Our email server is down at the moment. So we're having to send this email out in batches of 500 from Gmail. There is big news from La Sierra. Please help us by forwarding this email to as many people as you know. Also, in light of this news, we have reopened the comments so you can share your thoughts.

**LSU Board says 'we apologize'**
In a surprising turn of events, LSU Board’s appointed Creation-Evolution Study Group issued a detailed memorandum to the board, outlining their report and recommendations regarding the allegations against LSU.

In addition to the memorandum, Randal Wisbey and Ricardo Graham issued an open letter, summarizing much of the memorandum. There are some noteworthy revelations in the letter, such as an apology and a concession to what Educate Truth and others have been claiming was occurring in the biology department. (Read more)

**La Sierra University won’t neglect creation teaching, president, chairman vow**
In an open letter welcomed by many Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders and members across North America, La Sierra University on March 9 acknowledged serious problems in its teaching of origins over the last several years, and apologized for not having adequately communicated Seventh-day Adventist beliefs about creationism to its students. (Read more)

**LSU student: 'Apostate or Apostle'?**
On May 25th, 2010, the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists removed La Sierra University from its employee subsidy list. The charge: apostasy.

Some are outraged. Many see it as, since it happened last year. Others have no idea what is going on. The case, I believe, deserves some attention, however—especially after recent visitations from both WASC and AAA accreditation bodies. For those who are not up to date on their religious vernacular, apostasy means a complete desertion and departure from one’s religion, cause, or principles. La Sierra University has been accused of this desertion due to the inclusion of the theory of evolution in some biology courses. (Read more)
In a surprising turn of events, LSU Board’s appointed Creation-Evolution Study Group issued a detailed memorandum to the board, outlining their report and recommendations regarding the allegations against LSU.

In addition to the memorandum, Randal Wisbey and Ricardo Graham issued an open letter, summarizing much of the memorandum. There are some noteworthy revelations in the letter, such as an apology and a concession to what Educate Truth and others have been claiming was occurring in the biology department:

[1] “We found that only 50 percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that our Adventist view of creation was presented, and only 40 percent agreed or strongly agreed that our Adventist view was supported. This is not acceptable, and we apologize.”

[2] “Instruction at the university, while being strong in many areas, has not adequately presented the denomination’s position on the subject of creation.”

[3] “There is some evidence that students have not always been respected for their belief in the Biblical creation position.”

The letter ends with this final thought:

“La Sierra University is committed to being an institution that does not just present the Church’s view of creation, but fully supports it. We pledge our commitment to work prayerfully and diligently to ensure that our mission to provide a rigorous and faith-affirming Seventh-day Adventist education is carried out on behalf of our students and our Church.”

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Sybil says:
March 10, 2011

So the biology professors will continue to teach under a new level of restraint? There is an old saying that “one convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.” Religious resolve would seem to dictate true repentance and sorrow by cleaning house after their discovery interviews with students. What is the value of a soul when their findings conclude some left religion altogether after sitting at the feet of some of these professors? Do Wisbey and Graham sigh and cry over that? Will someone in authority over that institution seek them out in an effort to apologize, ask for their forgiveness and attempt to regain them?
Sean Pitman says:
March 10, 2011

I’m not quite sure how professors who already believe in mainstream evolutionary theories of life existing and evolving on this planet over hundreds of millions of years of time are going to be effective in presenting the SDA position on origins? – i.e., that life was created in just six literal days within recent history?

It seems futile to me to make these professors attend GRI workshops – like that is going to change their minds or make them more effective at promoting the Church’s position on origins in their classrooms as remotely rational or scientific compared to the mainstream scientific perspective on origins.

Sean Pitman
http://www.DetectingDesign.com

Ken says:
March 10, 2011

Dear Shane and Sean

I want to congratulate you both as it is apparent that the efforts of Educate Truth are reflected in LSU reevaluating its position.

Sean’s point about the GRI may be academic, if the GRI itself has members that doubt or question recent six day creation.

Note that LSU states they will have the biology department ‘present’ the SDA's position on creation, not necessarily teach it.

Kudos on your efforts
Your agnostic friend
Ken

BobRyan says:
March 11, 2011

Ken and Sean are both making the case that the idea that LSU would actually put the horse back in the barn – after it is out to this extent — is highly unlikely and the fact that GRI itself is somewhat fractured on this topic only plays into the hands of anyone that may not be on board with reform at LSU.

in Christ,
Bob

BobRyan says:
March 11, 2011

When NPUC decided to solve the problem at Walla Walla – significant changes were made in the staffing of the WW religion and biology departments.

I don’t see anything close to that level of resolve in the Pacific Union.

