Fortunately for the species homo sapiens, unlike ND, ID does seem to leave room for hope and does not imply the Ultimate dead-end (literally). ID implies a strong plausibility structure that life is not only intelligently designed, but that life has meaning, purpose, and value. And perhaps there is a God, objective morality, and the life immortal.

Lastly, ID and ND have great philosophical implications for life. This is why the question asked by the biology professor was so penetrating. It was meant to be an intellectual assault on every student’s beliefs of the true, the good, and the beautiful, be they religious or otherwise. Neo-Darwinists like Richard Dawkins know these implications to be true as indicated by his statement that, “…Darwin made it possible for an intellectually fulfilled atheist.” These theories are already part of the growing debate concerning the bioethical issues of cloning, stem cell research, reproductive technology, and more. Depending on which theory is accepted, this will influence public policy in law, medicine, business, and education. We must as a culture ask the questions “What is a human being?” “What does it mean to be human?” “Who is and who is not a member of the human community?” “How should we treat human beings?” “Do human beings have rights?” (For answers, please refer to Body & Soul by J.P. Moreland and Scott Rae, 2000)
Get Involved with the IDEA Center!
"IDEA Course 2003" To Be Taught at "The Rock University":
Beginning January 16th, 2003, the IDEA Center will begin teaching its second annual IDEA Course! Modeled after the IDEA Course from last spring, the "IDEA Course 2003" will be a six week course dealing with intelligent design theory and the creation - evolution issue. Topics that will be covered in the course include

- Intelligent Design Theory
- The Anthropic Principle
- Information and Biological Design
- Problems with Evolutionary Theory
- The Fossil Record
- Problems with the Chemical Origins of Life
- Philosophical Implications of Design and Evolution.

The IDEA Course will be taught in conjunction with "The Rock University," a Bible college founded by "The Rock Church." The Rock Church is a large church that meets on the campus of San Diego State University, and is pastored by former Chargers NFL player, Miles McPherson. Course instructors include IDEA Center staff members Eddie Colonter, Ryan Huxley, Casey Luskin, and Scott Uminsky. For more information, or if you would to register for the course, please visit http://www.ideacenter.org/idclass.htm or see the form below.

IDEA Center Membership / IDEA Conference Registration Form
This is a form to become an IDEA Center Member and / or to register for the IDEA Class (San Diego, Jan. 16 – Feb. 20). As a member, you'll receive this free electronic quarterly newsletter with updates about the Center, creation-evolution resources, and science news. The IDEA Center currently exists as a non-profit organization and we humbly accept your donations.

Please make me an IDEA Center Member:

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Please register me for the IDEA Course 2003:

To Register for the IDEA Course, please check the following box: [ ]

The Course will meet for six weeks on Thursdays from 6pm - 9pm from January 16th through February 20th (totaling 18 class hours). The registration fee for the course is $100. Please do NOT send any money for the course at this time. After returning a registration form for the course, we will contact you with further payment information and instructions, and will also give more detailed information about the class schedule and syllabus.

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