

# the *Educational Research Analysts* MEL GABLERS' *Newsletter*

Inside:  
Strong on Evolution,  
Weak on Facts

Your Textbook InfoSource • PO Box 7518 • Longview, TX 75607-7518 • 903/753-5993 • fax 903/753-7788 • Info@TextbookReviews.org • November 2003

*Slightly less bad than before*

## BIOLOGY BOOKS EVOLVE IN TEXAS

In November 2003, after months of media coverage and two public hearings, Texas' State Board of Education (SBOE) approved high school Biology books for 2004 local adoption. At issue was treatment of evolution in Glencoe's *Biology: The Dynamics of Life*, Holt *Biology*, and Prentice Hall *Biology*, regular (non-Advanced Placement) texts by major publishers which will dominate Texas sales.

These books were very evolutionary. That did not violate Texas law. What did violate Texas law was their censorship of scientific weaknesses in evolutionary theories. Texas requires them to tell **scientific weaknesses as well as strengths of scientific theories**, including evolution. That is constitutional because (unlike some states) it **does not single out evolution** for special treatment.

But not all of those texts were equally nonconforming. Two acknowledged major scientific weaknesses in evolutionary theories. An entire page in *Prentice Hall Biology* explained that phylogenies based on biochemical similarities may contradict phylogenies based on comparative anatomy, complete with a student reinforcement activity and review questions.

This not only is a significant scientific weakness in evolutionary theory; it is the exact opposite of what that book said on the subject in its 1991 and 1998 Texas editions, to which our reviews specifically objected in both those earlier adoptions. Had Texas added this weakness during the state approval process, it would have riled the pro-evolution gestapo. As it was, they apparently never noticed it.

Despite that improvement, and similar progress in Glencoe's *Biology: The Dynamics of Life*, all the books needed more scientific weaknesses in evolutionary theories to conform fully to Texas law ... which evolutionists opposed. A stalemate ensued. There were few important changes during the state approval process. The SBOE in November basically accepted the books as submitted in April.

*Like the gentleman he is, Prentice Hall Biology co-author Ken Miller graciously wrote to the Texas Education Agency, of our list of factual errors that we filed on his book:*

“I am very grateful to the Gabler organization for finding these mistakes and typographical errors. Their exceptional thoroughness is commendable, and in almost every case I have recommended that we follow their suggestions. Please extend my thanks and appreciation to their organization in helping to improve the accuracy of our text. ”

*Dr. Miller referred here only to our errors list. He would take strong exception to our review of his treatment of evolution. Yet we brought the same precision to both.*

The Texas rule requiring scientific strengths and weaknesses of scientific theories proved so **constitutionally bulletproof**, that evolutionists tried to **re-frame the debate by attacking "intelligent design" instead**, which no one was asking for. In the media, though, SBOE conservatives successfully distinguished the Texas rule from evolutionists' diversionary assault on "intelligent design."

These three 1100-page texts took us nine weeks each to review, about seven months' work altogether. We filed a list of 110 indisputable factual errors that publishers and the state of Texas missed in them. Publishers admitted these in writing, validating our depth of

analysis. That prepared Biology textbook reformers better than ever for 2004 local adoptions.

This experience showed the superiority of the Texas rule on treatment of scientific theories. It helped set in motion (through public demand) greater compliance with that rule over time. It reaffirmed the wisdom of textbook activism rather than litigation to work for change. California state-adopts only through grade 8, so Texas most influences high school textbooks nationwide.