

Case #2: Jeremy Geraci

As a graduate student, Jeremy Geraci had been an enthusiastic promoter of science literacy and environmental education. Until he accepted a college teaching position, he had never been confronted with such disturbing student evaluations.

Jeremy had been excited about teaching an introductory biology class for students who were not majoring in the field. He knew that many students graduated from high school without understanding basic biological principles, and that this would be their last opportunity to grasp these ideas before they went out into the working world.

The course had run smoothly, although, as Jeremy recalled, there had been some unusual questions from a few students during the section on evolution. One young man had approached Jeremy after class and asked him whether he thought that carbon dating was a reliable process. Jeremy had explained that the inaccuracies in C-14 dating were only moderately significant in comparison to the large time scales the dates encompassed. The student had seemed unconvinced, but left without explaining his position fully. There were many other students in line after class that day, and Jeremy hadn't thought much of the question at the time.

There had been several other student questions which, in retrospect, bothered Jeremy. A female student had seemed to have difficulty comprehending the principle of survival of the fittest. She'd asked Jeremy after class: "Don't you think that there might be something else at work with evolution? I mean, look how complicated we are." She had gestured to her hand, which was decorated with pink nail polish.

Jeremy had begun talking about the process of genetic variation, but the young woman had seemed unconvinced. "I guess as long as I get this right for the exam, I'll be o.k.," she had replied, turning back up the aisle to exit the room. Jeremy had wondered whether he said something wrong.

At the end of the semester, most of Jeremy's evaluations were complimentary. Students noted his enthusiasm and said they had learned a great deal. Several mentioned that they were now interested in science majors.

But halfway through the stack were three evaluations that disturbed Jeremy.

"Doesn't value differing points of view."

"Brainwashes students."

And last, the worst comment Jeremy had ever received:

"You'll burn in hell for this. Stop teaching evolution or else."