

September 12, 2017

Dr. Mark Mercer
President, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship
PO Box 33056 Quinpool Centre
Halifax, NS B3L 4T6

By email


Dear Dr. Mercer;

We are responding on behalf of the University of Victoria to your letter of August 29th, 2017. Feel free to convey this response to your members as you deem appropriate.

The University of Victoria is committed to a hiring policy that seeks excellence and equity, gender and racial diversity. We understand that drawing on diverse perspectives and experiences is essential if we wish to enrich our campus cultural mosaic, achieve excellence in research and teaching, provide mentors for our students, and bring complex learning perspectives to our community. We also recognize that in order to achieve equality it is sometimes necessary to treat people differently. Within the Faculty of Social Sciences our commitment to diversity is deeply rooted in our understanding of discrimination-free hiring and what our students need in order to excel in a globally-connected world.

UVic's values are expressed through our [Employment Equity Plan](#), approved under s. 42 of the BC Human Rights Code, and the diverse materials we offer in support of integrating perspectives of all employees into our campus. Our multi-stage [faculty hiring processes](#) start with setting rigorous criteria which accord with the collective agreement and ensure that all potential candidates meet standards of excellence as a baseline. The omnipresence of bias in hiring and evaluation is shown across the literature in social sciences, and we are not yet where we want to be with respect to hiring of members of visible minorities and Indigenous Peoples. Currently within the Faculty of Social Sciences, 11.6% of our faculty identify as a member of a visible minority (compared with 19.9% national availability) and the numbers for Indigenous faculty are so small that we report them as <5 for privacy reasons. Amongst UVic's students, 32% identify as a member of a visible minority and 5% identify as Indigenous. UVic selectively uses preferential or limited hiring pursuant to section 42 of the BC Human Rights Code as a tool when it is recognized that specialist diversity knowledge is a gap in a particular area. We welcome the chance to use these tools to bring in highly qualified candidates who might otherwise be overlooked and to move our institution closer to excellence.

We want to address specifically one statement from your letter: "It is hard to see how your intention to hire only a minority or indigenous scholar will ameliorate the conditions of disadvantaged people."



We know that such hires can have a significant impact. When a racialized student sees a person of colour standing at the front of the class, they can see a role model. They may find hope that they too, as someone marginalized by colonial attitudes and white privilege, can learn, achieve and find a pathway to success in the world. It means that as a minority individual, they can see somebody who has overcome similar obstacles. It builds confidence that they can knowingly share their experiences with someone of kinship, who understands the challenges of discrimination, bias and racism from personal encounters. If a racialized scholar brings their own life experience to their research and teaching they have a chance to expand collective knowledge as they explore topics and address perspectives that have been overlooked or misunderstood in an environment dominated by majority perspectives. And when a student who identifies as a member of the majority engages with a scholar from a marginalized background, they can gain insight into new ways of viewing the world, an appreciation of how minorities are dispossessed by mainstream cultural attitudes and assumptions, and the opportunity to learn from difference.

While we recognize that each faculty member is an individual and will have their own approach to engaging with their personal background and discipline, these are a few of the ways that a minority or Indigenous scholar can ameliorate the conditions of disadvantaged people in ways that are not open to majority scholars.

Sincerely,



Catherine Krull, PhD, Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences



Cassbreea Dewis, Acting Director, Equity and Human Rights

*Cc: President Jamie Cassels, QC
Dr. Valerie S. Kuehne, Vice-President Academic and Provost
Dr. Frederick Grouzet, Chair, search committee
Pamela Richards, Director, Faculty Relations and Academic Administration*