

# THE ATHEIST

Newsletter of the Atheist Community of Austin, a Nonprophet Organization

P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764

512-371-2911

[www.atheist-community.org](http://www.atheist-community.org)

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Volume 3 No. #8

## Media Relations

On August 10th, ACA member Kim Smith led a discussion of how our group can best deal with the media. Kim works with media relations and had a lot of good information for us. Her advice to ACA is to put together a media packet that can be sent to editors and reporters. By building long-term relationships, and being open and honest with reporters, our organization could certainly benefit. Kim stressed that the media lives by deadlines but that timely local stories of interest to the public would likely be run. As we all know, just the mention of the word *atheism* is often enough to get a reaction from people. This could be used to our advantage when we promote projects that promote positive atheism.

Kim also discussed the various types of media and how we might utilize them. For example, newspaper reporters and magazine reporters are not after the same type of story. Producing and sending out a good media kit is an important first step. If any one in the group is interested in working on this project, please contact me at [jknz@hotmail.com](mailto:jknz@hotmail.com)

~John Koonz

## FACT Joins Atheist Alliance

I have 15 YES votes in from 15 of our 19 stateside member societies approving of Freethinkers of Central Texas as a member society. This is a very strong majority of the members. Arizona Secular Humanists and SE Michigan Chapter FFRF did not yet vote but they are having organizational difficulties so can be excused. Atheist Coalition only responds to emails if it is desperately needed so they probably won't vote. Freethought Society of Greater Philadelphia has not yet voted but probably will.

The only thing lacking to make this really official is a copy of the FACT bylaws, which they are working on, although there is no doubt they will be democratic.

~Marie Alena Castle (President of Atheist Alliance Inc.)

## Atheist Alliance Convention Needs Speakers

Marie Castle had a "Call for Presenters" in the last issue of the Secular Nation for the Y2K Conference. We already have some very interesting speakers who have agreed to present. However, we also have quite a bit of program time that needs to be filled. I would much rather have choices of presenters than just accept all those who volunteer. Thus, I would very much like to have many applicants.

Please survey your memberships and encourage those whom you know to be good speakers with interesting messages to volunteer now for this Conference. Also, please recall your past program speakers at your meetings for those who have a message for this conference and encourage them to apply.

~Hank Kocol., Atheist Alliance Board of Directors

## Nobel Prize Winner to Speak at Furrs

Steven Weinberg, winner of the 1979 Nobel Prize in Physics, and professor at the University of Texas, will give our September 5th lecture at Furrs.

Dr. Weinberg was the author of *The First Three Minutes*, and *Dreams of a Final Theory*. Recently, Dr. Weinberg was in the news for his 'anti-clerical' comments. Come early, because this lecture is bound to be one of the best.

Lectures are held at Furr's Cafeteria in Northcross Mall, 11:00 am. Susan Brown ([Liatris@mail.utexas.edu](mailto:Liatris@mail.utexas.edu)) is in charge of scheduling our lectures.

## Notes From the Last Board Meeting

Minutes from the July Board meeting were read and accepted.

### Treasurer's Report:

Accounts are not balanced (due to just getting the statement) but everything seems in order and we have about \$1700 in each of our accounts (checking and building fund).

### New member packets:

The board approved spending \$2-\$3 each for new member packets.

### ACA Brochure:

John will email Jeff and ask how the brochure is coming along.

### ACA Sales Tax Liability:

Discussion was inconclusive. The information Keith gathered would seem to indicate we are free from collecting sales tax. The board will seek a higher level of certainty by contacting the State Comptroller's Office.

### Update on Kim Smith's Media Session:

This will be held Tuesday evening at Susan Brown's house.

### Blood Drive Volunteer:

Mary Sue Osborne has agreed to take over the blood drive. Thanks, Mary Sue!

### When will atheist symbol vote be?

The vote will happen at a general membership meeting in the Fall, sometime after the next issue of Secular Nation comes out.

### TV Show:

ACAC's contract has not been renewed with the city of Austin. Atheist Experience supporters are encouraged to call the City Council and ask them to support cable access.

### Newsletter:

John is asking for articles for future newsletters.

### Lecture Series:

Dr. Steven Weinberg will be September's guest speaker. The board decided not to overly publicize the event as the small room at Furr's might easily be overwhelmed. Dr. Weinberg has not yet responded to Susan's question about appearing on TV the morning of his lecture.

