



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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10 September 2018

Peter J. Ricketts, Ph.D.
President
Acadia University
15 University Avenue
Wolfville, NS B4P 2R6

Dear President Ricketts:

I am writing as president of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS), an organization of university faculty members and others dedicated to the defense of academic freedom and the merit principle in higher education. (For further information, please see our website at www.safs.ca.)

According to newspaper reports, Acadia University has fired tenured psychology professor Rakesh (Rick) Mehta (<http://thechronicleherald.ca/novascotia/1595780-acadia-fires-rick-mehta-after-fire-storm-over-comments>). The reports do not give Acadia's official reasons for the dismissal. Acadia is a public institution whose operations should be transparent to the public; otherwise, citizens cannot have confidence in their institutions. In a matter as important as this, Acadia needs to state the charges against Dr Mehta and the evidence purported to support them.

It has been reported that Acadia received complaints about Dr Mehta's outspokenness. Dr Mehta has made known to his colleagues and students as well as the general public his views on freedom of expression on campus, on immigration, on his union, on women and men, on sexuality, and on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Dr Mehta's views, and his willingness to speak them, have upset some people and have even provoked the charge that Dr Mehta has poisoned the Acadia environment.

Universities are places of inquiry and discussion. To function properly, members of the university community need to be able to hold and express views that others reject, including views that others find offensive, repellent, or pernicious. Students and professors should be encouraged to speak their minds, even to be outspoken. Chastising professors for their views is contrary to the university's mission. Universities should repudiate the contention that a professor's outspokenness can poison the campus.

Professors may not, of course, harass their students or colleagues or treat them unfairly (by, for instance, assigning low grades to students whose views differ from their own). No one, though, has alleged either harassment, as properly understood, or unfairness against Dr Mehta. The complaints made public to date are entirely about the content of Dr Mehta's views and his eagerness to make them known.

The Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship would like to understand the grounds of Acadia's decision to fire Rick Mehta and to be assured that Dr Mehta's having publicly expressed controversial views on current important social and political controversies played no role in that decision.

We respectfully ask you to respond to our letter and to explain the rationale behind your decision to investigate Dr Mehta. With your permission, we will post your response along with this letter on our website.

Sincerely,



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