

December 2024

Discrimination Against Creationists in a Bioinformatics Lab

[To the TASC reader: The following Letter to the Editor was submitted by Jerry Bergman, a colleague of the anonymous writer of the letter. The letter writer's name was withheld at the writer's request. The assertions, opinions, views, and claims expressed in the letter are not necessarily those of TASC. – Ed.]

Preface

The letter that follows is a brief, anonymous account of a Ph.D. scientist's experience in academia. I have known him for several years and can verify both his experience and the fact that his experience is not atypical. In the letter, he has concealed his name and all identifying information of the people he worked with and of the universities where he has worked due to the real danger that such information may again affect his ability to earn a livelihood. He realizes that he must, in the hostile world of secular academia, keep his Christian and creationist beliefs private in order to stay employed.

Dr. Jerry Bergman, author, retired college professor

Dear Editor:

By the end of my Ph.D. work in biology, I remained employed as a programmer at my alma mater in the capital city of my home in a European country. After receiving my degree, I began looking for work in the biology area. After searching the web, I noted an advertisement for a bioinformatics lab position at a large American Midwest university.

As a dual citizen of both my country and the United States, moving to the United States would not be a problem. Therefore, I emailed the bioinformatics lab to indicate my interest in the position and received a telephone interview with the lab's professor the same day. A member of his lab had left, and he needed to fill an open position. Five days later, the professor called me back and informed me that I had been chosen for the position. I packed my bags and bade my friends and family farewell for my new life in the United States. I also informed my new employer that I was a Christian and wanted to find a church to join

when I arrived in America. The professor, who became my boss, later told me that he was a hard-core atheist.

Problems started soon after I landed at the airport. The professor and his wife picked me up to take me to my hotel. We were barely fifteen minutes into the city when we stopped at a traffic light. Across the road was a neon sign for a strip tease bar showing a woman swaying her hips. The professor pointed it out to me, saying, "You should come here to visit. The professor's wife, who was sitting behind him, was not at all supportive of her husband's comments. This was the first of a long series of sexually explicit comments that the professor would make to me and others in his lab. My boss knew that I was a believer yet stooped so low to make such comments on the very first day I was in the United States.

Within the week, after buying the necessary items for my apartment, I started working in the professor's lab. For a little over two years, I worked closely together with several other employees and never had any problems with my colleagues. One time, I even went with a colleague on a trip to the nearby mountains for a vacation.

My work involved downloading data, data analysis, writing scripts, setting up database tables, running queries on them, and producing figures and images for scientific papers. During my time in the lab, I was involved with two major projects which were published. In contrast, the last paper on our findings was rejected by six journals. It was very frustrating for all of us in the lab then.

From the start, the relationship between me and the professor began to sour, and the atmosphere became more tense as time went on. He could get very annoyed if some detail was not, in his opinion, quite right. At one point he mocked me for not knowing how to write the code required to enter the data in the computer for analysis. Although he spoke nicely to people to their faces, he spoke derisively about most of our close colleagues and other people in the department behind their backs.

One joke of the professor involved male genitals. My colleagues also heard these jokes as long as they worked in the professor's lab and were used to them. The professor

once promised that he would stop, but never did. He even talked about committing lewd acts with my girlfriend.

When he shouted at me for not doing things exactly the way he wanted, it made me very anxious. One incident, however, was when I actually did something wrong. The atmosphere was more overcharged than normal. He started yelling and cussing in front of the lab staff.

The professor also tried to influence me to vote for Barack Obama because Obama would push funding for scientific research. I found it perplexing that liberals disliked it if Christians tried to proselytize them, yet this professor was attempting to influence me to accept his worldview. Whenever I had discussions of a political or religious nature, the professor constantly cut in and attempted to stop me from expressing my thoughts. In general, the tone in secular academia was that it was assumed all scientists were liberal/Democrats/atheists and that conservatives/Republicans/Christians and, above all, creationists knew little about science and academia. This came out in some anti-Republican jokes that everyone laughed at during one conference that I attended. One office of a faculty member next to my professor's office had a political cartoon on his door that claimed that moderate Republicans were a dying breed. Given the recent Trump election results, the cartoon was wrong.

The professor was especially prone to making negative comments about church people in general. In his view, the church was all about money. He once mentioned a Christian hospital that charged what he thought were exorbitant prices for medical treatments, ignoring the fact that medical treatment in the United States is generally very expensive everywhere. His wife went to church, and on rare occasions he would go with her. During my two years in his lab, I attended various churches where I had given several talks on creation. One such church put one of my PowerPoint presentations on living fossils and genetics on their website. When one of our papers was rejected for publication by a particular journal, the professor called the editor to determine why it was rejected. The editor mentioned that one of the reviewers, because I was the first author, had Googled my name and had found out that I was a creationist. The professor, after an Internet search, then found my PowerPoint presentation that I gave at the church.

My boss then demanded that I take my PowerPoint presentation off the Internet. He also told me about his phone call to the journal editor who had rejected the paper. My boss made it clear that he did not like being associated with a creationist. He told me three separate times that I did not belong in science. On my second-to-last day in the lab, when I was sitting in my office next to another lab worker, my boss came in and asked me how could I accept the science of biology if I didn't accept evolution? He then insulted me for believing in creation, and I

became very concerned that he would get physically violent. The lab worker in my office with me began to leave, but my boss called him back, explaining that he was also involved in this issue. It was as though I had committed some crime against the professor and his lab by accepting creation and rejecting evolution. In the end, he demanded that I resign.

About one year into my job, without the professor knowing, I started looking for another position. It was mainly inertia that kept me working in his lab. I made good money and was at a loss as to what I could do otherwise if I left. Employment security, even in my horrendous work environment, was a stronger influence at the time than being free and unemployed. Finally, after two years, I told the professor that I must quit. He told me I could stay for two more months while looking for another job.

After I left his lab, I was unemployed for about a month before I was hired at another university due to my excellent publication record. I was still curious as to what the journal editor had told the professor about why our paper was rejected. I wanted to know the real reason it was rejected. So I wrote to the journal editor who wrote back and, realizing he could not say the paper was rejected due to my religion, instead he stated that the journal receives many papers and that our paper wasn't significant enough. Furthermore, he added that it would be better suited for a specialized audience. He then wished me success with my future submissions. I am sure that this answer was commonly used to explain rejections even when other more truthful reasons really existed.

Unbeknownst to me, the journal editor also sent his reply to my professor who then emailed me. My professor was beside himself in rage, demanding that I never again contact the journal editor. He further implied that if I did, I would be removed from the list of authors on future papers that he and I had worked on that would be submitted for publication in the future. He added that, because of my creation involvement, I had seriously tarnished our lab's credibility. I now know for certain that our paper was rejected not because the science was faulty but because I, as the first author, was a creationist.

In summary, this prolonged series of incidents is symptomatic of a deeper problem in academia. Liberals, secularists, and atheists today routinely get away with this behavior. This is an example of a sordid grotesque expression of the hatred of man towards our Creator. Outspoken Christians are often not welcome in academia. We are wasting much time and energy trying to swim upstream through the gauntlet of secular academia, oppressed by men who accept evolution as their worldview and reject our worldview. It is time that we Christians should form our own schools and institutions.

“I beseech you therefore, brethren...be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” [Romans 12:1–2 (KJV). See also 1 Corinthians 15:33 and 2 Corinthians 6:14b–17.]