

SECULAR STUDENT ALLIANCE

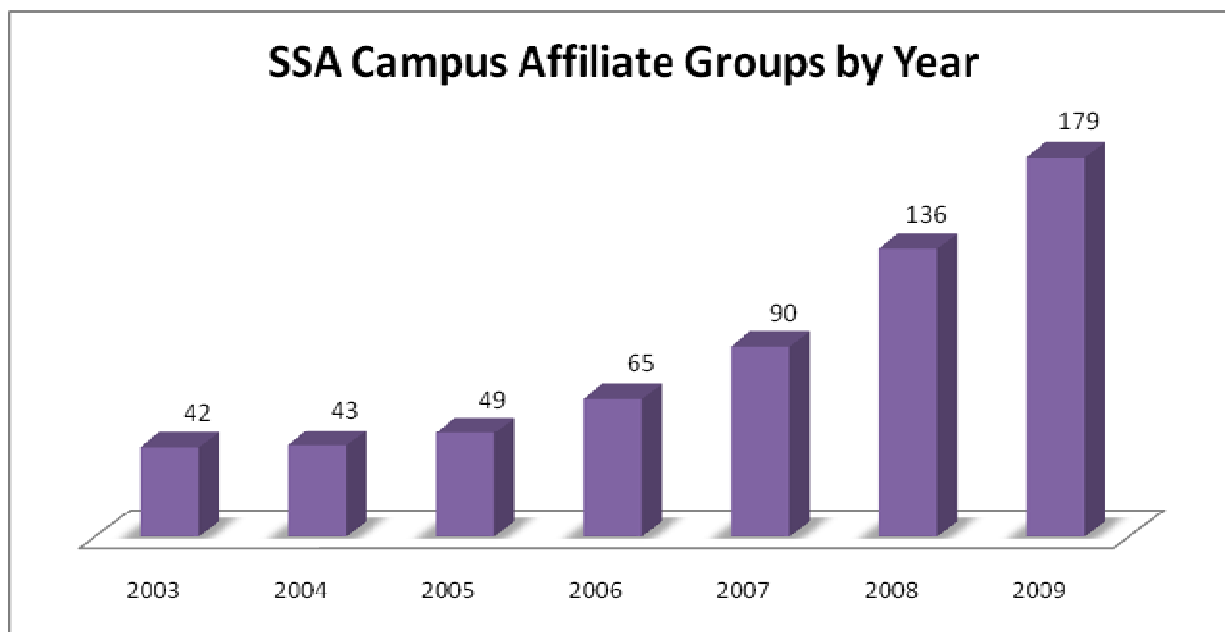
Activity Summary

2008-2009 School Year

The past year has been phenomenally successful for the Secular Student Alliance. Our affiliate count has gone up by over 25%. This report details our campus group affiliate support, our conference, our electronic newsletter, and our summer internships.

Direct Campus Group Affiliate Support

Supporting atheist, agnostic and humanist groups on high school and college campuses is the core of what we do. At the time this summary was compiled we had 179 campus affiliate groups in ten countries. This time last year we had 136; at this time in 2006 we had only 65. The group of affiliates that we support has grown over 250% in the last three years. Our affiliates range in size from just a handful of students to groups like the Campus Atheists, Skeptics and Humanists (CASH) at the University of Minnesota, who obtain thousands of dollars a year from their student activities board, and have organized their own conferences.



Affiliate Tracking and Listing

We ask all of our affiliates to update their contact information with us twice a year. Because we do this, we are able to publish the most up-to-date list of active humanist/atheist student groups of which we are aware (www.secularstudents.org/affiliates). This helps campus groups connect with each other and makes them more accessible to off-campus groups in the movement and the media.

Best Awards



Annual awards are given to exceptional SSA affiliates. The awards ceremony is conducted at our annual conference. Winners for best Service Project, Best Website, Best Media Appearance, and Best New Affiliate received \$300. The Best Overall Affiliate received \$500 from the SSA. This money is to recognize each group for their success this past year, and also to help each group carry out further impressive projects throughout the next academic year.