October's guest speaker will be Catherine Fahringer, San Antonio atheist activist and board member of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Catherine will appear on The Atheist Experience that morning.

### Library:

John will start listing new additions to the library in the newsletter.

### Survey Results:

The results of the survey were discussed, and copies of John's summary were distributed.

### Signs:

The board authorized 2 t-shirts as payment for ACA signs. A local sign maker apparently likes our shirts and will do work for them. Keith will get together with Jeff Dee (who was drafted) to work out the details.

### Atheist Alliance:

The Alliance has tentatively approved San Antonio based FACT, Freethought Association of Central Texas, as a new member society of the Alliance.

Congratulations to our fellow Texas Atheists!

## Our Growing Library

Two new books have been donated to our ACA library:

- *Freethought Across the Centuries*, by Gerald A. Larue
- *Freethought on the American Frontier*, edited by Fred Whitehead and Verle Muhler.

Vic Farrow is our librarian. If you have any questions, or would like to make a donation, please come to the bagelry as Vics e-mail is not working.

## Should Atheists Sacrifice Blood?

Join your fellow atheists in our quarterly blood donation drive. Come in at your convenience to THE BLOOD AND TISSUE CENTER OF CENTRAL TEXAS at 4300 North Lamar Blvd. Hours are 8-6 M-F and 8-2 Sat. You must be over 17 years old and weigh at least 110 lbs. You will need a photo ID. You will be given a mini-physical exam and complete a medical history questionnaire. If you are a first timer and would like someone to go with you for support please contact Marysue Osborne at 288-5307.

To help you remember we have scheduled our Blood Drives to coincide with the changing of the seasons. Our next Blood Drive will be on September 25th.

## One More Reason Beer is Better than Jesus:

Now you can meet your fellow atheists at the Scholtz Beer Garden (1607 San Jacinto) every Thursday 6:00pm to?

## Host a Foreign Atheist Student

The following messages came to me over the internet. What a great way to do something positive for another atheist! And what a great way to show the world that not all Americans are ignorant fundamentalists! Here's what I got:

The American Field Service (AFS) wants to hear from humanist households willing to host foreign exchange students. Many of these students find it difficult to get a home when they put "Atheist" "Humanist" or "None" under the application form's question about "Religious Affiliation". Since there is much higher nonbelief in Europe than the US--in many European countries unbelievers are in the majority in the younger generations--this may leave many students in need of a good American home.

One member of the ASHS leaders list--Carol Smith from Milwaukee--has already been in touch with AFS about hosting a French school girl who could not find a host family because of her atheism.

I hope you will publicize the message below in your local group newsletter and at your group meetings. Taking part in this program will surely be a rewarding experience for the hosts, as well as an opportunity to give a foreign student an introduction to America that they will remember all their life.

Regards  
Matt Cherry

Greetings! I am writing on behalf of AFS Intercultural Programmes, a non-profit foreign exchange program for High school youth. The American Field Service started in WW1, when a group of volunteer ambulance drivers helped the wounded. They reconvened for WW2, but then decided they would begin a youth exchange to promote global peace and understanding that would work to prevent war. Now for over 50 years, AFS has exchanged youth from over 50 countries, uniting students, volunteers, and host families around the world.

AFS is currently looking for host families interested in opening their lives and homes to foreign exchange students for a semester or a year. Hosting a student with AFS is an enriching, voluntary experience that can span a few weeks, months, a semester, or a year. We do have several students coming this August from all over the world who do not yet have families to call their own.

Besides hosting a student, there are many other ways to get involved with AFS. High school students or recent graduates can also take advantage of AFS programs abroad and spend a semester, year, or summer in another country, learning a language and becoming a part of a new culture.

AFS also needs volunteers who would like to be involved

with hosted students and host families. Each hosted student needs a liaison, which entails including your hosted student in a few of your family's activities once a month.

