

Where Faith Intersects Science

Rise & Shine, December 8th

2 Peter 1:5

For this very reason, you must make every effort to support your faith with goodness, and goodness with knowledge...

Questions:

1. What role should critical thinking have regarding religious faith?
 2. What is the difference between fact, opinion, speculative conclusion, overvalued idea, delusion? Where would you put faith in this list?
 3. When has popular opinion or knowledge conflicted directly with your core beliefs?
 4. Is the truth of faith something different from the truth of science? Are the two "truths" intended to be competitors, to be complementary or to be something else?
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Critics Fear New Ohio Bill May Allow Students' Religious Beliefs to Trump Scientific Facts

Ohio's state House of Representatives has passed a bill that some critics fear could require teachers to accept faith-based answers on school assignments – even if those responses are contradicted by scientific facts.

The legislation, HB 164, would do the following if it became law, according to an analysis from the Ohio Legislative Service Commission, a bipartisan agency that provides the Ohio General Assembly with budget and fiscal analysis:

- Allow students to engage in religious expression in the completion of homework, artwork or other assignments
- Prohibit public schools from rewarding or penalizing a student based on the religious content of a student's homework, artwork or other assignments.

It also says that student's grades for these assignments will be calculated "using ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance, including any legitimate pedagogical concerns."

Some critics are concerned that the bill could affect the grading of tests and other assignments where scientific theory might conflict with religious doctrine. In other words, does the bill allow students to be wrong in science class as long as their reasoning is based on religion?

For the bill's sponsor, Republican Rep. Tim Ginter, said that under the bill, "a Christian or Jewish student would not be able to say my religious texts teach me that the world is 6,000 years old, so I don't have to answer this question. They're still going to be tested in the class and they cannot ignore the class material." On the other hand, if students are asked to write a book report on any book of their choosing, the bill would make sure students aren't penalized for choosing to write a book report on the Bible's Book of Job, Ginter said.

Or, as Charles C. Haynes, founding director of the Religious Freedom Center at the Freedom Forum Institute, put it, students are "not let off the hook from learning what is being taught. They don't have to believe it, they don't have to accept it, but they have to know it."

But Gary Daniels, chief lobbyist for the American Civil Liberties Union of Ohio, said the measure does in fact allow students to answer homework questions and other assignments incorrectly, based on religious belief rather than science -- and not be marked wrong. "Under HB 164, the answer is 'no,' as this legislation clearly states the instructor 'shall not penalize or reward a student based on the religious content of a student's work.' "

Ohio House Minority Leader Emilia Strong Sykes claims the bill would technically allow students in social studies or science classes to refer to Bible stories (such as Noah and the Ark) as true historical events, or to characters from scripture (such as Adam and Eve) as real, historical figures. The bill mandates that educators must not penalize "religious responses that fly in the face of science and accepted facts," Sykes said.

"As the bill is currently written, it requires teachers to accept answers that could be scientifically inaccurate so long as religious doctrine says they are true," Sykes told HuffPost in a statement. "A K-12 public school education is intended to open minds and allow free thought, however we are wading in dangerous territory if we refuse to accept facts and science in educational settings."

The debate about how the bill might affect student expression perhaps can be focused on what a student is allowed to add to an answer. For example, if a science class lesson is about evolution or climate change, Ginter's interpretation would seem to suggest that students would need to answer questions according to current biological evolution theory as taught in class, but could add that they hold a different view because of religious belief and not be penalized for that addition.

Even if that is the intention of the bill, however, its critics are also concerned about how it would play out in practice. Daniels, who spoke against the bill to lawmakers, said he was concerned the legislation would tie teachers' hands if students ignored an assignment's instructions and instead stated their religious beliefs. Given the bill's vague language, Daniels said many teachers would let students' actions slide.

How the bill will be interpreted in courts ultimately hinges on what counts as "ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance" and what counts as "legitimate pedagogical concerns."

"And, of course, how these key parts of the statute are interpreted will depend on who is interpreting them," Corbin said.

The bill is being sent to Ohio's Republican-controlled Senate for consideration.

John 8:32

... and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.

Hebrews 11:1

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Prayer for Schools and Colleges (BCP p.824)

O Eternal God, bless all schools, colleges, and universities and especially those in Greater Cincinnati, that they may be lively centers for sound learning, new discovery, and the pursuit of wisdom; and grant that those who teach and those who learn may find you to be the source of all truth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*