2009 Best Media Coverage/Letter to the Editor: Pastafarians at the University of South Carolina (See <http://www.secularstudents.org/2009best> for links to all the stories mentioned below)



The Pastafarians @ USC received a wide range of media attention this year. They began with their school newspaper, which covered president Andrew Cederdahl's Founder's Scholarship from American Atheists, covered and praised the group's Darwin Day debate (Dan Barker v. Kyle Butt), and included several opinion pieces regarding the group, its message and tactics, both supportive and critical. Their media attention spread beyond campus when local news station WISTV featured the group's sold-out Darwin Day debate. Another local channel featured the group while discussing the recent ARIS survey results. ABC Columbia focused on the group in a series called "Hidden Columbia," and group leader Andrew Cederdahl was interviewed on Freethought Radio. Last - but certainly not least - the group was featured in a front page story in the *New York Times*, "More Atheists Shout It From the Rooftops."

2009 Best Website: Students for A Nonreligious Ethos (SANE) at Berkeley University (<http://saneatberkeley.org>)



SANE at Berkeley has a clean, easy to read website that's chock full of information about their group. The overall design is simple and uncluttered, making it easy to zero in on the information you need and navigate the site at a glance. The blog-style main feed features upcoming events and reviews of recent activities, updated almost once a week. From the front page, it's easy to find upcoming events, get information about meeting times and locations, and quickly navigate to other areas of the site. Contacting the group is handled by a spam-filtering webform, and there's an easy link to subscribe to their mailing list. The FAQ handles common questions in a light-hearted, fun manner. The site features pictures of the group's recent activities and links to other organizations, information about the group and more - all while maintaining organization and ease of use.

2009 Best Service Project: Students for Freethought at the Ohio State University



At the 2008 SSA conference leaders from Students for Freethought watched a presentation from University of Illinois students about their spring break service trip, wondering why on earth they hadn't thought of something like this themselves. They took the idea to their own group and immediately started planning a similar, week-long trip to help rebuilding efforts in New Orleans. But they weren't content to stop there! They organized their trip to line up with the U of I's trip in the spring of 2009, and the groups met up in New Orleans! Inspired by the success of their spring break trip, SFF leaders then organized

a second service project: a three-day camping trip to help improve and maintain the Pine Mountain Trail: putting up trail markers, installing bear poles (to keep bears from eating campers' food!), and generally cleaning and maintaining the trail through the Appalachians. We're excited to see one group taking on multiple large-scale service projects, and so we are pleased to be able to present Students for Freethought with the 2009 Best Service Project award.



2009 Best New Affiliate: American University Rationalists & Atheists



The American University Rationalists & Atheists (AURA) kicked off its first year with a call-out meeting with over 30 students in attendance. They've taken a field trip to see Bill Maher's *Religulous*, hosted a well-attended dialogue with a Christian student organization, welcomed speakers Dan Barker and Ellery Schempp, fed students at a Flying Spaghetti Monster Dinner and hosted a free comedy show on their campus. They were featured in their school's student newspaper when they challenged their university's commencement invocation. These activities, combined with student-led presentations and discussion meetings, are the components of a great first year for AURA.

2009 Best Affiliate: Secular Alliance of Indiana University



The Secular Alliance at Indiana University started just over a year ago, but you'd never guess it from their numbers. They started their semester with a visit from atheist author John Loftus. They then organized a group field trip to the Creation Museum in Petersburg, KY, and collaborated to make a video of their trip. This semester they met with other freethought groups in Indiana and have spearheaded the Indiana Atheist Bus Campaign (www.inatheistbus.org), which already has "You can be good without God" ads on buses in several cities across the state. They have garnered 200 members in just one school year, have built an effective and eye-catching website (www.saiu.org), and have applied for office space for their group in the fall.

Campus Organizers

We have a full time Campus Organizer who coordinates the delivery of services, develops new services, coordinates interns and other volunteers, offers advice on troubleshooting problems that affiliates are having, and maintains our relationships with our affiliates.

Northern California Campus Organizing

With funding from the Humanist Community in Silicon Valley, the Vital Spark Foundation, and the American Humanist Association, in 2008 the Secular Student Alliance launched a two year project aimed at building up the secular student movement in northern California.

