

# Hoax of Dodos, pt. 2

## ***Flock of Dodos* Filmmaker Uses Fuzzy Math and Falsehoods to Distort the Truth about Discovery Institute**

By John G. West, Ph.D.

In *Flock of Dodos*, filmmaker Randy Olson tries his best to discredit Discovery Institute (DI), the leading think tank supporting scientists and scholars researching intelligent design (ID). But he only ends up discrediting himself by showing how far he is willing to stretch the truth. This article looks at some of the film's most egregious errors about DI, starting with its claims about the Institute's budget.

### **Inflating DI's Budget—by over 300%!**

According to *Flock of Dodos*, Discovery Institute has a huge budget for its intelligent design program that dwarfs the resources of evolution's supporters. "The Discovery Institute is truly the big fish in this picture, with an annual budget of around 5 million dollars," Olson tells the audience. Later, a woman is shown repeating the same figure. The clear impression left with viewers is that the Institute spends \$5 million a year to promote intelligent design.

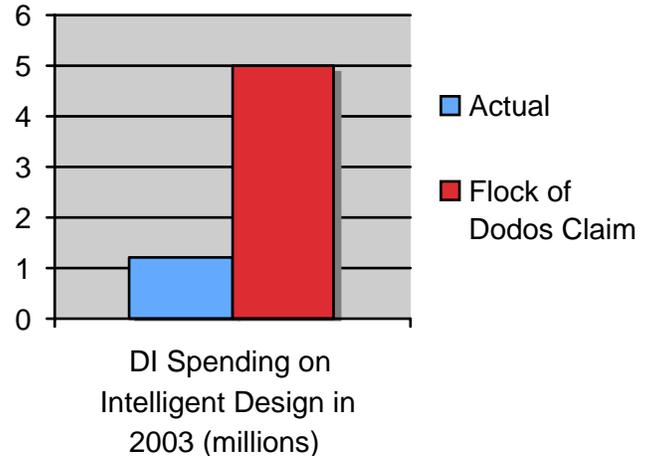
Not even close.

**Discovery Institute's Center for Science and Culture (its program on intelligent design and evolution) only spent \$1.2 million in 2003, the year that Olson uses for his film.** In 2004 it spent the same, and in 2005 it spent \$1.6 million.

**Indeed, the budget for the *entire* Discovery Institute, including expenditures on non-intelligent design programs on transportation, technology, and other topics, has never reached \$5 million.** In 2003, the Institute as a whole spent \$2.5 million, or half the figure cited by Olson. In 2004, it spent \$3.5 million, and in 2005 it spent \$3.9 million. These facts are publicly available for anyone to check on the Institute's Form 990s posted at [www.guidestar.com](http://www.guidestar.com).

How, then, did Olson arrive at his bogus number?

### **How much did DI *really* spend on intelligent design in 2003?**



Give him credit for creativity. Although viewers are clearly led to believe that Olson is talking about DI's activities relating to intelligent design, Olson lumped together the finances for *all* of Discovery's programs, including those that have nothing to do with ID. Since even that sleight of hand wouldn't get him to \$5 million, he then arbitrarily defined Discovery's "budget" not as its expenditures for a given year, but as its total *revenues*—even though this figure includes multi-year grants that must be spent over more than one year. Next, he used the revenue figure from 2003, which happened to be higher than the figures from 2004 and 2005. But even that number only got him to \$4.2 million, not \$5 million. So what did he do? *He simply added \$800,000 that didn't exist to produce a figure that sounded more impressive.* That's the sort of creative math that gets ordinary people in trouble with the IRS.

**But Olson's misrepresentations about the Institute's finances don't end there.** As part of an effort to discredit the Institute's supporters, the film shows a clip of Bill Wagnon claiming that "the Discovery Institute people... are funded by folks like the Unification Church, Reverend Moon...." The audience is never informed that this smear is absolutely false—or that Olson himself admits its falsity. In an e-mail to Discovery Institute in 2006, Olson conceded: "Bill Wagnon says you are funded by the Unification Church, *which I know to be untrue.*" (emphasis) Olson kept Wagnon's false claim in his film anyway.

**Even if Olson's bogus budget claims were correct, his overall point would still be absurd.** The idea that the resources of Discovery Institute dwarf those of evolutionists is preposterous. The budget of a single state university biology department is far larger than DI's entire program on intelligent design—as are the budgets of many of the groups that form the "evolution lobby" in the United States, such as the American Association for the Advancement of Science, which alone has a budget of more than \$75 million. If intelligent design has gained a voice in the public arena, it is definitely not because it is better funded than the proponents of evolution.

### **Other Falsehoods and Distortions**

*Flock of Dodos* is filled with numerous other falsehoods and distortions about Discovery Institute as well:

- The film falsely claims that DI helped initiate the controversy over intelligent design in Dover, PA. In fact, the Institute discouraged the Dover School Board from trying to mandate intelligent design, and then urged repeal of the Dover policy well before any lawsuit was filed. (For the truth, see "The Truth about DI's Role in the Dover School District Case" at [www.hoaxofdodos.com](http://www.hoaxofdodos.com).)
- The film maliciously implies that DI Fellow John Angus Campbell hid his Discovery affiliation at a pro-ID conference where the filmmakers interviewed him. In fact, Campbell's connection to DI has been noted on our website for years, and it was highlighted in the publicity for the conference in question. However, since Campbell is not a paid Fellow of the Institute, and since his salaried position is at a university, it is quite natural for him to list

that position as his main affiliation. The fact that Randy Olson didn't do his homework about Campbell before his interview is not Dr. Campbell's fault.

- Olson misrepresents the content of the so-called "Wedge" document. (For the truth, see "The "Wedge Document": How Darwinist Paranoia Fueled an Urban Legend" at [www.hoaxofdodos.com](http://www.hoaxofdodos.com).)

### **Olson's Double Standard**

Throughout *Flock of Dodos* Olson displays a clear double standard. He seeks to discredit DI because he thinks it receives funding from some groups he classifies as "right wing," but he never bothers to ask about the funding sources of pro-Darwin groups such as the National Center for Science Education. (Indeed, he himself has refused to disclose the funders of his own film, so no one gets to question him about *his* funding.) Similarly, Olson finds it significant that Discovery Institute hired a public relations firm for less than a year, but he ignores the regular use of PR firms by pro-evolution groups. The ACLU, for example, hired a Washington, DC public relations firm to represent itself in the Dover case. And the left-wing PR firm Fenton Communications has been used to promote "Evolution Sunday" as well as to coordinate the slick "Campaign to Defend the Constitution" that works to repeal "teach the controversy" policies on Darwinian evolution. Contrary to Olson, if evolution proponents have failed to persuade the public, it is not because of a lack of funds or PR. It's because of the lack of evidence for their position.

### **Why Did DI Limit Its Cooperation with Olson?**

Olson is upset that DI would not grant him all of the interviews he wanted with DI staff and Fellows. But the way his film plays fast and loose with the facts in order to further his agenda amply justifies DI's limited cooperation. DI staff are happy to talk with reputable journalists, whether or not they are hostile to DI's position, and they have done so with *Newsweek*, *Time*, *Science*, the *New York Times*, *CNN*, and many other media outlets. But there is no point in assisting a filmmaker who doesn't want to let the facts get in the way of his pre-determined agenda.

**Olson must think his audience is a bunch of dodos if he believes no one will notice his repeated departures from the truth.**