Hopefully I am wrong.

in Christ,
Bob

Shane Hilde says:
March 11, 2011

It appears that most of the changes are superficial. Why? Where is the evidence that something is being changed in the classroom? What’s happening to the curriculum?

The survey is a joke. I’d like to know how many students actually took general biology or were biology majors in the last 4 years. I bet it was more than 400.
Indeed the survey was a “joke” in many ways. For example, the language of the survey wasn’t specific enough to be meaningful to all. It didn’t ask, for instance, “Did your LSU science professors promote the Seventh-day Adventist perspective on origins with regard to the validity of a literal six-day creation week for the origin of all life on this planet within recent history?”

I dare say the response to such a question would have been a universal “No” from all honest responders. However, at least the survey did tip the scales enough so that LSU felt forced to make a public statement of apology. What it and the Church actually does to correct the errors of the past, errors and attacks on the Church’s fundamental goals and ideals for decades, is a whole different matter. So far, I don’t see any advances or recommendations that meaningfully solve the this long-standing problem for the Church within its schools of higher education.

Sean Pitman
http://www.DetectingDesign.com

Will the GC hold the leadership or the biology dept. responsible for their lies and deception or will it just be politics as usual? Recognition and Respect?! Lord help us, LSU, and our denomination.

Thanks to you Dr. Sean for your leadership in all of this!
Pastor Cook

The Board appointed evolution/creation study committee concluded that any tangible hands-on-investigation such as looking at curriculum or visiting classrooms or talking directly with the teachers was beyond their expertise, therefore the Provost conceived the survey idea. But even with the survey results, notice this disclaimer: “The only way in which to fully benchmark these results, however, would be to have this same survey conducted by La Sierra's sister institutions in North America. Without such comparisons, any criticism of La Sierra's effectiveness at supporting Adventist beliefs relative to other institutions is speculative, at best. It would be helpful if other Adventist institutions could work on the curriculum challenges surrounding this issue in a collaborative manner.”

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and see.

Amidst all of this scrambling for explanations, where is LSU’s clear statement affirming creation? By comparison, here’s what a clear statement looks like:

https://www.southern.edu/faithandscience/position/Pages/universitystatementoncreation.aspx

(Quote)

10. Sean Pitman says:
March 11, 2011

From the Spectrum Blog:
http://spectrummagazine.org/blog/2011/03/09/la-sierra-university-board-releases-documents#comment-83068

Daniel,

You wrote:

It is sad that we are willing to send our 18-year-olds into war and we allow them to vote for our local, state, and national leaders, but we cannot permit them to participate in discussions about evolution without having to frame said discussions so that only one conclusion can be reached. Not much of a discussion, in my opinion. Worse yet, not much of an institution of higher learning.

You misunderstand the basic argument in play here. We definitely want our young people to know everything there is to know about the modern theory of evolution. They should be taught about this theory. However, they should not be taught that this theory is clearly valid or that it is the best available scientific theory of origins.

Our own young people should also be exposed to the evidence, the abundant evidence, that is available in support of the SDA Church’s position on origins – i.e., a recent arrival of life on this planet, the lack of a viable evolutionary mechanism for change beyond very low levels of functional complexity, and the evidence for a recent catastrophic formation of much of the geologic column and fossil records.

Our students at LSU simply are not well versed in the evidence for Creation [at least not the SDA view of Creation]. They are only well versed in the arguments for mainstream evolutionary biology. That’s the problem.

Sean Pitman
http://www.DetectingDesign.com

(Quote)

11. Professor Kent says:
March 12, 2011

Bob Ryan wrote:

When NPUC decided to solve the problem at Walla Walla – significant changes were made in the staffing of the WW religion and biology departments.

I asked my SDA biologist colleague, who is very well informed, what happened at Walla Walla. The answer was a shocker to me: the claim here is completely bogus, vicious, and slanderous. He tells me there have been NO full-time faculty firings from Biology, and NONE of the departures in recent decades have had any bearing on creation-evolution issues.

I challenge Bob to tell us, specifically, what staffing changes were made in the Walla Walla biology department. What ARE you talking about?

(Quote)

12. Professor Kent says:
March 12, 2011

I am continually saddened by how faithful SDAs speak of and treat their leadership–God’s appointed shepherds of the flock. The tone of responses here disappoints me. I don’t think there are steps drastic enough short of outright replacement of faculty and administrators that will make many of you people happy (although your message on whether you want people fired is very mixed: the “official” ET position is not advocating firing, whereas Sean Pitman is unapologetic in his demands that individuals be fired, and not just LSU, but also Geoscience Research Institute).