The original goals of the program were to flyer 10 campuses, visit 8 campuses, and grow our affiliate base from 2 to 8 sustainable campus groups in the area. In the course of the program thus far, we have flyered 11 campuses, visited 11 campuses, and reached a total of 10 active affiliate groups in the area. We are also in touch with leaders at three other campuses who are

actively working on starting new groups. We organized a speaker tour with Dan Barker in the fall of 2008 and are organizing a similar tour with PZ Myers in January 2010. We are also in the beginning stages of organizing a leadership summit in the region to train student group leaders and encouraging regional networking.

Media Assistance

With a subscription to Bacon's Media Database (given to us by the American Humanist Association), the Secular Student Alliance is able to send out press releases for campus events to local media markets and national press releases nationwide. The Secular Student Alliance was covered over 24 times by the media in the last year. Our affiliate groups were covered over 26 times.

Literature and other Promotional Materials

We have just revised our *Group Running Guide*. We have distributed hundreds of copies of this 72-page guide to students interested in starting and running freethought groups since we started producing it in 2004. We have made revising this an annual summer intern project.

We printed and sent custom business cards to 31 of our groups since last September. We also send along our brochures, stickers from Americans United for Separation of Church and State, and literature from various humanist/atheist organizations.

In addition to printed literature we also have a wealth of "how to" information on our website for group leaders to use to better run their groups. This summer we created a Sample Year (<http://www.secularstudents.org/sampleyear>) to help guide our newer groups in planning out their activities for the year. This summer we also vastly expanded and organized our collection of activity packets (<http://www.secularstudents.org/activitypackets>). These activity packets are easy to follow write-ups of how to put on all kinds of different events on high school and college campuses. On our website we also have a sample constitution and resources about succession planning, building group momentum, writing a press release, and welcoming women.

Speakers Bureau

The SSA Speakers Bureau is a service we offer to our affiliates. Students are encouraged to bring one of our bureau members to campus for a presentation, debate, or activist training session. We helped to directly organize 57 speaking events with our affiliates last year. Our affiliates organized many events beyond the ones with which we specifically helped.

Project Grants

Project grants are given to SSA affiliates requiring funding for their groups activities. We gave out \$5,971.38 in project grants to our various affiliate groups over the last school year.

Web Hosting

We provide technical support and web hosting for five of our affiliate groups. Most universities give student groups some kind of web space, but sometime groups want to use technologies that are not provided by these hosting environments and web space is not as frequently available at schools in developing countries.

Group Starting Packets



In addition to providing services for existing affiliates, we also provide resources to students who are trying to get affiliate groups started at their campus. These packets contain brochures, customized flyers, our *Group Running Guide*, and thumb tacks. Additionally, we create a web page on our website specifically about the group starting efforts going on at the campus, a Facebook Group for the students to use to organize at that school, and a unique email forward which goes to the person starting the group in addition to Secular Student

Alliance staff. We have sent out over **226** packets in the last year—already **42** of those packet requests have lead to new affiliate groups.

2009 Annual Summer Conference @ Ohio State University

Visit <http://www.secularstudents.org/conference> for links to the complete conference proceedings, tons of photos, videos, and audio from our 2009 conference and before.



After our colorful trip to the Creation Museum in Kentucky (which was attended by over 300 people), many students as well as other notable freethinkers accompanied us back to Columbus, Ohio for the Secular Student Alliance 2009 Conference. Students from universities and groups across the country converged to learn, discuss, and mobilize for later action in their own communities. We ended up with a delightful variety of secularists - as student Jon Reams noted, "I enjoyed the mix of popular figures, organization leaders, and students."

Seminar topics ranged from activism and service to interacting with the media, fundraising, and dating as an atheist. As a member of one of our 170+ campus Affiliate Groups noted, "[The conference] was extremely useful and involved subjects that are applicable to our organization. The seminars were helpful and informative." Students and speakers alike stayed on the Ohio State University campus and shared meals together, strengthening connections between groups.

With so many like-minded people in one place, it is little wonder that a sense of community was established right away. Secular Student Alliance board members talked to and sat with students, who talked to and sat with speakers and organization leaders. Andy Cheadle, organizer for the freethought group at Wright State University remarked, "I absolutely loved the conference. Being able to meet so many great people and having access to these resources is something not a lot of people get!"

Christian minister Jonathan Weyer presented on the collaboration work he has done with Students for Freethought at Ohio State. He stayed for most of the conference and his presence served as a powerful reminder of how important it is to engage with those who we consider to be different from ourselves.

