

Truth Sheet #03-3

The NCSE Uses a “Push Poll” to Discredit Discovery Institute’s Bibliography

Overview: In 2002, Discovery Institute prepared for the Ohio State Board of Education a bibliography of 44 peer-reviewed science journal articles written by evolutionists that discussed unresolved questions about various aspects of neo-Darwinism. In response, the National Center for Science Education (NCSE) surveyed the authors of the articles and purported to show that Discovery Institute had misrepresented the articles. In fact, the NCSE was the one engaging in misrepresentation. Its so-called “survey” completely mischaracterized the Institute’s bibliography, and it failed to substantiate the charge that the bibliography was inaccurate.

1. What is the real story behind Discovery Institute’s bibliography?

- In 2002, Discovery Institute prepared an annotated bibliography of 44 peer-reviewed science journal articles written by evolutionists that discussed interesting unresolved questions about various aspects of neo-Darwinism. The Institute submitted this bibliography to the Ohio State Board of Education, which was considering whether to require students to study scientific criticisms of modern evolutionary theory. The bibliography is available online at <http://www.discovery.org/viewDB/index.php3?program=CRSC%20Responses&command=view&id=1127>.
- Articles were selected for the bibliography because they did at least one of the following: “challenge one or another aspect of Neo-Darwinism”; “discuss problems that evolutionary theory faces”; or “suggest important new lines of evidence that biology must consider when explaining origins.”
- The articles cited were written by evolutionists. The point was to demonstrate how even many evolutionists continue to raise critical questions about key aspects of neo-Darwinism, and that students should be allowed to learn about such questions.
- Discovery Institute never represented the bibliography as containing articles that provided “scientific evidence for intelligent design” or “scientific evidence against evolution.”

2. What was the NCSE’s response to Discovery Institute’s bibliography?

- The NCSE sent a survey to the authors of the articles listed in the bibliography. In a clear effort to “guide” the answers of those they surveyed, the NCSE provided recipients with a highly misleading description of the bibliography and its purpose.
- Among other things, the NCSE falsely suggested that the bibliography was being used “either to weaken the newly-proposed [Ohio] state science standards’ coverage of evolution or to include material on ‘alternative theories’ in their coverage of evolution.” In fact, Discovery Institute did not favor weakening the coverage of evolution in Ohio (it wanted to expand it), and it did not advocate requiring alternative theories like intelligent design to be included in the science standards.
- In addition to asking each author whether he or she thought Discovery Institute’s summary of the author’s article was accurate, the NCSE also asked, “Do you consider your work to provide scientific evidence for intelligent design?” and “Do you consider your work to

provide scientific evidence against evolution?” Since Discovery Institute never claimed that the articles cited provided either “evidence for intelligent design” or “evidence against evolution,” these questions clearly prejudiced the survey answers.

- In fact, the NCSE’s so-called “survey” is a classic example of what is known as a “push poll.” Instead of using the survey to discover the recipients’ actual beliefs, the NCSE used biased wording to produce the particular responses desired by the NCSE.
- Even with the NCSE’s effort to guide the results, the results were less than impressive:
 - Of the more than 70 authors represented in the bibliography, only 26 authors responded.
 - Of the 26 respondents, only 16 had their comments cited by the NCSE.
 - Of the 16 authors cited by the NCSE, only 13 were quoted contesting the accuracy of Discovery Institute’s summaries of their articles, and even fewer were quoted as identifying specific objections to the Institute’s summaries.
 - While the NCSE gives the impression that survey respondents overwhelmingly disputed Discovery Institute’s bibliography, the NCSE failed to release responses from nearly 40% of survey respondents.
- According to survey responses actually published by the NCSE, several authors clearly feared being misrepresented as favoring “intelligent design” or being “anti-evolution.” However, since Discovery Institute never made any such representations, these fears reflected the biased statements put out by the NCSE, not any claims by Discovery Institute.
- The handful of authors who cited specific objections to Discovery Institute’s summaries of their work mostly offered quibbles, or else their objections evaporated on closer inspection. For example, one author conceded that Discovery Institute had stated that he “is highly skeptical of creationism, and endorses what he calls ‘the fact’ of evolution,” but then complained that the Institute did “not give an honest sense of the clarity that I put in that disclaimer”! (What is that supposed to mean?)
- After the NCSE released its “survey,” Discovery Institute performed a careful analysis of each purported claim of misrepresentation made by the NCSE and found that “every case... dissolves on close inspection.”
- Those who would like more detailed information are encouraged to read “Questions and Answers about the Discovery Institute’s Bibliography of Supplementary Resources for Ohio Science Instruction,” available online at <http://www.discovery.org/viewDB/index.php3?program=CRSC%20Responses&command=view&id=1146>.
- The information cited here about the NCSE’s survey comes from “Analysis of the Discovery Institute’s Bibliography,” available on the NSCE website, <http://www.ncseweb.org>.
- Discovery Institute encourages anyone with further questions to read the articles cited in its bibliography for themselves. If they do so, the Institute is confident that they will be able to determine the accuracy of the Institute’s bibliography to their own satisfaction.

3. What is the bottom line?

- Rather than debate the scientific evidence, some Darwin-only activists are willing to resort to political tactics to keep the public from learning the truth about legitimate scientific controversies involving evolutionary biology.
- When Darwin-only lobbyists make charges of misrepresentation, it’s important for fair-minded people to demand to see the evidence for such assertions—even if that means going back and reading the original sources for themselves.