Personally, I was pleased to see that LSU, the local conference and union, and the AAA have been taking steps to understand the issues and seek a resolution. Of course this is a step in the right direction. I think you guys have clearly “won” in the sense that LSU concedes there has been a problem and feels compelled to ensure it is not continued. You’ve won…unless a feast upon carcasses is REALLY what you’re after.

(Quote)

13. Bill Sorensen says:
March 12, 2011

Professor Kent said…..

“I am continually saddened by how faithful SDAs sneak of and treat their leadership–God’s appointed shepherds of the flock”
Are you suggesting that all leaders are “God’s appointed shepherds of the flock.”?

I personally doubt this idea. And I am not suggesting that none are being used of God. But this sweeping endorsement doesn’t seem to fit the reality.

After many decades of faulty leadership in many areas, it would seem inevitable that the credibility gap would widen more and more and polarization would be the result. When the church opted for pluralism after the Dr. Ford fiasco, we could only agree with Solomon, “The curse causeless shall not come.”

The devil uses time to his best advantage, and modern Adventism is the product of what happens repeatedly in history. Given enough time, Satan will corrupt everything God ordains to advance God’s kingdom. Satan then uses this instrumentality for his own purpose and kingdom after he has infiltrated the church and undermined its mission and message.

So EGW has rightly said, “Two parties will be developed.” Exactly how to deal with all the issues is not so easily discerned. None the less, we better realize that all is not well and the “peace and safety” message is bogus.

Loyalty to “the church” has often been misunderstood as “loyalty to Christ” and the results have always been the same. The church takes the place of Christ and becomes the antichrist in this world. Adventism is not beyond this possibility.

Bill Sorensen

(Quote)

14. Wayne says:
March 12, 2011

What Professor Kent and others are missing is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church as well as all of it’s educational institutions are all a CORPORATION. If one were to work for a CORPORATION such as Microsoft, IBM, etc., and were not doing the job they were hired for they would be fired. As a CORPORATION the SDA church should do no less. All employees of the church and its various institutions are only CORPORATE employees. If you don’t believe me go look at the name on the conference office. It says SOUTHEAST CALIFORNIA CORPORATION OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS. If you want to see the CORPORATION at work, just use the name SDA or SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST for an independent ministry and see how fast they sue you. Unfortunately the infiltration mentioned is true. The CATHOLIC CHURCH CORPORATION wants to see nothing less than the true message of the scriptures made of none-effect, and what better way to do that than to present fable as truth. The advent message has been the truth since 1844 and Satan has used men like Canright, Kellogg, Ford, and anyone else including professors and “God’s appointed shepards” to discredit and water down the true message for this time.

Should these professors be fired? Absolutely. Should the “leaders” of the conference be fired for not upholding the fundamental teachings of the Adventist church? Absolutely. These men and or women who teach anything other than the undiluted three angles messages are only CORPORATE employees. Fire them. We have not heard much from the President of the General Conference lately, has he backed down?

(Quote)

15. Wayne says:
March 12, 2011

Concerning the “apology” by the LSU board. That is cheap talk. It’s only a way of getting the heat off the situation. If they were truly sorry and repentant there would be changes made. Otherwise it is only political rhetoric. It’s kind of like a thief apologizing after he got caught. This University has stolen from the constituents of each church by taking their hard earned money for the truth they thought was being taught and giving a lie in return. Perhaps they should be sued for fraud?

(Quote)

16. Professor Kent says:
March 12, 2011

Wayne, I totally agree that the Church’s employees MUST abide by employment conditions. I also agree that the biology and religion faculty MUST teach and treat SDA doctrines with respect. I have never suggested otherwise. I’m continually amazed by how my position gets distorted.

However, I don’t think that we should be in the business of firing every employee who does not adhere to every general position of faith and behavior. I know for a fact that many Church employees drink alcohol. Many dance. Many eat meat, including unclean meats. Many have divorced for inappropriate reasons. [edit] Many believe that God’s Word cannot be accepted on faith. Should they all be fired outright, or should we attempt to educate and rehabilitate them when we learn of their shortcomings? So far as we know, the LSU administration has made clear to these employees that they are to cease and desist with any teachings and treatment that gave rise to the ongoing witch hunt. And the employees may well have reformed.

The documents released by La Sierra include the names of MANY Church individuals, including prominent church leaders, who have made a sincere effort to address the issue at hand. When you label the apology that was accompanied with very extensive documentation as “fraud,” you are indicting all who have been involved with the process of discovery and finding a solution. Can you be a little more charitable?