In addition to giving the keynote address at the conference, PZ Myers also wrote up a very nice blog post about his time at the Secular Student Alliance 2009 Conference. Other speakers included Sean Faircloth and Jesse Galef of the Secular Coalition for America, Maggie Ardiente of the American Humanist Association, Debbie Goddard of the Center For Inquiry On Campus, Amanda Metskas of Camp Quest, atheism on campus researchers Kathleen Goodman and Prof. John Mueller, Fred Edwards of UnitedCOR, Jason Torpy of the Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers, Edwin Kagin of American Atheists, Hemant Mehta of friendlyatheist.com, and many others.

Thanks to the financial support of the Roxbury foundation we were able to provide \$4,000 in travel grants for students to attend the conference.

A weekend of business, laughter, and networking, the conference was an inspiration to those who attended, and serves as a reminder of why maintaining secular student communities is so important.

Electronic Newsletter: the *eMpirical*



We publish a quasi-monthly electronic newsletter called the *eMpirical*. Subscription has exploded from 4,350 last year to 15,762 this year. The best way to get a feel for the *eMpirical* is to look at the most recent issue: <http://www.secularstudents.org/enews>

Resources for Educators



Working in cooperation with the Brights.net we've created a web page and accompanying brochure aimed at high school administrators. The web page and brochure explain perspective of secular high school students and give suggestions for making the high school environment a comfortable and welcoming place for secular students. The brochure and web page also discuss the kinds of activities that secular high school groups do.

The web page is www.secularstudents.org/educators.

For several years the Secular Student Alliance has had a web form that high schoolers could use to request legal help when they felt that their rights as atheists, agnostics or humanists were being abridged by their schools. We have passed these legal complaints on to the Freedom From Religion Foundation, the American Humanist Association and Americans United for Separation of Church and State. This brochure and web page seek to solve these difficulties through education rather than litigation.

Summer Internships

Amber Scott, graduate student in art education at Ohio State University and Jonathan Sussman, English and History of Ideas major at Brandies University were the Secular Student Alliance's 2009 summer interns. Their internships were full-time and each lasted ten weeks. They worked out of our offices in Upper Arlington, OH. These are volunteer positions, but we were able to pay them each \$200/week as a living stipend.



This was the third summer of our internship program. In addition to the work that our interns actually get done for us (details below) these are excellent opportunities for students to get to know the secular movement as a whole. One of our interns was able to travel with us to the American Humanist Association conference in Tempe, AZ and both of our interns played a central role in helping with our 2009 conference which brought in both on and off campus leaders from around the country. Jonathan Sussman summed up the power of an SSA internship well: “an SSA internship jump-started my passion for freethought activism, which I'm going to pass on to my whole campus.”

Our 2009 interns created a 2009 edition of our *Group Running Guide*, created a Sample Year (<http://www.secularstudents.org/sampleyear>) to help new groups plan their years and vastly expanded our library of activity packets (<http://www.secularstudents.org/activitypackets>) to help in the planning of specific events. In addition to these larger projects, the interns also helped with following up on the Group Starting Packets we'd sent out in the last year, organizing our trip to the creation museum, helped stuff a mailing to our members, updated our Facebook page, reorganized our resource library (<http://www.secularstudents.org/library>) and revised several other web pages.

Branded Affiliate Program

One of the most common complaints we hear about the Secular Student Alliance is that people haven't heard of us earlier. People also ask us if secular campus groups they heard of that don't have our name are affiliated with us (most are). To help increase awareness that there is a growing secular student movement, we are now encouraging our affiliate groups include our name in their names.



The Secular Student Alliance has always allowed its campus affiliates to take its name if they so chose. This year we formalized the process and began encouraging our affiliate groups to either take on our name in the form of “Secular Student Alliance at SCHOOL NAME” or by using the subtitle “An Affiliate of the Secular Student Alliance” to their existing name. As this report is written, we have seventeen groups which have changed their name to “Secular Student Alliance at SCHOOL NAME” (obviously with their school’s name) and four groups who have adopted a subtitle.

Groups participating in the branded affiliate program are still strongly encouraged to cooperate and affiliate with other groups.

Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers Leadership Grant

The Secular Student Alliance is partnering with the Military Association of Atheists & Freethinkers to find up-and-coming leaders in the U.S. military. The military has always been a source of leaders in the United States. The Military Association of Atheists and Freethinkers would like to encourage and support nontheistic military student leaders. MAAF will award \$500 to a student leader who has demonstrated excellence in both military and nontheistic activities. The military includes both current and prior service, all branches, and particularly ROTC and academy cadets. Nontheistic activities include participation in student or non-student organizations with atheist, humanist, agnostic or other nontheistic focuses. In each area, leadership, volunteerism, and awards should be included.



This program should also provide an opportunity for student organizations to reach out to local military installations and to ROTC programs. This creates them know that there is nontheistic support for them as well and that our community is supportive of the military.

Applications can be submitted online at <http://www.maaf.info/leadergrant.html>.

Secular Coalition for America

The Secular Coalition for America (www.secular.org) is the national lobby representing the interests of atheists, humanists, agnostics, freethinkers and other nontheistic Americans. The Secular Student Alliance was a founding member of the Secular



Coalition for America back in 2002 and continues to be an active member today. Through connections made via the Secular Coalition for America, the Secular Student Alliance is now

in communication with the White House Office of Public Engagement and Intergovernmental Affairs. Young secularists are a rapidly growing demographic and the White House is eager to better understand them. This relationship is just beginning, but we are very excited to be in direct communication with the White House.

Media Coverage

The Secular Student Alliance has garnered a considerable amount of media attention since last September which are listed below. Many other pieces ran about SSA campus affiliate groups—we reprinted on our website (with permission)—those are not listed here.

August was a guest on Sounds Reasonable which is a half hour show. – 10/24/2008
WHRW – Binghamton, NY

Atheist lobbyist to speak in North Texas – 10/21/2008
Dallas Morning News – Dallas, TX

Treadwell's latest attempt at albatrossing of Gillibrand: pot decriminalizers – 10/13/2008
Albany Times Union – Albany, NY

The Godless Rise As a Political Force – 3/7/2009
National Journal Magazine – Washington, DC

God-less 'congregation' planned for humanists – 3/20/2009
AP News Wire – Washington, DC

More Americans adhere to no religion – 4/3/2009
Columbus Dispatch – Columbus, OH

More Atheists Shout It From the Rooftops – 4/26/2009
New York Times – New York, NY

National Day of Prayer Protest Photo Spread – 5/7/2009
Columbus Dispatch – Columbus, OH

'Coming out' can be a trial for atheists and agnostics – 5/14/2009
The National – Abu Dhabi

Religious people make better citizens, study says – 5/13/2009
The Pew forum on Religion & Public Life – Washington, DC

Rediscovering Secular America – 7/3/2009
The Nation – New York, NY

Lyz Liddell interviewed – 8/6/2009
WFCO 90.5FM – Lancaster, OH

Atheists Visit Creation Museum – 8/7/2009
Local 12 WKRC – Cincinnati, OH

Creation Museum: Is This How World Began? - 8/8/2009
ABC News Blog – New York, NY

Atheists expelled from Creation 'Museum' – 8/9/2009
Examiner – Columbus, OH

Mueller Speaks at Secular Student Alliance Conference – 8/10/2009
Department of Student Affairs in Higher Education – Indiana, PA

Why Would a Secular Group Visit the Creation Museum?—8/11/2009
Science + Religion Today - <http://www.scienceandreligiontoday.com>

Atheists Visit Creation Museum – 8/14/2009
Christian Press – Newton, KS

Atheists put their faith in Twitter – 8/14/2009
Religion News Service – Washington, DC

Coming out atheist: young nonbelievers build community in college and online – 8/17/2009
News 21 – <http://news21.com>

Skeptics, creationists go toe to toe – again – 8/18/2009
USA Today – McClean, VA

Atheists Groups Double in Size in Two Years – 9/16/2009
Beliefnet – New York, NY

Atheist Groups Increase on School Campuses — 9/17/2009
The Christian Post – Washington, DC

Campus Atheist Groups Double in Size in Two Years – 9/18/2009
Crosswalk.com – Richmond, VA

Creation Museum welcomes atheists, critics – 9/24/2009
Baptist Press – Washington, DC

Beyond Belief: Atheist community thrives in Cincinnati's backyard – 9/30/2009
CityBeat – Cincinnati, OH