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Faculty member at Iowa State University denied tenure for supporting intelligent design.

Jocelyn Green | posted 1/10/2008 08:55AM

When Guillermo Gonzalez, assistant professor of physics and astronomy, was denied tenure at Iowa State University (ISU) in November 2006, department head Eli Rosenberg said the decision had nothing to do with Gonzalez's support of intelligent design. Recently released documents, however, told a different story.

In Gonzalez's tenure dossier, Rosenberg stated, "The problem here is that Intelligent Design is not a scientific theory. ... The fact that Dr. Gonzalez does not understand what constitutes both science and a scientific theory disqualifies him from serving as a science educator."

Gonzalez said he never taught intelligent design (ID) in his classes. "The recent controversy surrounding me is strictly about the research I have done on ID," he said. "My ID research [published in *The Privileged Planet*] was funded in part by a grant from the Templeton Foundation, which ISU administered."

Faculty members who question Darwinian evolution say they often run into trouble at secular universities. Caroline Crocker, who taught scientific evidence for and against evolution at George Mason University, was released by the school in December 2004. "I wanted students to think for themselves," she said. "My supervisor accused me of teaching creationism and removed me from teaching lectures immediately; at the end of the semester, the job was over."

But according to George Mason spokesperson Daniel Walsch, "[Crocker's] contract was simply not renewed. It had nothing to do with the ID/evolution debate."

At the University of Idaho, where tenured professor Scott Minnich supports intelligent design, president Timothy White issued a statement banning anything other than Darwinian evolution from being taught in science courses.

"Most institutions would have serious doubts about the professional credibility of teaching intelligent design alongside evolution in a science class," said Jonathan Knight of the American Association of University Professors. "It could be taught in terms of contemporary social issues, or in a philosophy course."

Dorothy Boorse, associate professor of biology at Gordon College, a Christian liberal arts school, agreed that ID, as it is frequently described, doesn't meet the basic standards of scientific research.

"Some scientists translate ID into a disbelief in mechanisms of science that are pretty well supported," she said. "I'm to teach the best available biology, and the best evidence is that God has used extensive evolution. I think most scientists in biology would agree with that, including

Christians."

John West of the Discovery Institute, an ID think tank, seeks to counter such marginalization of ID. "[Pushing evidence for design into a philosophy class] would be like saying you can't teach any other view than capitalism in economics class, but you can talk about Marxism in a propaganda class," he said. "That's preposterous."

In August 2007, Baylor University took offline the Evolutionary Informatics Lab website of Robert Marks, who is tenured. He said it was because the lab's research implied there might be a Creator. "What's at issue here is the ability to bring the idea of the possibility of design into science," said Marks.

At some Christian colleges, the pressure goes in the other direction. In 2005, Olivet Nazarene University microbiologist Richard Colling published *Random Designer*, a book promoting understanding between evolution and faith. In response, church leaders and university trustees questioned Colling's Christian orthodoxy.

"They pressured our president because they don't like theistic evolution," said Colling. "There's no doubt in my mind that if not tenured, I would have been released last year."

Instead, president John Bowling removed Colling from teaching general biology, banned his book from university classes, and directed that biological origins be team-taught with religion or theology faculty.

The difference between Colling's situation and his, Gonzalez said, is that private Christian colleges are expected to require adherence to religious doctrines. "[But] public universities claim to protect their faculty's academic freedom, no matter how unpopular their ideas might be among their colleagues," he said.

Gonzalez is appealing his case to the Iowa Board of Regents. His appointment as assistant professor at ISU ends in May.

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