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7 April 2008

Chad Gaffield, President
SSHRC
350 Albert Street
P.O. Box 1610
Ottawa, ON K1P 6G4

Dear Dr. Gaffield:

**An open letter to SSHRC
regarding the clarification of the Intelligent Design
remarks to Dr. B. Alters**

I have been informed of the letters sent to you by Dr. Brian Alters requesting an explanation of the Intelligent Design remarks contained in the SSHRC committee communication that turned down Alters' grant application. You have not answered this request even though the request was sent on Nov. 19, 2007, almost 5 months ago. This is a request from an applicant for a clarification of a statement that SSHRC has acknowledged to be in error. SSHRC is clearly obligated to answer.

The statement in question is:

“Nor did the committee consider that there was adequate justification for the assumption in the proposal that the theory of Evolution, and not Intelligent Design theory, was correct.”

The statement requires clarification because Evolution is a scientific theory backed up by overwhelming observational evidence and is the only credible scientific position that is defensible whereas Intelligent Design is a religious belief. The statement in question is clearly in error. It implies that Intelligent Design is regarded as a scientific theory on par with Evolution.

I will review Dr. Alters' request:

- March 28, 2006. Dr. Alters requested a clarification of the statement well before the deadline to do so. The program officer declined to give a clarification.
- August 3, 2007. On the basis that:
 - SSHRC announced that the committee statement was inaccurate.
 - SSHRC policy is to provide clear and unequivocal decision statements to applicants.

Dr. Alters again requested a clarification of the statement.

Ref: http://tuda.triumf.ca/evolution/Alters_to_Gaffield_070803.pdf

- September 10, 2007 you replied, “SSHRC has provided clarification in this matter, both publicly and in correspondence, on several occasions”. No further clarification was offered.

Ref: http://tuda.triumf.ca/evolution/Gaffield_reply_070910.pdf

From the record available to me, SSHRC has not provided any clarification either publicly or in correspondence on any occasion except to note that the original statement to the applicant was flawed. The clarifications alluded to in the letter were not specified.

- November 19, 2007 Dr. Alters noted that SSHRC policy is to provide clear and unequivocal decisions **in letters to the applicants**, and requested that a clarification be sent directly to him as per policy.

Ref: http://tuda.triumf.ca/evolution/Alters_to_Gaffield_071119.pdf

This letter has not been answered.

In a letter (http://tuda.triumf.ca/evolution/gaffield_061108.pdf) sent to me on November 8, 2006, you stated, “that one sentence of the decision letter sent to Dr. Alters did not accurately reflect the thinking of the peer-review committee”. On the matter of clarification you wrote, “that, in future, peer-review committee views are to be expressed clearly and unequivocally **in letters to applicants**”. These two statements obligate SSHRC to provide Dr. Alters a clarification in a letter sent directly to him – if the adjudication statement was inaccurate then Dr Alters must, by your own policy be given the committee views “clearly and unequivocally.”

Let me say a word on the SSHRC silence on the matter of Intelligent Design. In your Nov. 8, 2006 letter you write, “SSHRC remains silent on Intelligent Design theory – simply because it is not our agency’s mandate to take a position”. And again at another point in the letter you have, “With respect to the reaction to this sentence, SSHRC’s focus has been to ensure the impartiality of the peer-review process, not to enter debates on the issues”. These statements make it appear that you are supporting the adjudication committee’s apparent view that there is a legitimate scientific debate concerning Evolution and Intelligent Design.

As the prime government custodian of funds for science education research, SSHRC cannot remain impartial in regard to a matter of such fundamental scientific importance, and of such overwhelming scientific consensus. The science community and the science education community that you serve regard Intelligent Design as a Trojan horse specifically designed by fundamentalist advocates to undermine science education and to bring religion into the classroom. The present impartial stance denigrates the prestige and regard SSHRC maintains as the granting agency for science education research. It questions the competence and it undermines the confidence in the agency’s ability to execute its science education mandate.

The science education research community will wish to be assured that SSHRC does not entertain any illusions whatsoever that Intelligent Design is a scientific theory. Researchers involved in science education require that their research be reviewed by peers who understand the science, as well as the educational methodologies.

Gaffield – 7 Apr. 2008

Sincerely,

Patrick Walden,

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