



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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13 August 2018

Gervan Fearon, PhD
President and Vice-Chancellor
Brock University
1812 Sir Isaac Brock Way
St. Catharines, ON L2S 3A1

Dear Dr Fearon:

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.)

Brock University recently condemned statements made by Garth Stevenson, a retired Brock political science professor, and has threatened to revoke Dr Stevenson's professor emeritus status (<https://brocku.ca/brock-news/2018/08/university-deplores-abhorrent-social-media-outburst/>). SAFS believes that these actions are ill considered.

Emeritus status is conferred in recognition of the person's achievements as a faculty member and contributor to his or her discipline, and in some cases for administrative activities. Since a professor's political or social opinions are irrelevant when the awarding of the title is considered, they cannot be relevant retroactively.

Dr Stevenson made known through social media his views and feelings regarding the removal of a statue of Sir John A. Macdonald and of those people, including First Nations Canadians, who advocated removing the statue. Whether the statue should have been removed and the reasons why and why not are matters of public interest, as is the place of First Nations within Canada. University professors should be free to comment on matters of public interest as they see fit, even intemperately, without putting their official university positions at risk.

By officially characterizing Dr Stevenson's comments as "inflammatory" and "abhorrent," and criticizing them as appalling and a threat to Brock's commitment to inclusion and respect, Brock University has signaled that certain views on important topics may not be spoken. A university, though, should encourage a full range of opinion on all subjects. By removing Dr

Stevenson's emeritus status and ruling his views incompatible with Brock policy, Brock University makes it harder for members of the university to believe that they are free to speak their minds.

Brock's actions will also diminish the respect the public has for work on controversial issues coming from the university, as people will suspect that Brock professors and students must hold to the approved views rather than to their evaluation of the evidence.

We respectfully ask you to respond to our letter. With your permission, we will post your response along with this letter on our website.

Sincerely,

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

Mark Mercer, PhD
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