

Andrew Potter resigns from McGill post after Maclean's essay on Quebec

Resignation from Institute for the Study of Canada prompts questions about academic freedom
By Benjamin Shingler, CBC News Posted: Mar 23, 2017 10:48 AM ET Last Updated: Mar 23, 2017 1:32 PM ET

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/andrew-potter-mcgill-institute-for-the-study-of-canada-resignation-macleans-1.4037618>

Andrew Potter, the director of McGill's Institute for the Study of Canada, has resigned from his post after penning an essay in Maclean's that argued "Quebec is an almost pathologically alienated and low-trust society."

Potter faced widespread criticism for the article, including from Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard, who said it painted a "negative portrait" of the province "based on prejudices."

Potter's essay described last week's traffic jam on Montreal's Highway 13, which left hundreds of people stranded in their cars overnight during a snow storm, as a "mass breakdown in the social order."

In a statement shared on Twitter, Potter said he "deeply regrets many aspects of the column" and how it came across as critical of the entire province.

An article of very poor quality': Couillard blasts Maclean's for Highway 13 traffic jam article
"That wasn't my intention, it doesn't reflect my views of Quebec, and I am heartbroken that the situation has evolved the way it has," he wrote.

Potter said "negative reaction from within the university community and the broader public" left him no choice but to resign.

[View image on Twitter](#)

March 22 2017

In light of the ongoing negative reaction within the university community and the broader public to my column published in the March 20 online edition of Maclean's, I have submitted my resignation as Director of the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada, effective immediately.

I deeply regret many aspects of the column – its sloppy use of anecdotes, its tone, and the way it comes across as deeply critical of the entire province. That wasn't my intention, it doesn't reflect my views of Quebec, and I am heartbroken that the situation has evolved the way it has.

This has been the dream job of a lifetime, but I have come to the conclusion that the credibility of the Institute will be best served by my resignation. I intend to continue with my current academic position at McGill, and I hope to serve the school in any place I might be effective.

Potter took over as director of the institute last August for what was supposed to be a three-year term. He had served as the editor of the Ottawa Citizen before his appointment.

He plans to continue to teach at McGill. Potter's announcement followed a Facebook post on Tuesday in which Potter apologized for the "rhetorical flourishes" in the piece.

Infringement on academic freedom?

In a statement, McGill University said it accepts Potter's resignation as director. They did not return a request for comment.

The role of the institute, the university said, is to "to develop a clearer understanding of Canada's social, political and economic future; to identify and explore the benefits that a pluralistic society offers and to support the study of Canada across the country and internationally."

McGill has faced criticism of its own for its handling of the controversy.

As Potter's column circulated earlier this week, the university said on Twitter that Potter's views expressed in the column "do not represent those of McGill."

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The views expressed by @JAndrewPotter in the @MacleansMag article do not represent those of #McGill.

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That prompted another essay in Maclean's, by academic Emmett Macfarlane, arguing the university had "lost sight of the core principles by which it ought to governed.

"This may seem, on the surface, a relatively innocuous statement. But it is in fact a reprehensible attack on the core of the academic mission, and specifically on academic freedom," he wrote.