



## AN OPEN LETTER REGARDING THE TEACHING OF CREATION

How students learn about origins is a matter of significant concern in the Seventh-day Adventist Church today. La Sierra University has found itself the focus of this concern for much of the past two years.

The University Board of Trustees, administration, and faculty have heard and taken seriously the concern expressed by Church leaders and members, especially as expressed in the report and recommendations of the Adventist Accrediting Association following their regular November site visit. The Board appointed a study group to study the issue. It carefully reviewed the AAA report and the team's counsel and issued a report that the La Sierra University Board of Trustees voted to receive at its February meeting. The Board has directed campus administration to implement the Board's recommendations. The complete report can be found at [http://www.lasierra.edu/fileadmin/documents/provost/LSU\\_Board\\_Report.pdf](http://www.lasierra.edu/fileadmin/documents/provost/LSU_Board_Report.pdf).

In order to get the most accurate and objective assessment of what students are learning in La Sierra's biology classes, the study group went directly to the source. It attempted to reach every student who studied General Biology or who graduated with a biology major for the past four years, plus the year 2000. It invited them to answer, anonymously, 17 questions focusing specifically on what they learned about creation and evolution, whether their personal religious views were respected, and how the classes impacted their religious faith.

From those who have been enrolled in biology classes, the study group learned that the university is doing well in some areas. Two-thirds responded that their professors presented helpful ways of relating science and religious faith, supported their faithfulness to their religious heritage, and encouraged faith in a personal God.

The survey, though, also showed areas in which we have fallen short of what we and our Church want for our students. We found that only 50 percent of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that our Adventist view of creation was presented, and only 40 percent agreed or strongly agreed that our Adventist view was supported. This is not acceptable, and we apologize. We have already begun addressing this in meaningful ways to ensure that our biology program seriously addresses the topic of creation.

The study group's findings also included:

- The biology faculty deserve recognition and respect for their work. Neither their professional competency as biologists nor their character and sincerity were questioned.

- Instruction at the university, while being strong in many areas, has not adequately presented the denomination's position on the subject of creation.

- There is some evidence that students have not always been respected for their belief in the Biblical creation position.

The Board adopted, and directed campus administration to implement, the following measures:

- Accept and implement the recommendations from the Adventist Accrediting Association.

- Develop faculty workshops regarding the challenges of teaching controversial topics such as those in biology.

- Continue the work in progress, (as identified below).

- Conduct regular follow-up surveys of biology students.

- Provide the Board with ongoing candid and prompt reports of both progress and challenges in dealing with this issue.

The Board affirmed its support for the president and his administration and entrusted them with the implementation of these recommendations. In addition, the Board committed to support the administration in these efforts and to focus on the more positive aspects of the university.

The university president and provost identified steps to address this issue that have already been taken or are currently in progress. These include:

- Ensuring that all biology students discuss key documents relating to our Adventist belief regarding origins, including Fundamental Belief #6, the 2004 Annual Council Reaffirmation of Creation, and Genesis 1 and 2.

- Increased participation by the Church's Geoscience Research Institute in planning the General Biology Seminar.

- Ongoing refinement of the General Biology Seminar, based on student exit surveys and other input.

- Attendance of biology faculty members at the Geoscience Research Institute summer workshop.

- Continue the lecture series that presents a range of Adventist views on the integration of faith and science.

- Establish dialogue with biology professors from sister Adventist colleges and universities.

The biology department specifically commits to:

- Faithfully present the Seventh-day Adventist Church's position on creation.
- Respect every student's religious beliefs.
- Help students learn how to grapple with issues of faith and science in faith-affirming ways.

La Sierra University is committed to being an institution that does not just present the Church's view of creation, but fully supports it. We pledge our commitment to work prayerfully and diligently to ensure that our mission to provide a rigorous and faith-affirming Seventh-day Adventist education is carried out on behalf of our students and our Church.

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President

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