

## **MEDIA ADVISORY**

**Austin, April 23, 2008** – The Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board’s Academic Excellence and Research (AER) Committee today voted to recommend to the full Board that a proposal for a certificate of authority to offer a Master of Science degree in Science Education by the Institute for Creation Research (ICR) Graduate School not be approved. The Committee’s decision was based on a recommendation by Texas Commissioner of Higher Education, Dr. Raymund Paredes.

Commissioner Paredes based the recommendation on two considerations: 1) that ICR failed to demonstrate that the proposed degree program meets acceptable standards of science and science education; and 2) that the proposed degree is inconsistent with Coordinating Board rules which require the accurate labeling or designation of programs. Standard 12, Chapter 7 of Board rules requires that proposed programs “shall adequately cover the breadth of knowledge of the discipline taught” and that “degree level, degree designation, and designation of the major course of study should be appropriate to the curriculum offered.” Since the proposed degree program inadequately covers key areas of science, it cannot be properly designated either as “science” or “science education.”

In his recommendation, Commissioner Paredes stressed that he was “not questioning the validity of religious belief as a means of comprehending the world and universe around us.” However, he further stated that “Religious belief is not science. Science and religious belief are surely reconcilable, but they are not the same thing.”

The full Board is scheduled to vote on the recommendation of the AER Committee at the April 24, 2008 Board meeting. If the proposal is not approved, the ICR will have 45 days to file an appeal or 180 days to reapply for another certificate of authority.

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*Note:* The Commissioner and Board Committee members will not be able to comment further until after a decision is rendered by the full Board at its quarterly meeting on April 24, 2008.

Attached for further background:

1. Overview (FAQ) of process for consideration of Certificate of Authority
2. Timeline of events regarding ICR application
3. Commissioner’s prepared statement to the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board Committee on Academic Excellence and Research



# OVERVIEW

## FAQ: Process for Consideration of Certificate of Authority

### What is a Certificate of Authority?

Section 61.304 of the Texas Education Code prohibits a private postsecondary educational institution from granting or awarding degrees in the state of Texas unless the institution is issued a Certificate of Authority (COA) to grant such a degree by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board ("Coordinating Board").

A COA is an interim step for an institution seeking approval to offer degrees in Texas. A COA awarded by the Coordinating Board is a temporary authorization, valid for up to two years, that is predicated on the institution receiving formal accreditation from a Coordinating Board-recognized accrediting agency. An institution may seek limited, periodic renewal of their Certificate of Authority. However renewal is subject to the institution making demonstrable progress toward accreditation.

### What type of institution may apply for a Certificate of Authority?

Any private postsecondary educational institution that has been in operation for not less than two years and does not possess accreditation from a Coordinating Board-recognized accrediting body may apply to the Coordinating Board for a COA to offer a degree program.

### How do you (CB) determine which programs to approve for Certificates of Authority and which ones to deny?

The Texas Higher Education Board makes judgments of fact on a case-by-case basis regarding the decision to issue Certificates of Authority that are based on a long-established list of criteria that can be found in the Education Code, Title 3, Section 7, Chapter 7 of the Texas Statutes. As long as it meets the established list of criteria, it is eligible for consideration. Eligibility for consideration, however, does not guarantee approval.

### What is the process for considering a Certificate of Authority?

The COA relies on a comprehensive, multi-tiered review process. The process begins with a formal application submitted by the applicant seeking temporary authorization to operate in Texas. Once an application is received and is deemed complete, Coordinating Board staff organize a Site Evaluation Team comprised of independent experts in higher education that are charged with conducting a peer review of institution facilities, curriculum, faculty, and other issues relevant to operating a high quality institution of higher education.

The Site Evaluation Team reports their findings to Coordinating Board staff and the Certification Advisory Council—an independent advisory panel established by state statute to review Certificate of Authority applications and make non-binding recommendations to the Commissioner of Higher Education and the Coordinating Board.