(Quote)

17. Angelina says:
March 13, 2011
Professor Kent,

And exactly how are these people then held accountable? For so many years/decades, our youth has been misled even humiliated, concerned parents have been lied to, and the Lord’s money, wasted. Charitable? That’s exactly what the church(on every level) has been until now, and I believe our church leaders will answer one day for being asleep at the helm.

Teaching in our schools is not just another job. It is an awesome responsibility, the effects of which will have repercussions for generations of people and either help steer them to Christ or away from Him. When one accepts this responsibility, wouldn’t you agree that this is far different than a single person’s choice to drink alcohol and the effect it has, on one or a small number of lives? Personally, I believe that the church should stay consistent with expectations for its employees on all levels, even “general positions on faith and behaviour”, but if it does not, then can what LaSierra’s professors have done really fall in this same category, or do we need to asses first and foremost what the fallout has been, and what the potential risk is if they were to continue to teach?

One more point: If we have any hope of winning back any of the precious souls lost because of this, then the message has to be clear and unequivocal — What happened was not right. What you were taught was not right. These professors have no place teaching at our schools — The charity we extend has to do with continued patience and love for them as church members, not as employees. Just like you would not award custody of an abused child to his abusive, albeit remorseful parents, neither should we leave these professors to continue teaching our youth. How could we trust them again, or ever?

I look forward to reading your suggestions.

Angelina

(Quote)

Professor Kent says:
March 13, 2011

Angelina,

We all live and work in circumstances where we do not agree with all of the policies we are expected to abide by. We all support a government which implements policies some of which we disagree with. Any Church employee must respect the employment conditions and policies, regardless of how they feel about them. I have taught at a number of private and public universities, and have disagreed with certain policies that I nevertheless respected.

In practical terms, I would bet money these faculty signed agreements that stipulated behavioral policies that they were to uphold. I would bet my right shin bone, however, that they never signed an agreement that said “you can teach microevolution but not any form of evolution that exceeds the species level.” You can’t fire employees who have broken no conditions of employment. It’s not ethical, legal, or Christ-like (although Christian employers often do operate independently of ethical, legal, and Christian concerns). Of course, the conditions of employment now need to be made more explicit, and La Sierra appears to be implementing change. It’s up to the employee now to decide what they wish to do.

In practical terms, things get much worse. Last year, Southern Adventist University and Southwestern Adventist University advertised something like FIVE biology positions that went unfilled. They are advertising these same positions again this year. I’m told by reliable sources that the Church DOES NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT QUALIFIED FAITHFUL BIOLOGISTS to replace the faculty you wish to see fired. Eddie and others here have tried to jumpstart a discussion to help resolve this latter issue, but no one seems interested. Many of you want to just fire employees with no consideration of the consequences.

On a final point, God is much more interested in restorative than retributive (punitive) actions. If this was not the case, we would not be here today having this discussion.

Until the whole world hears,
Professor Kent

(Quote)

Adventist in High School says:
March 14, 2011

6 of 8 3/14/2011 10:07 AM
If we have any hope of winning back any of the precious souls lost because of this, then the message has to be clear and unequivocal.

— What happened was not right. What you were taught was not right.

Interesting line of thought…

(Quote)

21. Shane Hilde says:
March 14, 2011

It appears that most of the changes are superficial. Why? Where is the evidence that something is being changed in the classroom?

What’s happening to the curriculum?

The survey is a joke. I’d like to know how many students actually took general biology or were biology majors in the last 4 years. I bet it was more than 400.

I’ve done some digging around LaSierra.edu and found out they don’t have that many graduating biology majors. I think the average is around 26.

I’m retracting my earlier comment about the number of students who tool general biology. There are other GE science classes available, so not every student ends up taking this class.

I do have questions about how representative the survey is the biology students.

For example, take question number 8 which asks, “The Seventh-day Adventist view of creation was presented in biology classes.” Fifty-percent agreed, and 44% were neutral or disagreed. We have no idea what non-respondents would have answered. In other words, we don’t know how the other 278 students who didn’t respond would have answered. So only 46 (12% of students surveyed) students over the last four years plus 2000 agreed the Seventh-day Adventist view of creation was presented in biology classes.

They tried. Aren’t there more accurate assessments of what students have learned than a survey?

(Quote)

22. Angelina says:
March 14, 2011

Professor Kent,

Thank you for your reply, but I’m not sure you answered my question, at least I hope you haven’t: How exactly are these professors (administrators etc) held accountable? From your relatively non-commital comments above, it seems you would leave it up to these professors (and I include administrators and any others in position of authority who should have taken action but didn’t) to decide whether, under new, more explicit job descriptions they choose to stay or leave. Really? Is this what you would do? Are you implying that the church does not have cause to terminate their employment? Are you saying that after a decade or more of their lies and deception, this is all we can do, revise the job description? Are you telling me that it is not a condition of employment to uphold the church’s fundamental beliefs, whether implicit or explicit? Please tell me this isn’t your solution.

