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"Evolution and Creationism in America's Classrooms" [3]

A noteworthy new paper reports on a national survey of high school biology teachers concerning the teaching of evolution. According to Michael B. Berkman, Julianna Sandell Pacheco, and Eric Plutzer's ["Evolution and Creationism in America's Classrooms: A National Portrait,"](#) [4] published on May 20, 2008, in *PLoS Biology*, the survey was "the first nationally representative survey of teachers concerning the teaching of evolution." Among the highlights (quoting from the article):

- Overall, teachers devoted an average of 13.7 hours to general evolutionary processes (including human evolution), with 59% allocating between three and 15 hours of class time ... Only 2% excluded evolution entirely. But significantly fewer teachers covered human evolution, which is not included as an NSES benchmark. Of teachers surveyed, 17% did not cover human evolution at all in their biology class, while a majority of teachers (60%) spent between one and five hours of class time on it.
- We found that 25% of teachers indicated that they devoted at least one or two classroom hours to creationism or intelligent design ... Of the 25% of teachers who devoted time to creationism or intelligent design, nearly half agreed or strongly agreed that they teach creationism as a "valid scientific alternative to Darwinian explanations for the origin of species." Nearly the same number agreed or strongly agreed that when they teach creationism or intelligent design they emphasize that "many reputable scientists view these as valid alternatives to Darwinian Theory."
- Our teachers were each asked a question about their own personal beliefs about human origins. ... Among the biology teachers, 16% believed that human beings were created by God in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years (and an additional 9% declined to answer). Although this is a far smaller proportion than found among the general public (48%), our data demonstrate substantial sympathy for the "young earth" creationist position among nearly one in six members of the science teaching profession.

The authors conclude, "These findings strongly suggest that victory in the courts is not enough for the

scientific community to ensure that evolution is included in high school science courses. ... Our study suggests that requiring all teachers to complete a course in evolutionary biology would have a substantial impact on the emphasis on evolution and its centrality in high school biology courses. In the long run, the impact of such a change could have a more far reaching effect than the victories in courts and in state governments."

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