Please contact me if you are interested in hosting, going abroad, or volunteering with AFS. It is a wonderful opportunity to get involved and change the world, one foreign student at a time. Give us a call for more information. Thanks, and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best regards,

Jackie Boismenu  
1800 876 2377 ex 2244      1 800 AFS INFO  
jboismen@afs.org      www.afs.org/usa

## And The Survey Says:

**Q:** What would you like to tell middle school kids about atheism?:

**A:** I would tell them what I tell my own children. Your life is your own. No one can take responsibility for your actions but you and no one can think for you if you let them. Be smart. Read and learn as much as you can about the world around you. Don't take someone's word for it, find out for yourself and gather all the evidence you can before you make a decision. This will work in all situations if you get used to using your brains for yourself. And remember, hating is hating ...no matter for what reason or for what god you do it. Hate kills and hating others for their differences instead of learning from them is a coward's way through life.

## A Quote to put on your refrigerator

"Do you want people designing corn seeds who have no idea what DNA is? People will continue to ridicule your state on account of this, but it's also bad for everything."

Bill Nye the Science Guy on the Kansas Board of Education decision to stop requiring that evolution be taught as part of the science curriculum.

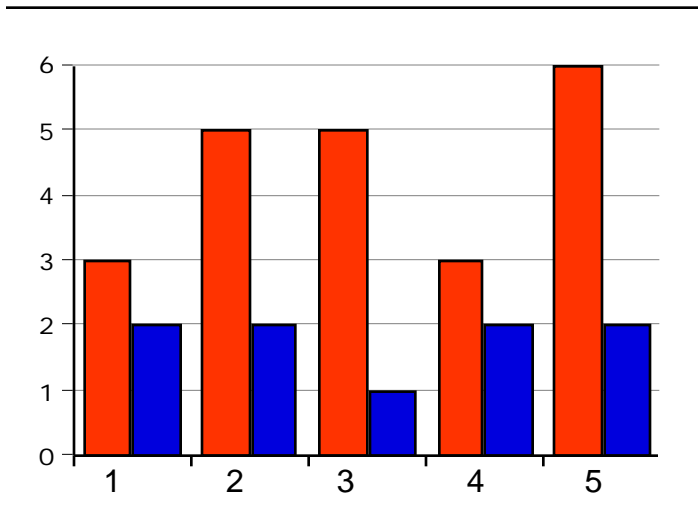
# Survey Results

I hope to post my complete report on the ACA website soon. It is clear that many of us have good ideas on the direction ACA should take. If you are interested in getting involved, there are plenty of opportunities. Here are some of the results from our recent ACA member survey:

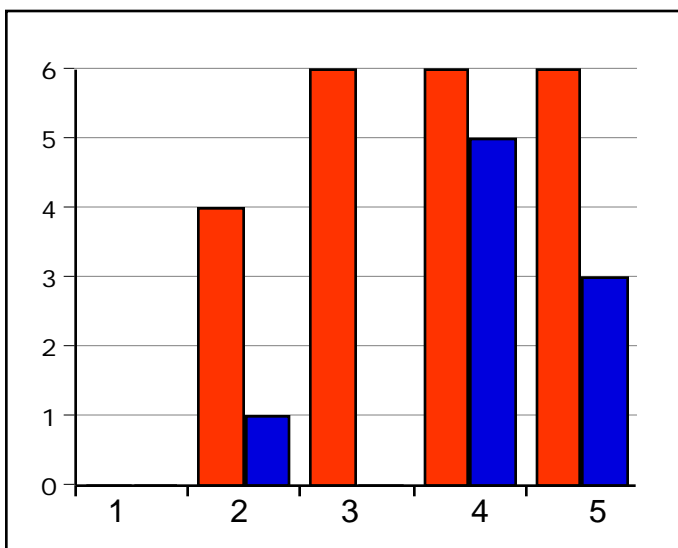
**Q. What direction would you like to see ACA take? Rate the importance of each from 1-5 with 5 being most important.**

In these graphs, the bars on the left represent the responses of ACA members. In all, 29 people responded in time to have their opinions counted. of those, 20 were members.