Upon review of the Site Evaluation Team report and other relevant information, the Certification Advisory Council forwards their formal, non-binding recommendation to the Commissioner of Higher Education. The Commissioner has the explicit authority to accept,



reject, or amend the recommendation as warranted after additional review of the application and findings. At the appropriate time, the Commissioner forwards his formal recommendation to the full Coordinating Board for final approval or denial of the application.

### **How are members chosen to serve on the Certification Advisory Council?**

Section 61.314 of the Education Code directs the Coordinating Board to appoint an advisory council on private postsecondary educational institutions. The Council is charged with advising the Board on the standards and procedures to be used to review applications for certificates of authority. The statute stipulates that three of the six members be representatives of private institutions. Members are selected by the Board to serve on the Advisory Council because they are widely regarded as independent experts in their respective fields.

### **What criteria does the Coordinating Board use to evaluate applications for a Certificate of Authority?**

Section 7.7 of current Coordinating Board rules establishes twenty-one (21) specific criteria used to evaluate an institution seeking a Certificate of Authority. These include:

Legal Compliance	Qualifications for Institutional Officers
Governing Board	Distinction of Roles
Financial Resources/Stability	Financial Records
Institutional Assessment	Student Admission and Remediation
Faculty Qualifications	Faculty Size
Academic Freedom	Curriculum
General Education	Credit for Work Completed
Library	Facilities
Academic Record	Accurate Representation in Publications
Academic Advising and Counseling	Student Rights and Responsibilities
Health Services	

### **Can the Commissioner of Higher Education overrule or change the recommendation of the Certification Advisory Council?**

Yes. The statute is clear that the Council is advisory in nature and does not bind either the Commissioner or the Coordinating Board to any decision. The Commissioner thoroughly reviews all recommendations for certificates of authority to assure the institution seeking temporary authorization in Texas is of high educational quality. The Commissioner is charged with making formal recommendations to the full Board and may accept, reject, or amend any recommendation on a Certificate of Authority before it is considered by the Board, which has final approval authority over such requests.

### **Does the Board have to accept the Commissioner's recommendation?**

The nine-member Board has the prerogative to either accept, reject or send the recommendation back for further review before voting.

### **Where can I find the full standard for the Certificate of Authority in the Texas Code?**

Most of our governing standards of operation are codified in the Texas Statute, Education Code, Chapter 3.

**For more information:** Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board  
Office of External Relations  
(512) 427-6111

# **Institute for Creation Research Process Update to Grant a Certificate of Authority**

## **When did the ICR first apply for a Certificate of Authority to offer a Masters of Science Education in Texas?**

The Institute for Creation Research Graduate School (ICRGS) first contacted the Coordinating Board staff in July 2005 to gather information regarding the application process for a Certificate of Authority (COA) to offer degree programs. In 2007, ICR formally submitted a request for a COA to offer an online Masters of Science program in Science Education.

## **Why was the ICR's application decision postponed from January to April 2008?**

In early January 2008, ICR was asked by the Commissioner to provide additional information related to their proposed Masters in Science Education degree program after a team of distinguished scientists and science educators raised additional questions. The ICR requested a postponement to allow them more time to address questions raised by the panel. In granting the request, the earliest the Board could consider the ICR's COA request was at their April 24, 2008, Board meeting.

## **What happens next if the recommendation is to approve ICR's request for a COA?**

If the Commissioner's recommendation is to approve ICR's request for a Certificate of Authority, and the Board votes to affirm, then ICR will have gained the legal authority to begin offering the proposed Masters of Science Education degree to their students. The ICR must then begin the process of obtaining accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The ICR must apply to renew their COA every 2 years for a maximum of 8 years from the original date of issuance and must show continuous progress in achieving accreditation during that time.

## **If the recommendation is to deny, what recourse does the ICR have at that time?**

In the event the Commissioner recommends to deny the ICR's application for COA, and the full Board votes to affirm the recommendation, the ICR will have the option to appeal the decision within 45 days and/or to reapply within 180 days.

