



## *Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship*

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17 September 2018

Lisa Philipps, LLB, LLM  
Provost & Vice-President Academic  
York University  
4700 Keele Street  
Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3

Dear Professor Philipps,

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 at least two current searches for tenure-track professorial positions at York University are limited to scholars who are Aboriginal or Indigenous in ethnicity or cultural identity. One search is in the School of Kinesiology and Health Science (in Sport, Physical Activity/Culture and Indigenous Health), the other in the School of the Arts, Media, Performance and Design (in Indigenous Theatre).

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. A fair competition to identify the scholars best suited for these jobs would be fair to all individuals as well as optimally promote York's concern for good teaching and scholarly accomplishment.

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 administrators, 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 candidates taken to represent a group.

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 aboriginal scholars will not apply for your

positions, wanting to be valued for the quality of their work rather than for their ethnicity or cultural affiliation.

Universities 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 searches 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,



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