



# *Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship*

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29 August 2017

Frederick Grouzet  
Chair of the Search Committee  
Department of Psychology  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
University of Victoria  
3800 Finnerty Road (Ring Road)  
Victoria, BC V8P 5C2

Dear Dr Grouzet,

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](http://www.safs.ca).)

I am writing to you because it has come to our attention that a recent advertisement for a tenure-track appointment in your department states that “the selection for this position will be limited to members of visible minorities and Indigenous persons.”

Hiring according to race, 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.

The job advertisement says that the psychology department would “like a scholar who can bring the perspective from a visible minority or indigenous person to their teaching and research.” This phrase would seem to imply that minority or indigenous scholars will have a particular perspective, a perspective that other scholars cannot share. Now it is perfectly fine for a department to consider the perspective a candidate will bring to teaching and research, but if the department is seeking to enlarge the range of perspectives among its members, it would be best for it to invite all qualified people to apply so that it would have available to it the largest range of perspectives.

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 teaching skills of individual candidates.

Your ad mentions Section 42 of the BC Human Rights code as justification for discriminating on grounds of race, ethnicity, or cultural affiliation. Section 42, though, says that discrimination is not wrongful when it “has as its objective the amelioration of conditions of disadvantaged individuals or groups.” It is hard to see how your intention to hire only a minority or indigenous scholar will ameliorate the condition of disadvantaged people. Minority and indigenous job candidates are not being discriminated against by universities or psychology programs. Hiring committees do not need to exclude qualified candidates in order to treat qualified minority or indigenous candidates fairly.

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

Universities best serve the interests of discovery, students, and the community at large when they seek to hire the candidate who combines research and teaching ability to the highest degree. To find that candidate, universities must not exclude any qualified applicant. We ask that you remove the discriminatory intention from your job ad and consider all qualified candidates on their merits.

We respectfully ask that you 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.

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