

# The Importance of Free Inquiry

*Dan Riley, Campus Organizer, Center for Inquiry Transnational  
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CFI's 2008 Student Leadership Conference was the largest such gathering in the Center for Inquiry's history. Coming together from all across North America, freethinkers gathered at CFI headquarters for presentations, lectures, and networking. A variety of new projects, such as our campus regional coordinators program, a podcast directed towards college students, and a student Digital Media Outreach Committee, will help bring together the abilities of CFI's expanding grassroots student movement. With our growing connectedness and increased capacity for reaching people comes the increased ability to further our shared ideals.

Perhaps the most cherished principle of CFI's perspective on human life is the promotion of freedom of inquiry. For the benefit and progress of humanity, this organization holds that all subjects, from geography to geology, democracy to Deuteronomy, are and should be open to civilized, reasoned examination. Such a philosophy lies at the core of the halls of our academic institutions as well. Our professors, scientists, and intellectuals uphold the enlightened principle that, through clarified articulation, rigorous reflective study, and freedom of information, humanity will attain knowledge, enhance our lives, and further our understanding of the universe.

In a world that far too often inflicts us with hurricanes and heartache, malaria and malnutrition, poverty and PTSD, calling upon our best qualities can lift our moral zeitgeists to new heights. Through inquiry, light-filled parts of the world have overcome a historic propensity for slavery, witch hunts, religious persecution, gender discrimination, and racial segregation. No longer, our modern reason has decided, should epileptics seek solutions from the clergy; our current understanding of neuroscience, coupled with our concern for humanity's well-being, dictate that human health and happiness outweigh tradition and dogma. This is a triumph for our species.

While throughout the school year many of you will undoubtedly experience moments of relative boredom, it is important to be mindful of the influence that academic research and open debate has upon our world and our lives. The accumulated knowledge of our schools translates into life-saving pharmaceutical drugs, progressive medical procedures, social change, and a fuller appreciation for global cultures, governments, and economics. With modern technology, we live in an ever-shrinking world. Humanity's best mechanism for equipping ourselves with the tools for the present and the future lies in our freedom to inquire and our ability to answer.

*The newest addition to CFI's Outreach team, Dan Riley has a B.A. in political science from Duke University. He has experience working in the legal profession and as an organizer in a U.S. presidential election.*