

Q&A about the Guillermo Gonzalez story

Q: The Discovery Institute defends Gonzalez as the victim of discrimination. Why are his colleagues not justified in exercising scientific judgment, even to his detriment? Isn't it the job of scientists to discriminate between good scientific ideas and bad ones?

A: Scientists indeed have that job, but the point is irrelevant here, for six separate reasons.

- First, ISU had previously approved and administered a grant to Gonzalez, to help write this very book *The Privileged Planet* supporting intelligent design from the entirely mainstream and prestigious Templeton Foundation. That demonstrates that the university had already accepted the concept behind the book as the subject for legitimate scholarship.
- Second, the book has the endorsements of top scientists like Simon Conway Morris of Cambridge University, Owen Gingerich of the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics, and U.S. National Academy of Sciences member Philip Skell. Again. This is legitimate science that has earned protection under the rubric of academic freedom.
- Third, academic freedom itself is meaningless if it fails to defend controversial ideas like intelligent design but merely defends the “right” to argue for popular, universally accepted concepts. Indeed, ISU’s faculty handbook claims that academic freedom is “the foundation of the university,” but apparently that freedom does not extend to proponents of intelligent design.
- Fourth, the astronomer’s ideas about intelligent design were not, in any event, part of his teaching of students. Still, Dr. Gonzalez’s department chair claimed that Dr. Gonzalez’s views on ID “disqualified” him from being a “science educator.” Moreover, Dr. Gonzalez’s writings clearly indicate that he understands that science should produce predictive, testable theories. The department chair’s litmus test is pure viewpoint discrimination.
- Fifth, the secret e-mails demonstrate that Gonzalez’s colleagues were motivated much less by their scientific judgment than by worries that their personal and departmental prestige would suffer as a result of protecting Gonzalez’s right to academic freedom. Indeed, they privately desired that Gonzalez would know “that this is not a friendly place for him to develop further his IDEas” and thus hoped “He may look for a better place as a result.”
- Sixth, if such discrimination was appropriate, ethical, and legal, why did the faculty conduct their persecution of Gonzalez in secret, meanwhile concocting a ludicrous cover-up having to do with his scholarly productivity? Clearly, university official knew they were doing something wrong. Otherwise they all would have owned up honestly to their motivations.

Q: As part of the standard tenure process, didn't Dr. Gonzalez's department seek outside scientists to evaluate his fitness for tenure? If so, what did they say?

A: The department did indeed appoint outside reviewers to evaluate Dr. Gonzalez as a candidate. Of those who gave clear recommendations, **two-thirds strongly supported his tenure promotion**. As one of his external reviewers (whose advice ISU ignored) stated, "Dr. Gonzalez is **eminently qualified** for the promotion according to your guidelines of excellence in scholarship and exhibiting a potential for national distinction." **In other words, Dr. Gonzalez's colleagues simply ignored the recommendations of the decisive majority of the outside reviewers they themselves had appointed!**

Q: ISU claims that it declined to offer Gonzalez tenure because of a disappointing record of publications and obtaining grants. Is there any truth in these claims?

A: No. If you look through the record of emails among his colleagues, you won't find them grouching about how Guillermo doesn't publish enough or doesn't get enough grants. **On the contrary, key measures of productivity show that Gonzalez was more productive as a scholar during probationary period at ISU than any of the tenured faculty who voted against his tenure.** No other tenured ISU astronomer besides Gonzalez co-authored a textbook with Cambridge University Press during that time. Moreover, his department's tenure requirements *do not even list grants as one of the criteria evaluated for tenure applicants*. Instead, the official tenure standards emphasized the candidate's publication record. On that score, Gonzalez published over 350 percent more peer-reviewed scientific articles than the number required by his department to "ordinarily" demonstrate excellence in research.

Q: How do we know the faculty who conspired against him knew they were doing something wrong?

A: Because one of the conspirators, ISU professor John Hauptman said so in an email: "This principle [of academic freedom] has been violated massively in the physics department." Other members of Gonzalez's department frankly acknowledged that their continued plotting behind the back of their junior colleague raised ethical problems. As ISU physicist Bruce Harmon admitted in an e-mail, "I don't think talking behind Guillermo's back is quite ethical." Such occasional qualms didn't stop the back-room scheming against Gonzalez. Nor did they stop Gonzalez's colleagues from secretly scheming to issue a public statement repudiating Gonzalez's views. Only when ISU astronomer Steve Kawaler urged his colleagues to hide their real opinion of Gonzalez for legal reasons did the proposal to issue a public repudiation of Gonzalez unravel. Following legal advice from his wife, a former employment lawyer, Kawaler warned colleagues that any public statements they might make "could be used to justify a legal claim of a hostile work environment." Notably, Kawaler did not seem concerned about rectifying the hostile work environment that actually existed, only about hiding any evidence of it that could be used in court. For these reasons, Kawaler urged his colleagues to not release a department-

wide petition attacking ID, yet he hypocritically signed a petition released by the National Center for Science Education condemning ID as “creationist pseudoscience.” Yet another member of Gonzalez’s department understood that these secret efforts against Gonzalez were dishonest and underhanded: “Do we do everything at secret meetings and the hope the Discovery Institute’s Lawyers don’t subpoena our records? If I were Gonzalez, I would prefer my colleagues were honest and forthright in their opinions, as he seems to be with his.”