Many years ago, I worked for a Catholic charity organization. At worship one morning the President who was also a Priest, made a jaw-dropping statement. He said, “There is no such thing as good and evil. God and Satan don’t really exist.” What do you think happened? He was quietly relieved of his duties and sent to work in a mission field with natives struggling with addictions such as glue sniffing, alcoholism and pornography, to see first hand the effects of evil. Unfortunately, the Catholic Church’s track record is abysmal when it comes to taking action for wayward priests, but in this instance their reaction was swift and unequivocal. Do you think it was stipulated somewhere in this Priest’s contract that he has to believe in good and evil?

Since we are also short on pastors, maybe we should hire a few from the Presbyterians, or from Jehovah’s Witnesses….Doesn’t matter, does it?

Keeping these professors because there may not be others would be a testament to our lack of faith. God will provide in His time. The primary concern, as I see it, is not who will replace these professors, but rather, how to restore trust and credibility so that our youth and their parents, past, present and future can feel certain once again that we are all on the same page.

I fully agree with your final point. However, firing these employees would not be punitive in my perspective. They repeatedly made choices, and perhaps still stand by those choices, that went counter to what our institution is about. They lied when questioned, conveniently “laid low until it blew over”, openly ridiculed students for their bible-based beliefs and on and on. By making these choices, they also chose the consequences that they should have faced ions ago. Did Jesus stand by and give the moneychangers the choice to stay if they changed their behaviour? No. He loved them none the less, and undoubtedly prayed for them, as we should too for these employees, but our Christian duty, to protect and promote Truth, demands we do more.

Thank you
Angelina

(Quote)

Leave a Reply
AN OPEN LETTER REGARDING THE TEACHING OF CREATION

How students learn about origins is a matter of significant concern in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. La Sierra University has found itself the focus of this concern for much of the past two years.

The University Board of Trustees, administration, and faculty have heard and taken seriously the concern expressed by Church leaders and members, especially as expressed in the report and recommendations of the Adventist Accrediting Association following their regular November site visit. The Board appointed a study group to study the issue. It carefully reviewed the AAA report and the team’s counsel and issued a report that the La Sierra University Board of Trustees voted to receive at its February meeting. The Board has directed campus administration to implement the Board’s recommendations. The complete report can be found at [http://www.lasierra.edu/fileadmin/documents/provost/LSU_Board_Report.pdf](http://www.lasierra.edu/fileadmin/documents/provost/LSU_Board_Report.pdf).

In order to get the most accurate and objective assessment of what students are learning in La Sierra’s biology classes, the study group went directly to the source. It attempted to reach every student who studied General Biology or who graduated with a biology major for the past four years, plus the year 2000. It invited them to answer, anonymously, 17 questions focusing specifically on what they learned about creation and evolution, whether their personal religious views were respected, and how the classes impacted their religious faith.

From those who have been enrolled in biology classes, the study group learned that the university is doing well in some areas. Two-thirds responded that their professors presented helpful ways of relating science and religious faith, supported their faithfulness to their religious heritage, and encouraged faith in a personal God.

The survey, though, also showed areas in which we have fallen short of what we and our Church want for our students. We found that only 50 percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that our Adventist view of creation was presented, and only 40 percent agreed or strongly agreed that our Adventist view was supported. This is not acceptable, and we apologize. We have already begun addressing this in meaningful ways to ensure that our biology program seriously addresses the topic of creation.

The study group’s findings also included:

- The biology faculty deserve recognition and respect for their work. Neither their professional competency as biologists nor their character and sincerity were questioned.
• Instruction at the university, while being strong in many areas, has not adequately presented the denomination’s position on the subject of creation.

• There is some evidence that students have not always been respected for their belief in the Biblical creation position.

The Board adopted, and directed campus administration to implement, the following measures:

• Accept and implement the recommendations from the Adventist Accrediting Association.

• Develop faculty workshops regarding the challenges of teaching controversial topics such as those in biology.

• Continue the work in progress, (as identified below).

• Conduct regular follow-up surveys of biology students.

• Provide the Board with ongoing candid and prompt reports of both progress and challenges in dealing with this issue.

The Board affirmed its support for the president and his administration and entrusted them with the implementation of these recommendations. In addition, the Board committed to support the administration in these efforts and to focus on the more positive aspects of the university.

