

July 1, 2013

Dr. Jo Ann Gora
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Dear President Gora,

Accompanying this letter is a petition from more than 7,000 people from around the United States, including more than 1,200 residents of Indiana, urging you to protect the academic freedom of Ball State University (BSU) Professor Eric Hedin.

The signers of the petition object to the Freedom from Religion Foundation's attack on Prof. Hedin and his "Boundaries of Science" honors course. They urge Ball State University to guarantee Prof. Hedin's freedom to teach without the threat of censorship or intimidation.

In 2004, a national conservative group complained about BSU Professor George Wolfe and his controversial course on peace studies. You and your university strongly defended the academic freedom of Prof. Wolfe. I ask that you show a similar willingness to defend the academic freedom of Prof. Hedin as he is being unfairly maligned by the Freedom from Religion Foundation and other outside groups. **Academic freedom means nothing if it does not protect professors from all sides of the intellectual and ideological spectrum.**

It is especially disturbing that much of the campaign against Prof. Hedin appears to be based on falsehoods. It is equally disturbing that BSU has reacted to the campaign against Prof. Hedin by launching an expansive investigation by a special committee that seems to be acting outside the normal procedures found in its own *Faculty and Professional Personnel Handbook*.

Rebutting False Claims about Prof. Hedin

As you may know, Discovery Institute has filed several public documents requests with BSU. After reviewing the syllabus the university supplied for Prof. Hedin's "Boundaries of Science" course, it seems apparent that a considerable amount of misinformation is being spread about Prof. Hedin. **First and foremost, Prof. Hedin does not teach "creationism" in his course.** None of the texts listed in

the syllabus (even those on the bibliography of suggested resources) promote the view that the Earth was created a few thousand years ago based on a literal reading of the Bible. The only required texts for the course are a mainstream science text about cosmology and a well-regarded book about the relationship between science and faith by Oxford University mathematician John Lennox (a scholar who explicitly rejects Biblical creationism). Prof. Hedin's course does explore the broader question of whether nature provides evidence of purpose, especially in physics and astronomy, but this broader debate over cosmic design has deep roots in Western thought, going back at least to the ancient Greeks, and it is not limited to any one philosophical or religious tradition. Indeed, there are many scientists and other scholars who embrace evolutionary accounts of biology while at the same time seeing evidence of design in nature at the cosmic level. Contrary to claims by the Freedom from Religion Foundation, Prof. Hedin's course syllabus includes a bibliography of additional materials reflecting diverse theological and scientific views, including materials by writers who are highly critical of the idea of intelligent design in biology. Overall, the syllabus for Prof. Hedin's course seems to fulfill BSU's stated purpose for HONRS 296, which is to "emphasiz[e]... the relationships of the sciences to human concerns and society." Questions about the purpose of life, and the relationship between science and faith, are some of the most important and abiding "human concerns" raised since the advent of civilization.

Regarding Prof. Hedin's classroom activities, it seems clear from student comments submitted to BSU that Prof. Hedin has interacted properly with students and has not used his classroom to proselytize for a sectarian purpose. Consider the following comments BSU disclosed to us from students who have taken Prof. Hedin's honors course:

- "I'm an agnostic and I find absolutely nothing wrong with... [Professor Hedin's] teachings; ... as far as intelligent and thought-provoking discussions go, [Hedin's "Boundaries of Science" class]... is one of the most INNOVATIVE classes I have had during my time at Ball State. I lean more towards scientific evidence than anything else, but being an intelligent, curious, and open-minded individual, I appreciate all of the discussions that this class has had and all of the new ideas I have come to understand. There is nothing wrong with this class, and I would recommend it to anyone, no matter what their religious beliefs are."
- "I took the honors physics course taught by Dr. Hedin in the spring of 2011. While learning about scientific concepts such as quantum mechanics, black holes, the formation of stars, and other topics, Dr. Hedin's instruction challenged me in a way that my other university classes did not. This course made me a better learner. It allowed me to become much more competent in these complex scientific areas of study and prompted me to become an individual who is committed to learning more about these topics in my own time. At times, in the classroom, students would pose questions which were related to spiritual concepts, but Dr. Hedin merely facilitated discussion giving EVERY single student an opportunity to provide input. Furthermore,

Dr. Hedin goes above and beyond the actions of a typical college educator.”

In sum, there appears very little of substance in the complaint filed against Prof. Hedin by the Freedom from Religion Foundation. There is certainly nothing that would justify launching an expansive and unprecedented investigation against Prof. Hedin and his course or subjecting him to a stricter scrutiny than applied to other BSU professors.

Yet that is precisely what BSU appears to be doing.

Concerns about the Double Standard Being Applied to Prof. Hedin

As I have [discussed in detail elsewhere](#), and mentioned above, BSU’s treatment of Prof. Hedin thus far differs dramatically from its treatment of Prof. George Wolfe when he was under similar attack from an outside group in 2004. Even though allegations against Prof. Wolfe were actually *more* serious than those leveled against Prof. Hedin, BSU’s investigation of Wolfe was *less* exacting and invasive. According to the Provost at the time, the inquiry into Wolfe’s class consisted of talking with Wolfe, talking with Wolfe’s supervisor, and reading letters received by BSU. This cursory investigation was concluded within 10 days and did not even involve an interview of the student who had come forward with specific allegations against Prof. Wolfe. By contrast, Prof. Hedin is now facing an expansive and unprecedented investigation by a special committee that seems to have been created outside of the normal procedures and policies found in BSU’s *Faculty and Professional Personnel Handbook*.