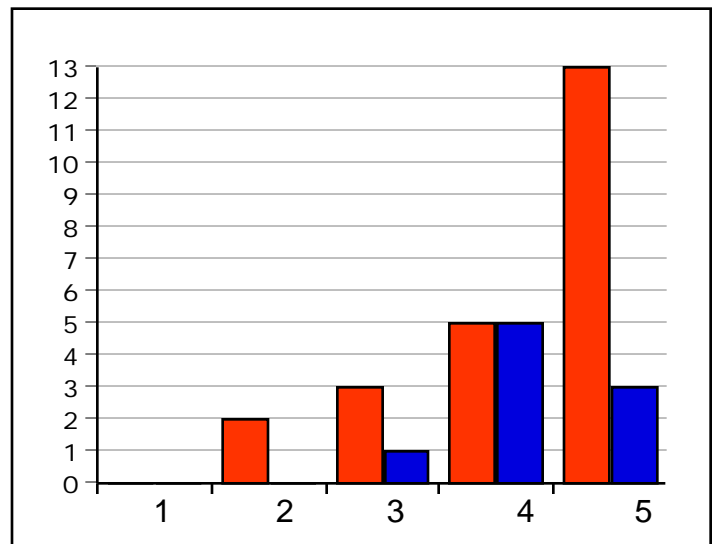
Political activism (marches/ protests)



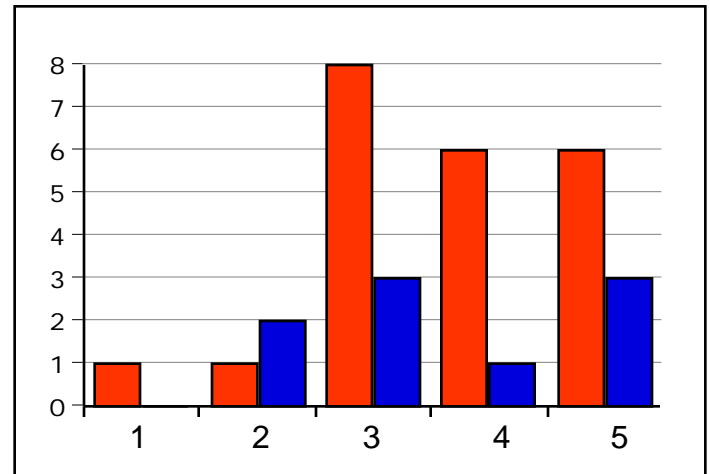
Social activities (movie nights/happy hours)



Education (lectures/debates)



Social action (blood drives/ community service)



Included below are *all* the responses to the open ended questions:

**Q. What projects would you like to see ACA involved in during the next year?**

**Members**

1. Building a Habitat for Humanity home
2. anti-drug campaign
3. Work on getting our own place.
4. Media response, letter writing
5. Continue blood and organ donor card drives.
6. Develop a quick response plan to deal with political stupidity (10 commandments RFA etc)
7. Reading group (atheist books & books of interest to atheists)
8. Develop a Critical Thinking course or a "what is atheism" course for UT's Informal Course program.

9. More community outreach and public education
10. Any mentioned in question #5.
11. Review of Y2000 candidates, esp Gov Bush
12. Age oriented projects 0-4, 4-7, 7-12 etc.
13. A project in the community in the form of a team of volunteers (literacy, elderly maintenance, etc.
14. Find other ways to be more visible in the community.
15. Continue same activity.
16. e-commerce on website.
17. Advertise in something other than the Chronicle.
18. School visits?
19. recruiting librarians?
20. We need to be more visible in promoting reason and fighting theocracy.

### Nonmembers

1. Reading at nursing homes.
2. Habitat for Humanity
3. Literacy programs
4. Battered Womens shelter
5. Some joint projects with San Antonio, Hill Country.
6. I'd like information on how to do atheist ceremonies for major life events ex. funerals.
7. Set a positive example for Freethought as a way of life.
8. Solstice/equinox parties, alternative Christmas/Easter activities.

### Q. How can ACA best promote positive atheism?

#### Members

1. Newspaper at least once a week
2. Avoid any impression that we are opponents of Christianity; set ourselves up as proponents of critical thinking about religion and be more patient and methodical in explaining our point of view; avoid characterizing believers as stupid or foolish; understand that most of them were raised in that lifestyle and lack the skills to think critically
3. the TV program might offer a 'sermon' of 5 minutes or so on the advantage ie, the lack their of in religion.
4. Be visible at marches, community activities etc.
5. Continue excellent TV show by getting articulate, intelligent guests who happen to be atheists, of course.
6. I think we are already doing that- but we need to provide more opportunities for active participation.
7. Through education, (TAE, lectures, debates, etc.) and social action.
8. By continuing to show that our members, and other atheists, are good citizens who simply don't follow the religious myths: via TV show, media relations, getting our name out w/ positive messages.
9. Remain active in the community.
10. Education and social action, letter writing campaigns to deflect negative stereotypes
11. Atheist positive leaders in all levels, and positive support for each of these leaders at all levels . That is, each level that these leaders develop and also at all levels of our

atheists leaders support the noticeable leaders who are not so noticeable.

