



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

Board of Directors

Mark Mercer, Ph.D. (Saint Mary's)
President
president@safs.ca

Janice Fiamengo, Ph.D. (Ottawa)
fiamengo@uottawa.ca

Tom Flanagan, Ph.D. FRSC (Calgary)
tflanaga@ucalgary.ca

Andrew Irvine, Ph.D. (UBC)
andrew.irvine@ubc.ca

Steve Lupker, Ph.D. (Western)
lupker@uwo.ca

John Mueller, Ph.D. (Calgary)
mueller@ucalgary.ca

Clive Seligman, Ph.D. (Western)
seligman@uwo.ca

Peter Suedfeld, Ph.D. FRSC (UBC)
psuedfeld@psych.ubc.ca

Past Presidents

Clive Seligman, Ph.D. (Western)

Doreen Kimura, Ph.D. FRSC (SFU)

John J. Furedy, Ph.D. (Toronto)

23 October 2017

Richard Florizone
President, Dalhousie University
Halifax, Nova Scotia B3H 4R2

Dear President Florizone,

I am writing as president of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS), a national organization of university faculty members and others dedicated to the defense of academic freedom and reasoned and respectful debate. (For further information, please see our website at www.safs.ca.)

It has come to our attention that a Dalhousie student, Masuma Khan, was recently found to be in violation of Dalhousie's code of conduct, which prohibits "unwelcome or persistent conduct that the student knows, or ought to know, would cause another person to feel demeaned, intimidated or harassed." Ms Khan had posted on Facebook the following comments: "At this point, fuck you all. I stand by the motion I put forward. I stand by Indigenous students. ... Be proud of this country? For what, over 400 years of genocide?" Ms Khan had also written: "white fragility can kiss my ass. Your white tears aren't sacred, this land is."

SAFS is concerned that the code of conduct infringes upon freedom of expression at Dalhousie.

Freedom of expression on campus is important to both inquiry and discussion. Members of a university community need to be free to criticize the views of others if they are to move closer to discovering the truth. Leaving people free to speak what they will as they will is also a necessary sign of respect for their intellectual and moral autonomy. Further, a code of conduct that can be used to deny people freedom of expression and the freedom of listen will have the effect of encouraging people to launch complaints rather than to engage in critical discussion.

Now it might be true that Ms Khan spoke abusively and, thereby, demeaned, harassed, or intimidated others. There are, however, ways of addressing abusive speech that do not infringe upon freedom of expression. Both what is said and how it is said can be objects of critical discussion themselves. It would seem a more promising route would be to encourage students and other members of the Dalhousie community to talk about what Ms Khan said and how she said it.

Will Dalhousie examine its code of conduct with an eye to reforming it so that it no longer can be used to violate freedom of expression?

SAFS looks forward to hearing from you. We will post this letter on our website. With your permission, we will be pleased to post your reply together with it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Mercer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark Mercer, PhD
President, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS)
PO Box 33056 Quinpool Centre
Halifax, NS B3L 4T6
president@safs.ca
<http://www.safs.ca/>

Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy
Saint Mary's University
923 Robie Street
Halifax, NS B3H 3C3
mark.mercer@smu.ca
<http://professormarkmercerc.ca/>
<http://www.smu.ca/academics/departments/philosophy-faculty-and-staff.html>

Cc: Dr. Arig al Shaibah, Vice-Provost, Student Affairs, Dalhousie University