



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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president@safs.ca

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fiamengo@uottawa.ca

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tflanaga@ucalgary.ca

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andrew.irvine@ubc.ca

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lupker@uwo.ca

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mueller@ucalgary.ca

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seligman@uwo.ca

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1 May 2018

Bryan Tolson, President
Faculty Association of the University of Waterloo
200 University Avenue West
Waterloo, ON N2L 3G1

Dear Dr Tolson:

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'm concerned about a passage in the message the Faculty Association of the University of Waterloo (FAUW) posted on 23 April (<https://fauwaterloo.blogspot.ca/2018/04/fauw-supports-multicultural-uw.html>).

SAFS commends the FAUW for maintaining a commitment to the free exchange of ideas on campus by not having called for the cancellation of the event that was to feature media personality Faith Goldy and University of New Brunswick professor Ricardo Duchesne. (Unfortunately, as you know, the event was cancelled when the organizers heard that security would cost

them \$28,000.)

But in that message, you write of the speakers that "Their ideas do not reflect the views or the scholarship of our faculty, staff, or students." It seems presumptuous of the union to claim to know and represent even just the views of the union's members on the topic of the discussion, "multiculturalism, borders, and identity in Canada," let alone the views of all members of the Waterloo University community. No union official or university administrator ever has the right to speak on behalf of all faculty, staff, or students in these kinds of cases.

For a university to function as a place dedicated to the free exchange of ideas, the members of a university community must be unafraid to speak any ideas they wish. When a faculty union dismisses certain ideas, it purports to instruct professors and students about the parameters of approved scholarship and approved views at the university. This instruction can chill discussion on campus by encouraging self-censorship. Certainly it will dampen candour

among students.

It can also affect professors themselves, by making them doubt their union's commitment to defend them should they believe their academic freedom is at risk or has been violated. Waterloo professors might feel that their union will not support them if their views are not among the approved views.

Because an essential role of a university is to provide an atmosphere in which the free expression of ideas is possible, faculty unions should not be ruling certain ideas beyond the pale.

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', with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

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>

Cc: Katie Damphouse, Academic Freedom & Tenure and Policy Officer, FAUW
Laura McDonald, Community Relations Coordinator, FAUW
Shannon Dea, Vice President; Director (at-large), FAUW