



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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president@safs.ca

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fiamengo@uottawa.ca

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seligman@uwo.ca

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7 March 2019

David Agnew
President, Seneca College of Applied Arts and Technology
Newnham Campus
1750 Finch Ave E
North York, ON M2J 2X5

Dear President Agnew,

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.)

I am writing you because it has come to our attention that a professorship in English and Liberal Studies that Seneca College is seeking to fill is restricted to scholars who are of First Nations, Métis, or Inuit descent. <http://www.thecouncilrepository.ca/jobposting/viewtopic.php?f=51&t=2480>

Hiring according to descent, ethnicity, or cultural affiliation is a violation of the merit principle, the principle according to which academic decisions should be made on academic grounds only. It is also wrongfully discriminatory.

Discriminatory hiring is sometimes said to be warranted on academic grounds by the need for role models and mentors for minority or indigenous students. But whatever qualities make for good and inspiring teachers, those qualities are present or absent in individual scholars, not in scholars considered as members of ethnic groups. Students are best served by hiring committees that look at the qualifications and skills of individual candidates rather than of candidates taken to represent a group.

Indeed, hiring on the basis of descent, ethnicity, or cultural affiliation might have the effect of harming individual indigenous scholars, because it may lead others to see them in stereotypical ways. It is conceivable that qualified First Nations, Métis, or Inuit scholars will not apply for your position, wanting to be valued for the quality of their work rather than for their line of descent or ethnicity.

Among the skills applicants for the position must possess are the ability to teach Indigenous issues and the ability to connect to the Indigenous community in the Greater Toronto Area. Neither of these qualifications is found only in First Nations, Métis, or Inuit scholars.

Colleges best serve the interests of discovery, of students, and of the community at large when they seek to hire the candidate who best suits the position. To find that candidate, universities must not exclude any qualified applicant. We ask that you remove the discriminatory intention from your job search and consider all qualified candidates on their merits.

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

Sincerely,



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>

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