The university president and provost identified steps to address this issue that have already been taken or are currently in progress. These include:

• Ensuring that all biology students discuss key documents relating to our Adventist belief regarding origins, including Fundamental Belief #6, the 2004 Annual Council Reaffirmation of Creation, and Genesis 1 and 2.

• Increased participation by the Church’s Geoscience Research Institute in planning the General Biology Seminar.

• Ongoing refinement of the General Biology Seminar, based on student exit surveys and other input.

• Attendance of biology faculty members at the Geoscience Research Institute summer workshop.

• Continue the lecture series that presents a range of Adventist views on the integration of faith and science.

• Establish dialogue with biology professors from sister Adventist colleges and universities.
The biology department specifically commits to:

- Faithfully present the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s position on creation.
- Respect every student’s religious beliefs.
- Help students learn how to grapple with issues of faith and science in faith-affirming ways.

La Sierra University is committed to being an institution that does not just present the Church’s view of creation, but fully supports it. We pledge our commitment to work prayerfully and diligently to ensure that our mission to provide a rigorous and faith-affirming Seventh-day Adventist education is carried out on behalf of our students and our Church.

Randal Wisbey       Ricardo Graham
President          Chair, Board of Trustees
In an open letter welcomed by many Seventh-day Adventist Church leaders and members across North America, La Sierra University on March 9 acknowledged serious problems in its teaching of origins over the last several years, and apologized for not having adequately communicated Seventh-day Adventist beliefs about creationism to its students.

“We found that only 50 percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that our Adventist view of creation was presented, and only 40 percent agreed or strongly agreed that our Adventist view was supported,” LSU President Randall Wisbey and LSU Board Chairman Ricardo Graham wrote in the open letter.

The letter accompanied the release of a Board-approved report on the controversy that has focused on the Riverside, California, campus for nearly two years.

“This is not acceptable, and we apologize,” the two leaders added.

Dr. Lisa Beardsley, Education director for the Adventist Church world headquarters, called the statement “a step in the right direction.”

“My prayer is that Adventist education at La Sierra University will grow and acknowledge its redemptive purposes,” Beardsley said.

Larry Blackmer, vice president for Education for the church’s North American Division, also saw promise in the university’s letter.

“I am so pleased with the board and administration’s openness in addressing the issues that have concerned the church for the past few years,” Blackmer said. “I found their statements to be sincere, looking to do what is right.

“This issue has been a controversy regarding the university for the past two years, and I hope with strong administrative follow-through, with monitoring by the board of directors and a continued commitment to the core values of the church, that this chapter can be closed and we can focus on the many wonderful things that are happening on the LSU campus,” he said.

A team from Adventist Accreditation Association (AAA) — which recently conducted a site visit at La Sierra — concluded that, subject to AAA approval, the university “should receive the maximum accreditation possible under AAA guidelines.” La Sierra announced the team’s findings online on February 8, but has since removed the statement from the university’s website.

The full board of AAA will vote next month on a final accrediting recommendation for the school.

In its place, La Sierra has posted “An Open Letter Regarding the Teaching of Creation,” in which the school states its apology, adding, “Instruction at the university, while being strong in many areas, has not adequately presented the denomination’s position on the subject of creation.”

“There is some evidence that students have not always been respected for their belief in the Biblical creation position,” the La Sierra statement said.

In 2009, one LaSierra student said he’d felt that lack of respect. Louie Bishop told Adventist Review he was placed on “citizenship probation” by the school for circulating letters opposing the teaching of evolutionary concepts and for posting notes of a professor’s classroom lecture online.

Following consultation with its Board of Trustees at a February 10 meeting, the university announced, “The Board adopted, and directed campus administration to implement, the following measures:

* Accept and implement the recommendations from the Adventist Accrediting Association.
* Develop faculty workshops regarding the challenges of teaching controversial topics such as those in biology.
* Continue the work in progress, (as identified [elsewhere in the statement]).
* Conduct regular follow-up surveys of biology students.
* Provide the Board with ongoing candid and prompt reports of both progress and challenges in dealing with this issue.”

Moreover, the school said, “The university president and provost identified steps to address this issue that have already been taken or are currently in progress. These include:

* Ensuring that all biology students discuss key documents relating to our Adventist belief regarding origins, including Fundamental Belief #6 [and] the 2004 Annual Council Reaffirmation of Creation, and Genesis 1 and 2.
* Increased participation by the Church’s Geoscience Research Institute in planning the General Biology Seminar.
* Ongoing refinement of the General Biology Seminar, based on student exit surveys and other input.
* Attendance of biology faculty members at the Geoscience Research Institute summer workshop.
* Continue the lecture series that presents a range of Adventist views on the integration of faith and science.
* Establish dialogue with biology professors from sister Adventist colleges and universities.”