In addition, the special committee appointed to evaluate Hedin and his “Boundaries of Science” course seems to have been [stacked with professors with clear conflicts of interest](#) who are likely to be predisposed to be hostile to Prof. Hedin’s course. One of the professors on the special committee has been publicly involved with two national lobbying groups prominent in the debate over intelligent design, serving as a “scientific consultant” for one of the groups. A second member of the special committee served on the executive committee of an organization when it issued a denunciation of intelligent design. Two of the four professors also participated in a Darwin Day conference organized by the Ball State Freethought Alliance, an avowedly anti-religious group. According to the President of the group at the time, [“our original goal seems to have been just belittling religion and generally being arrogant in a way that likely didn't attract many people.”](#) The Darwin Day conference was even promoted by the Center for Inquiry as an event where people could [“\[m\]eet with other Secular Humanists.”](#) These conflicts of interest raise serious questions about the ability of committee members to act impartially.

Apart from conflicts of interest, the scholarly composition of the special committee is also curious. Hedin is a physicist, and most of the scientific topics covered by his course according to its syllabus fall in the areas of physics, astronomy, and cosmology. Yet there is no physicist on the special committee.

Instead, fully half of the committee is made up of experts in evolutionary biology. This is very strange considering that the discussion of biological evolution is listed as a very small segment of the course. By contrast, one of the big themes of Hedin's course appears to be the relationship between science and faith, and yet none of the committee members appear to have expertise in that area. The course also discusses issues related to information theory; again, committee members do not appear to have expertise in that area. Notable as well is the exclusion from the committee of anyone from Prof. Hedin's department. At most universities, when there is a complaint about a professor, the first level of response is his or her department. In this case, BSU appears to have excluded Hedin's department from the process. Why?

Most troubling of all, the special committee appointed to investigate Prof. Hedin appears to be completely *ad hoc* and its operations do not seem to be governed by any official standards or procedures, whether located in BSU's *Faculty and Professional Personnel Handbook* or elsewhere. Furthermore, it is unclear what standards the committee and the Provost are using to evaluate Prof. Hedin or his course. [According to your student newspaper, The Daily](#), BSU's Provost Terry King "said the committee will review if the [course] content is appropriate, if the professor is qualified and if the teaching is appropriate." Not only is this expansive mission seemingly untethered to official procedure, but Provost King did not define or acknowledge any bounds on what shall constitute "appropriate," a term sufficiently pliant for use as cover for suppression of minority academic views.

Questions that Need to be Answered

In light of the issues raised here, and because I would like to report back to the 7,000 signers of the attached petition, I respectfully ask you to respond to the following questions:

1. What specific language in the *Faculty and Professional Personnel Handbook* authorizes the appointment and governs conduct of the special committee investigating Prof. Hedin and his course? Please supply copies of this language and any policies, procedures, or standards that guarantee and explain Prof. Hedin's rights to due process.

2. What other professors at BSU have been subjected to investigation by a special committee using the language and other policies, procedures, and standards referenced in question 1?

3. What specific standards are the special committee and Provost using to determine as "appropriate" or not the content and teaching of Prof. Hedin's course? Have these standards been applied to other BSU faculty? If so, how have they been so applied?

4. What specific standards are the special committee and Provost using to determine whether Prof. Hedin is "qualified" to teach his course? Have these standards been applied to other BSU faculty? If so, how have they been so applied?

5. What specific measures has BSU taken to ensure that Prof. Hedin is treated fairly and that his academic freedom rights are protected during this investigative process?

6. How were members of the special committee selected, and what specific measures were taken by BSU to ensure that committee members would be impartial and free from conflicts of interest?

7. Why was Prof. Hedin's academic department excluded from the evaluation process, including the special committee?

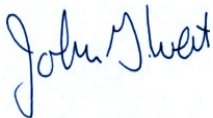
8. Please explain whether the Provost and any members of the special committee have been specifically instructed by BSU that they must act in accord with the following provisions of BSU's *Faculty and Professional Personnel Handbook*:

"Academic freedom is essential ... and applies to both teaching and research ... Academic freedom in its teaching aspect is fundamental for the protection of the rights of the teacher in teaching and of the student to freedom in learning" (p. 63); "[t]he teacher is entitled to freedom in the classroom in discussing the appointed subject, but should be careful not to introduce a controversial matter which has no relation to the subject" (pp. 63-64); "Academic freedom and freedom of expression include but are not limited to the expression of ideas, philosophies, or religious beliefs, however controversial, in classroom or other academic settings." (p. 68)

9. Why is BSU subjecting Prof. Hedin to a level of scrutiny and analysis that BSU did not apply to Prof. George Wolfe, when Wolfe's freedom to teach was challenged in 2004?

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. The 7,000+ signers of the attached petition await your answers.

Sincerely,



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