## **TIMELINE:**

### **November/December 2007**

- Institute for Creation Research submitted an application for a Certificate of Authority to offer an online Masters of Science degree in Science Education.
- CB staff began the review process which included:
  - o Preliminary staff evaluation of the proposal
  - o Site visit to the applying institution by CB staff and subject matter experts
  - o Preparation of a draft assessment of the proposed program
  - o Response to the draft assessment by the proposing institution
  - o Review of both the staff assessment and the institutional response by the Certification Advisory Council (CAC)
  - o Preparation of a recommendation of provisional approval by CB staff to the Commissioner of Higher Education.

## **January 7, 2008**

- Commissioner convenes panel of distinguished scientists and science educators to offer independent review of ICR's proposal
- Panel examined:
  - o ICR's syllabi for proposed courses
  - o Course prerequisites for the program
  - o Admissions standards
  - o ICR mission statement.

## **January 10, 2008**

- CB staff met with ICR representatives to address questions raised earlier by the group of scientists and science educators.
- Commissioner and staff requested additional information from ICR based on questions posed.

## **January 14, 2008**

- ICR sends request to postpone Commissioner's recommendation to the Board until such time as they could respond adequately to questions.
- ICR's requested until March 26, 2008, to submit responses and updates.
- Commissioner grants postponement with the mutual agreement that the vote would most likely be taken up at the April 24, 2008, Board meeting.

## **January-April 2008**

- CB staff reconvened a group of science educators to review newly-submitted materials.
- CB staff made its recommendation to the Commissioner for his review.

## **April 23, 2008**

- Commissioner announced his recommendation to the Academic Excellence and Research Committee at their meeting.

## **April 24, 2008**

- The full Board voted to accept, deny or amend the Commissioner's recommendation.

**For more information:** Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board  
Office of External Relations  
(512) 427-6111

**Commissioner's Recommendation on the Request by the  
Institute for Creation Research for a Certificate of Authority to Offer a  
Master of Science Degree in Science Education**

Dr. Raymund A. Paredes, Texas Commissioner of Higher Education

April 23, 2008

The Institute for Creation Research (ICR) Graduate School first contacted Coordinating Board (CB) staff in July, 2005 to gather information regarding the application process for a Certificate of Authority (COA) to offer degree programs. Two years later, ICR formally submitted a request for a COA to offer an on-line Master of Science degree in Science Education. CB staff soon thereafter began the review process which typically includes the following: preliminary staff evaluation of the proposal; a site visit to the applying institution by CB staff and subject-matter experts; preparation of a draft assessment of the proposed program; response to draft assessment by the proposing institution; review of both the staff assessment and the institutional response by the Certification Advisory Council (CAC); and preparation of a final recommendation on approval by CB staff based on the preceding steps. The CAC recommendation then comes to me. I have three options: I can accept the recommendation and carry it to the Coordinating Board for formal action; I can reject the recommendation and make another to the Board; or I can send it back to the staff for further review. It is not unprecedented for me to exercise either option two or three: indeed, in the last several weeks I rejected a staff recommendation on a doctoral program proposal.

I first learned of the ICR proposal after the CAC had voted to support the staff recommendation that the ICR proposal be approved. It was clear to me immediately that the review process had been flawed. The site visit team had included no experts in science education; one such expert had cancelled her participation at the last minute and the decision was made to proceed with the site visit anyway. Furthermore, the site visit team members were instructed to focus on questions of process and infrastructure and to disregard the academic focus of the proposed program. In its review, the CAC followed a similar tack and recommended provisional approval of the proposed program pending the correction of certain problems related to such issues as institutional governance and library resources. It seemed clear to me upon reading the various evaluation documents that the central issue of whether the proposed program met appropriate standards of science education had been insufficiently addressed. As a result, I directed staff to conduct a fresh review.

