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Film puts Baylor dust-up over intelligent design in the cinematic limelight

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By Tim Woods

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Baylor University distinguished professor of engineering Robert Marks had strong words for the school in a recently released movie but says he recognizes Baylor is in a difficult position, trying to balance its Christian heritage with lofty research goals.

Marks is one of several people whose cases are profiled in *Expelled: No Intelligence Allowed*, a film featuring attorney, actor and political commentator Ben Stein on a quest to expose cases of academic and intellectual suppression.

Specifically, the film seeks to show that scientists and academics who study the possibility of intelligent design in nature or even the possibility of God, rather than random chance, are being persecuted by scientific elite holding “neo-Darwinist” world views.

Marks’ involvement in *Expelled* centers on a Web site about his evolutionary informatics research lab.

The research is friendly to the philosophy of intelligent design, Marks says, but is not direct intelligent design research.

The site, formerly on Baylor’s server, was shut down last year by school officials who claimed it lacked sufficient disclaimers that the work was in no way that of Baylor University.

“What we say is you have the freedom to formulate your own views and so forth, just make sure that you issue a disclaimer that your particular view does not necessarily express the view of Baylor University,” Baylor Provost Randall O’Brien explained in September, when an *Expelled* film crew was in Waco trying to talk with President John Lilley. “We fully endorse the right and responsibilities of academic freedom.”

In *Expelled*, however, Marks says he has no doubt the site was shut down because of its relationship to intelligent design.

“The fact that this was singled out, let alone shut down, is jaw-dropping,” he says in the film.

Baylor spokeswoman Lori Fogleman, who spoke to *Expelled* associate producer Mark Mathis in September — Lilley was out of town — said she hasn’t yet seen the movie. However, she took issue with Marks’ claim the site was shut down because of its intelligent design connection.

Once a professor fulfills his or her obligation to the school, that person is free to conduct any outside research “as long as he or she does not represent that work as being connected to Baylor University,” Fogleman said.

Marks’ site has since been moved to a remote server.

Expelled, shown locally at Starplex Galaxy 16, 333 S. Valley Mills Drive, has met moderate success both locally and nationally. In its opening weekend, the film grossed nearly \$3 million, according to Box Office Mojo, with a healthy per-screen average of almost \$3,000.

Galaxy 16 manager Naomi Tatum said 724 people bought tickets to see *Expelled* in Waco between its April 18 opening and Sunday.

That’s a far cry from the theater’s new leading movie, *Baby Mama*, which sold 1,747 tickets at the multiplex since opening Friday, but Tatum said the numbers are respectable, given *Expelled’s* subject matter.

“Considering the kind of movie it is, it’s doing pretty well,” Tatum said.

Marks is happy with the film and hopes it helps spark a national discussion about “entrenched atheistic Darwinism (putting) a damper on anyone who wants to be a proponent of the God hypothesis.”

“I think the movie has been more successful in making people aware, as opposed to changing their minds,” he said. “This will be an ongoing battle.”

Mathis said he, too, is happy with the early results. He’s especially pleased when taking into account a culture he says is resistant to films like *Expelled* that question widely held beliefs such as neo-Darwinism.

“Leftist” movies such as Michael Moore’s *Sicko* receive tens of millions of dollars in free publicity “from mainstream media that is favorable to (Moore’s) position,” he said.

“We received the exact opposite of that, which is just a pummeling by the secular press, ignored by the big press, which fawn over leftist films, and then a pummeling by the critics because this film contradicts their world view. So to do the numbers that we did in that atmosphere I think is pretty remarkable.”

Fogleman said the school has heard from a number of concerned people about Baylor’s portrayal in the movie and “we’ve communicated with them that we regret that the movie has been a source of concern for them. But in the course of our conversation, we also took the opportunity to assure them that Baylor continues to maintain its Christian commitment in the historic Baptist tradition.”

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