

Academic Freedom Response Sheet

Framing:

It is imperative to provide a framework for any discussion on matters relating to intelligent design and creationism. A frame provides your listener with the context of what you are talking about, in other word, your big idea. Big Ideas are things that any rational, compassionate person will agree with.

The Discovery Institute has framed this as a debate about academic freedom. This is obviously something any rational, compassionate person will agree with.

When you talk about this bill, it is important that you use the term “academic freedom” as little as possible and always in the context that this bill is deceptively named. (Example: the deceptively named “academic freedom” bill is actually a bill to protect the ignorant.) If you can avoid using the term at all, that would be ideal. Every time you use that phrase, you are re-enforcing the Discovery Institute’s frame on this debate and you want to avoid that if at all possible.

Our Big Idea/Frame:

Our students should learn real science, not theological non-science.

Once you have provided an appropriate frame you can then explain why we are opposed to this deceptively named bill.

Issues of Concern/ Main Talking Points:

- Religious Motivation
 - This bill is a copy of a draft bill written by the Discovery Institute of Seattle Washington (DI).
 - The DI promotes theological non-science as a wedge to confuse people about what is and isn’t science.
 - They use this confusion to try and get their resource materials on Intelligent Design into the nation’s science classrooms.

- Disrupted Classrooms
 - This bill gives permission to individuals with religious agendas to disrupt the teaching of evolutionary science in our classrooms.
 - Even though this bill stipulates that only scientific arguments for or against evolution may be presented, the reality will be quite different as religiously motivated individuals try to introduce the creationist theory du jour.
 - Because supporters of the Intelligent Design movement have been told that their theological non-science is somehow scientific, and because they can’t tell the difference, they believe this law will protect them.
 - Science teachers are already very wary of teaching evolutionary science because of the number of aggressive students who refuse to allow these lessons to proceed. This situation will be worsened if students were given the immunity from their actions that this bill provides.

- Unnecessary Lawsuits
 - If this bill is passed, you can expect to see theological non-science presented in our classrooms almost immediately.
 - The bill is specifically worded so that pretty much the only alternative material available that might qualify is the DI's theological non-science material.
 - These presentations will result in legal action.
 - Either from students suing teachers who don't allow them to present this theological non-science.
 - Or from teachers being disciplined as a result of presenting this theological non-science.
 - The DI offers to provide legal assistance to individuals who use their materials because of the certainty that they will run into constitutional separation issues if their materials are used.
 - Unclear who will pay for these lawsuits
 - Teachers and students introducing DI materials will be provided legal support from DI.
 - Teachers who are sued by student's claiming academic freedom might be forced to defend themselves on their own dime.
 - Or will the taxpayers have to pay for these lawsuits?
 - Ultimately, it will be up to a judge to decide if these unapproved DI resource materials are science or theological non-science.
 - Research fellows from DI have admitted in court they don't actually have any science to back up their claims.
 - Since then they still haven't presented any scientific evidence for their claims, just changed their wording a little bit.
 - This pattern will continue as long as this law remains in effect. It would have to be rescinded to prevent new attempts at classroom disruption with whatever the latest version of Intelligent Design as theological non-science is being promoted.

Tips on Language Use.

Understanding vs. Belief

One of the frames the Intelligent Design movement uses is that of belief. They don't "believe" in evolution. From a framing standpoint this is pretty powerful, as Americans basically believe in the right of an individual to believe differently than others. In the context of evolution, it provides cover for creationists to be anti-science and reject inconvenient facts.

It is very important to talk about evolution and science as something that is to be "understood." People know how important it is to understand something, even if you don't agree with it. Because "belief" is the preferred frame for creationists, it is incredibly important that we don't use the word at all during our discussions about science, education and creationist topics. We need to reframe the discussion into being a conversation about understanding. When it comes to our students, we simply want them to understand science and that requires the teaching of real science, not theological non-science posing as science.

Real Science vs. Theological Non-Science

One of the reasons the Discovery Institute of Seattle Washington has chosen the “academic freedom” frame for this debate is not just because it is a powerful frame. It is because they are cultivating the idea that the reason their ideas aren’t respected among the scientific establishment is because there is an atheist conspiracy against them. There isn’t. The reason they aren’t a respected scientific establishment is because they aren’t engaging in actual science.

What they are promoting is “theological non-science.” If they actually had real science that pointed to the existence of an intelligence designer, it would make worldwide headlines and every major scientific journal would want to publish them and every university would try to recruit them into their staffs.

The real reason they aren’t being given equal time in our classrooms is because they aren’t engaging in real science. They are only promoting theological non-science. They are purposely trying to blur the lines between science and non-science to make their ideas more palatable. Don’t allow them to do this.

Label and frame their approach as “theological non-science” and put the onus on them to prove otherwise. We need to change the frame of this debate from one of academic freedom to real science vs. theological non-science.

Other Things to Keep in Mind

Labeling the Enemy

Try to refer to the “Discovery Institute of Seattle Washington” whenever possible. They aren’t from around here and are outsiders to our process. Including their location and full names accentuates that issue.

Pulling it all together.

Regardless of the specifics you get into, always start with the frame (real science not theological non-science) and one of the 3 main issues of concerns (disrupted classrooms, religious motivation, and lawsuits). Then pull it all back to our frame.

Example: Listen to the Experts

We just passed world-class standards written by experts in their fields. The experts have agreed; we need to teach our students real science and not theological non-science. This bill would throw out our new education standards and leave the question of what should or should not be taught in our classrooms up to a judge. As for me, I agree with the experts, we need to teach real science and not theological non-science.