



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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21 March 2017

Dr. Patrick Deane
President and Vice-Chancellor
McMaster University
Gilmour Hall, Room 238
1280 Main Street West,
Hamilton, Ontario, L8S 4L8
president@mcmaster.ca

Dear Dr. Deane,

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.)

Your "Open Letter to the McMaster Community" of March 20, 2017, <http://dailynews.mcmaster.ca/article/academic-freedom-and-the-role-of-the-academy-an-open-letter-to-the-mcmaster-community>, raises concerns for us about the protection of academic freedom.

We commend you for affirming in that letter that "the freedom to research, consider, discuss and present even the most controversial or potentially divisive issues is a fundamental tenet of academic freedom, and the foundation of the work and mission of the academy." We also agree that academic freedom includes the right of peaceful protest. Peaceful protest, however, does not include the right to silence speakers or shut down events by disruptive conduct, as recently happened to Dr. Jordan Peterson when he was invited to speak on your campus.

In that connection, we are gravely concerned by the statement in your open letter that "our commitment to academic freedom requires that, except in the most extreme cases, the cancellation of events, or the exclusion or removal of particular individuals will not be our response." By conferring a de facto hecklers' veto, this is an open invitation to protestors to shut down events through obstreperous behaviour.

We wish to emphasize the importance of this issue. Academic freedom becomes meaningless if protestors are invited to silence whichever speakers or shut down whatever events they chose. A president's defence of academic freedom has to consist of more than reciting abstract words; it must include taking action to remove those who prevent peaceful discussion from taking place.

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.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Mercer', written in a cursive style.

Mark Mercer, PhD
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