Q: Who on the faculty or staff of ISU can be said, definitively, to have lied about why they were getting rid of Gonzalez?

A: The chairman of the physics and astronomy department, Dr. Eli Rosenberg, certainly lied when he told the media that intelligent design wasn’t a “big factor” in Gonzalez’s being rejected for tenure. **This same Dr. Rosenberg had privately instructed the faculty who saw Dr. Gonzalez’s tenure file to use the litmus test that Gonzalez’s support for ID as science “disqualifies him from serving as a science educator.”** Dr. Rosenberg told the *Des Moines Register* that Gonzalez’s tenure file only had “a few words” about intelligent design, yet a full third of his Chair’s Statement dealt with Gonzalez’s views on intelligent design. This is not surprising, for the secret email traffic shows that a year before the tenure vote, the department was obsessed with the question and Dr. Rosenberg himself seems to have compiled a private file documenting publicity brought to ISU as a result of coverage of Guillermo Gonzalez’s views on intelligent design, which they felt damaged the department. Dr. Rosenberg told Gonzalez that the denial of tenure had to do with his academic achievements, but privately other voting faculty hoped that Gonzalez would know “that this is not a friendly place for him to develop further his IDEas” and thus hoped “He may look for a better place as a result.”

Q: What did the physics and astronomy faculty have to fear from Gonzalez’s support for intelligent design?

A: Academics are very focused on prestige and “reputation”. The latter has ramifications in terms of a department’s ability to raise grants for funding research, for attracting graduates students, and for other, more intangible things. Gonzalez’s colleagues wrote in their secret emails about feelings of “embarrassment” as well as perceived “damage” to their reputation, simply because Dr. Gonzalez supports intelligent design. Of course this is all a matter of their perceptions, which were probably wrong. Gonzalez’s ideas are in fact much more acceptable in his field than they would be in biology. But even if his colleague were right, the concept of academic freedom only has meaning if it is maintained *despite* costs to prestige or reputation.

Q: If the Iowa Board of Regents confirms ISU’s tenure denial to Gonzalez, what effect will that have on the research and thought of other scientists who want to question longstanding scientific assumptions and push forward the terms of scientific debate?

A: Obviously, the effects on free thought will be chilling. ISU will be sending a message that has already been sent to other open-minded scholars by other closed-minded institutions: certain ideas simply may not be entertained, on pain of losing your job. ISU will also be justifying a hypocritical double-standard in the area of academic freedom. It's telling that in 2007, the year Guillermo Gonzalez applied for tenure, ISU elevated to a full professorship Dr. Hector Avalos, a professor of religion who also advises ISU's campus atheist club and who spearheaded in 2005 a petition designed to pressure "all faculty" at ISU to reject intelligent design. Avalos was promoted despite defamatory anti-religious statements he made in a 2005 book (*Fighting Words: The Origins of Religious Violence*) which compared the Bible unfavorably with Hitler's *Mein Kampf*. What's the lesson? To do science that may lend support to religion is beyond the pale and not protected by academic freedom, but to equate religion with Nazism is just fine, in fact it is commendable.

Q: At bottom, what's really going on here? What is the relevance for those who don't live in Iowa, or don't follow developments in astronomy, or who might suspect this is just one isolated case, nothing to get excited about?

A: First, this is not an isolated case. In Spring, 2008, actor Ben Stein will be bringing out his documentary film *Expelled* (www.expelledthemovie.com), which tells the story of other scientists whose work has been shut down for questioning materialist assumptions, or merely for allowing others to question those assumptions. The film tells several stories including Dr. Gonzales' but focuses primarily on Dr. Richard Sternberg. (Dr. Sternberg was subjected to harassment, discrimination, and demotion at the Smithsonian Institution because he edited an article by another scholar who questioned Darwinian evolution as an adequate explanation for the origin and history of life and supported intelligent design.) Second, these cases illustrate a much wider conflict going on in the culture. It's a confrontation between rival worldviews. On one side there is dogmatic, totalitarian secularism. On the other, an embattled minority in the world of science and ideas who raise questions about the secularist creation myth: Darwinian evolution. Scientists and other scholars who support intelligent design or question parts of Darwinism only want a fair and open debate, a chance to present their ideas unhindered by threats or intimidation, whether open or concealed.