According to the statement, La Sierra’s “biology department specifically commits to:

* Faithfully present the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s position on creation.
* Respect every student’s religious beliefs.
* Help students learn how to grapple with issues of faith and science in faith-affirming ways.
In conclusion, the statement said, “La Sierra University is committed to being an institution that does not just present the Church’s view of creation, but fully supports it. We pledge our commitment to work prayerfully and diligently to ensure that our mission to provide a rigorous and faith-affirming Seventh-day Adventist education is carried out on behalf of our students and our Church.”

Daniel Jackson, president of the church’s North American Division, expressed hope at the news.

“I appreciate the expression of the La Sierra University administration and the Board in terms of their stated determination to promote the teachings of Scripture, in particular creation,” Jackson said in a telephone interview.

“My prayer would be that God would give them the commitment and resolve to see this matter through in a way that will be a blessing to students, faculty and the constituency at large,” Jackson said. “La Sierra University has had a reputation as an excellent institution.”

David Asscherick, the Adventist pastor and evangelist whose open letter to church leaders in 2009 brought attention to the concerns at La Sierra University, also expressed optimism.

“I’m happy to see the university affirm the reality and seriousness of these issues, and I look forward to observing the implementation of their plan,” he said during a March 10 visit to the Adventist Church headquarters.

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Categories: LSU, News
LSU student: ‘Apostates or Apostles’?

Educate Truth shares the following article excerpts from La Sierra University’s student paper The Criterion as a service to readers. Opinions expressed in these reports do not necessarily reflect the opinions of Educate Truth.

**Apostate or Apostles**
By Natalie Romero

On May 25th, 2010, the Michigan Conference of Seventh-day Adventists removed La Sierra University from its employee subsidy list. The charge: apostasy.

Some are outraged. Many see it as, since it happened last year. Others have no idea what is going on. The case, I believe, deserves some attention, however—especially after recent visitations from both WASC and AAA accreditation bodies. For those who are not up to date on their religious vernacular, apostasy means a complete desertion and departure from one’s religion, cause, or principles. La Sierra University has been accused of this desertion due to the inclusion of the theory of evolution in some biology courses.

There has been talk of other conferences taking the same action, which could prove disastrous for many students who are counting on that financial aid in order to attend La Sierra.

Defining just how we learn and how we teach, especially in the field of science at this institution is important. ‘Different people mean different things when they use the term evolution,’ said Dr. Gary Bradley, a professor of biology and genetics at La Sierra. He explained that for most conservative Christians, the word ‘evolution’ carries the usual anti-God connotation. However, for a scientist, the word represents the process by which all kinds of alterations and modifications happen in our world. Dr. Bradley believes that the Creator God designed the world with the ability for evolution to occur, and urges everyone to learn as much as they can about our Lord’s created universe. ‘There is abundant evidence that living things change. Thus evolution is well documented and well supported in the scientific world. It is unconscionable for a science student to remain ignorant of this fundamental aspect of life.’

This past summer, WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) reaffirmed La Sierra’s accreditation for eight more years; and hopes are high that the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools (AAA) will follow suit and also renew LSU’s accreditation when they convene on March 31st. Accreditation is vital, because it means that the university in question has been deemed to be operating at the level of quality consistent with its mission statement, as well as with the expectations of a school of higher education. As President Wisbey put it, ‘Accreditation is one of the most important marks a university can earn. It is a measure of excellence in education.’

Despite the renewal of accreditation, the WASC evaluation team noted the issues pertaining to LSU’s Biology Department. While they understand that it’s mainly a denominational issue, it directly touches on several WASC standards, including the roles of the faculty and academic freedom. As a result, WASC plans to send a team back to our campus later on this spring for a reevaluation. And hopes are high

But despite the concern by some, others are confident that this will all subside in time. ‘I’ve seen this kind of thing happen in other times and places. Eventually, it has blown over and the focus has shifted elsewhere,’ said Jocelyn Fay of the Southeastern California Conference.

In the opinion of Dr. Kendra Haloviak of the School of Religion, we are a ‘passionately Adventist institution,’ far from apostasy. The Twenty-Eight Fundamental Beliefs are some of the most important aspects that define us as a church. And despite what others may say, the Twenty-Eight Beliefs are actually taught in a variety of ways at La Sierra. ‘When I heard about the decision by the Michigan Conference I wondered if anyone there had contacted our campus before their action,’ Haloviak said. ‘If those with concerns had been able to have a conversation with the members of our community, they would encourage their employees’ college-aged children to further their Adventist education at La Sierra University.’ And with the highest enrollment in recent memory, with 2,098 students registering for Fall quarter, Haloviak’s confidence in LSU’s standard of education seems to be substantiated.
Apostates or Apostles

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Some are outraged. Many see it as, since it happened last year. Others have no idea what is going on. The case, I believe, deserves some attention, however—especially after recent visitations from both WASC and AAA accreditation bodies. For those who are not up to date on their religious vernacular, apostasy means a complete desertion and departure from one’s religion, cause, or principles. La Sierra University has been accused of this desertion due to the inclusion of the theory of evolution in some biology courses.