I believe that the second-stage review was thorough and balanced. On January 7, 2008, we brought in a group of nine scientists and science educators to review the ICR proposal. They examined proposed admission standards, course prerequisites for the proposed program, syllabi and textbooks for the proposed ICR courses, and the mission statement of ICR. On January 10, 2008, we met with representatives of ICR to address questions raised earlier by the group of scientists and science educators. Shortly after the January 10 meeting, ICR representatives requested until March 26 to submit responses to the questions raised and also asked that their request for a certificate of authority be deferred until the April 24 CB meeting. ICR submitted an updated file for review by the requested deadline. CB staff in turn

reconvened a group of science educators on April 7 to review the new materials. I have now received a staff recommendation, with which I concur. I recommend to members of the Coordinating Board that the proposal by the Institute for Creation Research Graduate School to receive a certificate of authority to offer a Master of Science program in Science Education not be approved.

My recommendation to the Board is based on two considerations, the first of which is that ICR failed to demonstrate that the proposed program meets acceptable standards of science and science education. As indicated in a faculty job announcement, ICR requires that applicants “be committed to young earth creation science and the Bible;” in its current general catalog, ICR states that its mission “is to study, teach and communicate the works of God’s creation.” Also in the catalog appears this statement: “All things in the universe were created and made by God in the six literal days of the Creation Week described in Genesis...and confirmed in Exodus....The creation record is factual, historical and perspicuous; thus all theories of origin and development that involve evolution in any form are false.” ICR’s catalog also states “The phenomenon of biological life did not develop by natural processes from inanimate systems but was specially and supernaturally created by the creator.” This statement runs counter to the conventions of science which hold that claims of supernatural intervention are not testable and, therefore, outside the realm of science.

A primary educational goal of Texas and the country as a whole is to increase significantly the number of high school graduates who have mastered basic science and are prepared to pursue careers in science in

our colleges and universities. The submitted ICR documents simply do not provide persuasive evidence that the proposed program will move us towards this goal. In *Thousands...not Billions*, a text used in ICR courses and submitted by ICR for review, the author Don DeYoung writes: “One principle agreed on... is that the earth is young, on the order of 6000 years old. This is not a working hypothesis to be tested as to whether it is true or false. Instead, it is a basic conclusion drawn from the biblical record of creation as written by the only One who was present, God himself.” At another point, DeYoung writes: “It is clear that the One who created all things can alter physical constants and laws at His will. In fact, most biblical miracles require a temporary suspension of basic natural laws.” Whatever the ultimate merit of such views, they clearly stand at odds with the most basic tenets of scientific work such as observation, testing and analysis.

Furthermore, the proposed ICR program is inconsistent not only with the conventions of science but with Coordinating Board rules. For example, Standard 12, Chapter 7 of Board rules requires that proposed programs “shall adequately cover the breadth of knowledge of the discipline taught” and that “degree level, degree designation, and the designation of the major course of study should be appropriate to the curriculum offered...” As our consultants on science education emphasized, the proposed ICR program, in insisting on a literal interpretation of biblical creation, gives insufficient coverage to conventional science and does not “adequately prepare students in the field of science education.” Program reviewers also noted the inherent difficulty of providing adequate training in experimentation and laboratory work—hallmarks of effective science education—through an on-line program. Thus, the proposed ICR program meets neither

standard cited above. The key point here is this: the proposed Master of Science in Science Education program inadequately covers key areas of science and their methodologies and rejects one of the foundational theories of modern science; hence, the program cannot be properly designated either as “science” or “science education.”

In recommending against approval of the ICR program, I am not questioning the validity of religious belief as a means of comprehending the world and universe around us. As far as I know, science has no answer to the question of how life on earth began or how the Big Bang was initiated some 14 billion years ago. Believers of many faiths might well attribute both these astonishing events to the intervention of a great Creator. It is entirely possible that science may never answer these fundamental questions and that, in these and other instances, religious belief supersedes science. But religious belief is not science. Science and religious belief are surely reconcilable but they are not the same thing.