Creationism Debate

This laboratory session is unlike any other that we will encounter this semester. Rather than focusing on the details of evolutionary or ecological systems, we will debate, as a class, current issues in the study of evolution.

Our plan is to debate, discuss, and explore the following thesis:

“Creationism should/should not be taught in the public school science curriculum.”

Debating Teams

We will consider both the scientific issues involved in this thesis, and the non-scientific issues. Non-scientific issues include, legal, moral, theological, and educational perspectives on creationism and evolution. Your TA will divide the class during the first week into 4 different teams, who will prepare presentations on the following topics:

“Creationism should be taught in the public school science curriculum (scientific issues).”

“Creationism should not be taught in the public school science curriculum (scientific issues).”

“Creationism should be taught in the public school science curriculum (non-scientific issues).”

“Creationism should not be taught in the public school science curriculum (non-scientific issues).”

You will want to begin working closely with the other members of your debating team to produce an effective presentation.

Resources

Because creationism is a controversial topic, there is a lot of material out there for you to work with. To begin with, read chapters 3 and 4 of your textbook (Strickberger) for an overview of the issues. Then begin your research in the library and, especially, on the world-wide web to gather resources for your arguments. Each person in the group should do their own library and internet research, and bring back to the debating 6 to 12 good sources that can be used in your presentation. Each person will need to turn in their own literature and internet citations as part of the assignment.
Debate Structure
Each team will be allowed 20 minutes for their presentation. You will need to decide who on your team will make the actual presentation. An overhead projector will be available in the lab, so you will be able to use overheads in your presentation. Presenters will be allowed to speak for 15 minutes without interruption.

Next, the opposing debate team will be given 5 minutes to rebut the arguments that were presented. Obviously, your team will have to listen very closely to the arguments that are being presented and have a good working knowledge of the material to craft an effective response. The presenting team will then be given 5 minutes to respond to the opposing team, and then 5 minutes at the end will be given for general questions from anyone in the lab.

With 4 debating teams, the lab will take 2 hours to complete, if we adhere strictly to the time schedule. After all 4 debating teams have made their presentations, the TA will lead the class in a general discussion of the topics that have been presented.

Grading
After the debate, you will need to turn in a typed bibliography of the 6-12 resources that you personally gathered to help your debating team. Please include a xerox of the first page of each journal article or web page that you used.

Your grade will be based on the bibliography you turn in, the quality of the presentation for your group, and your own participation in the discussion.

Keeping it Civil
Creationism and its place in the school curriculum is a controversial topic, and you and your fellow students may hold strong opinions on the topics being considered. It is important to be respectful and courteous of others at all points in the conversation.

Since we are following a formal debate structure, you may not speak until the appropriate time in the schedule. Do not interrupt others and do not raise your voice. Arguments should be based on evidence and reasoning, not on volume, sarcasm, or uninformed opinion. Your TA will serve as “umpire” to make sure things stay civil.

You may find that you have been assigned to debate a position that you personally disagree with. Good! Nothing sharpens your skills in rhetoric and logic more than being forced to support an argument that you don’t agree with. Remember that there are no “right” or “wrong” positions. There are arguments and counter-arguments to all of the evidence you will consider, and these issues have been debated for many decades by some of the greatest religious, scientific, and legal scholars in the nation. This is your chance to participate in this active intellectual debate. So remember… no biting and no kicking!