12. Huh? (Editors note)
13. Need to get the children somehow.
14. Religious groups have found ways to get into schools, there should be some way to do this with atheism.
15. By not ridiculing the beliefs of others.
16. Stay out of politics.
17. Having cool people such as myself is a good way to enhance our friendly image.
18. Keeping up the show.
19. Evangelizing more.
20. Putting religion aside, not to have to attack. Hopefully.
21. Be more visible.
22. Show positive impact on Austin community through giving money, time and effort to social causes

### Nonmembers

1. Public events like Houston's Darwin Day.
2. Use your intelligence (which you have in abundance) to show everyone else that we don't need "god" to be good people. That it's a matter of love&intelligence to be a good person, not "faith" & (yuk) obedience.
3. It seems we are doing all we can.

## Announcements

- ACA Board meetings are on the second Sunday of the month at 12:00. Board meetings are open to all members.
  - On September 5th, Nobel prize winning Cosmologist Steven Weinberg will speak to us. Lectures are held at Furr's Cafeteria in Northcross Mall, 11:00 am. Susan Brown (Liatris@mail.utexas.edu) is in charge of scheduling our lectures.
  - **Products** There are still t-shirts left. Our ACA t-shirts list a number of famous atheists. The "10 reasons why beer is better than jeezuss" are no longer available. Godless dollars are available now for \$1.50. See Michelle Gadush (gadush@mail.utexas.edu) for more information on these and other exciting atheist products.
  - **Randalls Donations** Randalls will donate a percentage of the money you spend there to the Atheist Community of Austin. To take advantage of this offer, contact the customer service department of your nearest Randalls. The ACA number is 5158.
  - **Weekly Meetings** Sunday Mornings at Hot Jumbo Bagelry, 307 West 5th Street at 10:30 a.m. on Sunday mornings when lectures are not scheduled at Furr's Cafeteria.
- For more information about any of these coming events, call (512) 371-2911 or e-mail kellenvh@earthlink.net  
The Atheist is printed on somewhat recycled paper!

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION FOR THE ATHEIST COMMUNITY OF AUSTIN, INC.**

Last name: \_\_\_\_\_ First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Companion's name (if family or couple membership)

Last name: \_\_\_\_\_ First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City/State/Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone : (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ e-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

This is to certify that I am a non-theist, that I have read the "Purpose" of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. as stated in the Constitution (below), and that I am in agreement with the principles stated herein. I understand that membership is open only to non-theists.

**Purpose**

The Atheist Community of Austin is organized as a nonprofit educational corporation to develop and support atheist community; to provide opportunities for socializing and friendship, to promote atheist viewpoints, to encourage positive atheist culture, to defend the First Amendment principle of state/church separation, to oppose discrimination against atheists, and to work with other organizations in pursuit of common goals.

This organization shall operate in an open, democratic manner, without discrimination as to gender, race, age, sexual orientation, ethnic origin, nationality, or disability.

The Bylaws to this Constitution are intended to further define and explain the operating procedure of this organization. Changes may be made to the Bylaws when necessary to improve the operation of this organization. Changes to the Bylaws shall not alter the purpose of this organization as set forth in its Constitution.

Check all that apply

I wish to become a member of the Atheist Community of Austin, Inc. Membership fees are \$24.00 per year, but our membership year does not begin until the 1st of March. My prorated membership fee, at \$2.00 per month u n t i l next March, is enclosed.

- I wish to make a tax exempt donation to ACA .
- I only wish to participate in the e-mail group. My e-mail address is above. No fee is required.
- I wish to help ACA save money by receiving The Atheist by e-mail. No fee is required.
- I wish to receive a hard copy of The Atheist in the mail. \$10 is enclosed.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Please return this form to: Atheist Community of Austin, Inc., P.O. Box 3798, Austin, Texas 78764

Austin, TX 78764  
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