But repercussions of such action should be considered. When Michigan cut off employee subsidies (financial assistance) to La Sierra, they cut off any chances for the dependents of their employees to attend our university. Adventist education does not come cheap. Conference employees do not get paid well. Were it not for employee subsidies, many people would not be able to attend Adventist institutions. In this economy, taking out loans for school is increasingly dangerous. There has been talk of other conferences taking the same action, which could prove disastrous for many students who are counting on that financial aid in order to attend La Sierra. Elder Jay Gallimore, President of the Michigan Conference, declined the opportunity to comment on the issue.

There could be repercussions for both current and future teachers who wish to work in schools in the North American Division (NAD) because of the Michigan Conference’s declaration. “By eliminating subsidies, Michigan has put not only La Sierra’s curriculum but also its instruction methods into question,” said Deanne Sparks, a current LSU graduate student and former teacher and school administrator. “How we learn is how we teach and vice versa.” The problem lies in that by questioning or blacklisting the school, teachers who earned their degrees at La Sierra might end up finding themselves unemployable by other Adventist schools within the NAD.

Defining just how we learn and how we teach, especially in the field of science at this institution is important. “Different people mean different things when they use the term evolution,” said Dr. Gary Bradley, a professor of biology and genetics at La Sierra. He explained that for most conservative Christians, the word “evolution” carries the usual anti-God connotation. However, for a scientist, the word represents the process by which all kinds of alterations and modifications happen in our world. Dr. Bradley believes that the Creator God designed the world with the ability for evolution to occur, and urges everyone to learn as much as they can about our Lord’s created universe. “There is abundant evidence that living things change. Thus evolution is well documented and well supported in the scientific world. It is unconscionable for a science student to remain ignorant of this fundamental aspect of life.”

From an administrative standpoint, President Randal Wisbey responded to Michigan’s actions as follows. “La Sierra University is an integral part of the Church’s shared endeavor to educate our young people to think well and to believe well. Our students constitute our best hope for the future of the Church, a Church that must be responsible, redemptive, and relevant if it intends to meet the needs of the world in the 21st Century.”

While Sparks’ concerns are legitimate, recent accreditation lays to rest any notion that LSU’s quality of education has been compromised. This past summer, WASC (Western Association of Schools and Colleges) reaffirmed La Sierra’s accreditation for eight more years; and hopes are high that the Accrediting Association of Seventh-day Adventist Schools (AAA) will follow suit and also renew LSU’s accreditation when they convene on March 31st. Accreditation is vital, because it means that the university in question has been deemed to be operating at the level of quality consistent with its mission statement, as well as with the
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But despite the concern by some, others are confident that this will all subside in time. “I’ve seen this kind of thing happen in other times and places. Eventually, it has blown over and the focus has shifted elsewhere,” said Jocelyn Fay of the Southeastern California Conference. George Virgil Larson, attended Walla Walla College, where there was a disagreement about instruction within some theology classes. “It got to the point where he was asked to spy on the religion teachers. He was expected to report back to other people. It was a big mess at the time,” said Larson’s daughter.

Many students involved in campus-based ministries have said that we are not apostate, but rather apostles. One such example is Krissy Traustason, who actively participates in Home Base, a ministry open to everyone at La Sierra. “We’re made up of devoted students who are dedicated to outreach in our community; we’re driven to be missionaries not only in foreign countries, but also here at home,” said Traustasson.

Jaylene Chung, who is actively involved in missions, agrees. She believes that La Sierra is fulfilling the Adventist church’s mission of spreading the gospel and helping others both inside and outside of the program. “[People who have gone through the missions program] have an intense first-hand experience of what it means to step out of their comfort zone to help the global community,” said Chung. “On top of that, there are also so many people at LSU who care deeply for others and live a life as Jesus exemplified, without having even left the country.”

La Sierra has a special challenge with missions programming, because a great deal of our student body is not Adventist. Many, in fact, are not even Christian. Despite this, there are several programs aside from missions, such as STORM, Rask@ls, REVO, and the like, where students of every background and belief come together to help make a difference in the lives of those around them, embodying one of the most powerful gospel messages: love your neighbor.

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