

15 November 2004

Mr. David Ahlquist  
President  
Board of Education  
Grantsburg School District  
Grantsburg, Wisconsin 54840

Dear Mr. Ahlquist,

It has come to our attention that the Grantsburg Board of Education has recently passed a motion to mandate that “theories of origins” alternative to evolution be taught in science classes throughout the district. It has further come to our attention that you have received a letter signed by hundreds of faculty members who teach Biology and Religious Studies courses at colleges and universities across the state opposing the motion. As professional Anthropologists, we feel so strongly about this issue that we are compelled to write to you as well.

Although evolutionary theory is absolutely central to an understanding of biological concepts, you should be aware that it also plays a critical role in Anthropology. Evolutionary concepts help us understand all facets of our field. Indeed, Anthropology is a broad discipline: Archaeology investigates and interprets the remains of past cultures; Physical Anthropology involves the study of the origin and evolution of human characteristics, our primate ancestors, modern primates, and the genetic diversity of contemporary peoples; Cultural Anthropology involves the study of the development and function of cultures, social systems, institutions, customs, arts and the relation of these to human social and psychological needs; and Linguistic Anthropology focuses on the history and evolution of human languages and their diversity of forms and usage worldwide. None of this can be done successfully without an evolutionary infrastructure.

There are those who profess to believe that students’ critical thinking skills will be improved if they are exposed to alternative “scientific” theories. The problem with this viewpoint is quite simple: there are no credible scientific alternatives to evolution. Yes, some ideas are dressed up to look like science, “scientific creationism” or “intelligent design” for example, but they have no standing within the scientific community. They are inconsistent with the basic methodology of science. It is simply not reasonable to believe that students will develop critical thinking skills when they are presented material that runs counter to what is at the heart of a discipline.

Rather than developing critical thinking skills, students exposed to these alternative “theories of origin” will have a difficult time differentiating between scientific and non-scientific concepts. While struggling to develop an intellectually meaningful framework, they will also have a hard time moving beyond the surface of any field to gain a deep understanding of the material. In short, your students will be at an academic disadvantage if they elect to extend their education and pursue a college degree. We repeat what we said at the outset: this disadvantage extends well beyond Biology. It goes

to the core of our ability to understand how humans can successfully manage the challenges and opportunities that arise in a changing environment. Students cannot fully appreciate their place in nature without the study of evolution. Without that understanding, how can they possibly become critical thinkers who make informed and responsible choices with regard to the health of society and of our planet?

Finally, we think it essential to point out that although many attempt to cast this controversy as one between religion and science, we firmly believe that this is not the case. Rather than going on at length on this point, we encourage you to look at *Voices for Evolution*, a book which presents statements by a host of religious denominations in support of evolution.

As Anthropologists and as the educators who are likely to have Grantsburg graduates in our college and university courses, we urge you to reconsider your actions. Your students deserve a better education than will be possible if your new policy is implemented.

Sincerely,

Fred Anapol, Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Kalman Applbaum, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Bettina Arnold, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Paul Axelrod, Professor of Anthropology, Ripon College  
Alex W. Barker, Vice President for Collections and Research, Milwaukee Public Museum  
Jeffery A. Behm, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Chair, Department of Religious Studies and Anthropology, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh  
Robert A. Birmingham, Lecturer of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Waukesha  
James A. Brey, Professor of Geography and Geology, University of Wisconsin-Fox Valley  
Barbara Y. Butler, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point  
Karl Byrand, Assistant Professor of Geography, University of Wisconsin-Sheboygan  
Roberta L. Coles, Associate Professor of Sociology, Marquette University  
Barbara Crass, Lecturer in Anthropology, University of Wisconsin Oshkosh  
Joseph Damrell, Professor of Sociology and Native American Studies, Northland College  
Shannon M. Fie, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Beloit College  
Glen Fredlund, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Eric Godfrey, Professor of Sociology and Chair, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Ripon College  
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William Green, Director, Logan Museum of Anthropology, Beloit College  
Brenda Jenike, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, Lawrence University

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Alice Kehoe, Professor Emerita of Anthropology, Marquette University and Adjunct Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Anatoly Khazanov, Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
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Nancy A. Krusko, Associate Professor of Anthropology, Beloit College  
Catherine L. Leone, Associate Professor of Anthropology and Sociology, University of Wisconsin-Manitowoc  
Herbert S. Lewis, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Ronald D. Lippi, Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Marathon County  
Susannah Lloyd, Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse  
Gabriele R. Lubach, Assistant Scientist, Harlow Center for Biological Psychology, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Nancy Oestreich Lurie, Anthropology Curator Emerita, Milwaukee Public Museum  
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John D. Richards, Associate Scientist, Anthropology and Director, Historic Resource Management Services, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

Patricia B. Richards, Associate Scientist, Anthropology and Associate Director, Historic Resource Management Services, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
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Cynthia M. Stiles, Registered Professional Archaeologist, Tribal Archaeologist, Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians  
Karen B. Strier, Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Madison  
Daniel Strouthes, Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire  
James L. Theler, Professor of Archaeology, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse  
Trudy R. Turner, Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee  
Jason Yaeger, Assistant Professor of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Cc: David Dahlberg, Board Member  
Christine Erickson, Board Member  
Russell Erickson, Board Member  
Cindy Jensen, Board Member  
Eric McKinley, Board Member  
James Sundquist, Board Member

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