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### ON FIGHTING FOR OUR ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS AND DOCUMENTING THEIR DESTRUCTION

*Frances Widdowson*

On February 6, 2026, my case of wrongful termination from Mount Royal University went to appeal before the Alberta Labour Relations Board. This was the next stage in the saga. My termination from Mount Royal University in December 2021 had been adjudicated over 30 hearing days throughout 2023. The arbitrator, David Phillip Jones, had found that, while some discipline was appropriate, my treatment was disproportionate and I should not have been fired. Despite his finding, Jones **concluded** that I could not be reinstated because my employment relationship was “not viable”.

The February appeal involved whether the decision of Arbitrator Jones not to reinstate me was “reasonable”, as well as whether his decision violated natural justice principles. This led to a focus on the nine “reasons” Jones had provided for why he believed I could not be reinstated:

1. The adverse effect of her participation in the Twitter war from the middle of 2020 to the middle of 2021 on her relations with a number of colleagues at MRU, which...cannot be repaired.
2. Her refusal to recognize the impact of her harassing social media communications on her colleagues, and her lack of any remorse for making them.
3. The reluctance of a number of witnesses who were co-workers to see her return to the workplace.

4. Her persistence throughout the arbitration hearing that none of her tweets investigated by Investigator Rence and Investigator Hope constituted harassment of Dr Lindstrom or Dr Watchman (although she grudgingly agreed that she would not now make the tweet referring to Dr D.A. Dirks).

5. Her post-termination conduct in her blogs and websites demonstrate a hostility to the University and to colleagues in the University.

6. Her behaviour at the arbitration hearing, which required re-deploying the set up of the room to distance her from witnesses, and required an admonition not to address them during their testimony.

7. Her refusal to accept that the terms of her employment relationship are determined by the collective agreement, which defines both academic freedom and the limits thereto, and her criticism of the Faculty Association for agreeing to these limitations.

8. The friction between her and other colleagues, as exemplified by the breadth of the Lindstrom and Watchman complaints (which go far beyond the harassing social media communications).

9. Given her implacable views and attitude, reinstating her would not be a “lasting and final solution”.

Leanne Chahley, the lawyer for the Mount Royal Faculty Association (MRFA, my union), argued that reason number six – the furniture rearrangement accusation – had violated natural justice principles because Arbitrator Jones had not allowed the union to make submissions about the matter. (For the record, the alleged “behaviour” never

happened and was completely made up by Mount Royal University.) Chahley also asserted that none of the “reasons” provided by Arbitrator Jones enabled us to understand why my actions were so detrimental that they warranted me being prevented from resuming my duties as a professor. After all, throughout the arbitration proceedings, Mount Royal University had said that it had no complaints about my research, teaching or service responsibilities.

In response, Mount Royal University lawyer Michael Ford maintained that there were enough “breadcrumbs” in the decision to make a “loaf of bread” (i.e. to show that Jones’ decision was “reasonable”). To substantiate this, Ford largely [focused](#) on 33 documents, which he brought up in his presentation. These mostly consisted of numerous articles that I had written – in *Minding the Campus*, the *Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship Newsletter*, and the *wokeacademy.info* website – about how “wokeism” (totalitarian identity politics) was negatively impacting the university and the union, including its influence on the complaints made by professors Renae Watchman and Gabrielle Lindstrom. Ford seemed to believe that these documents spoke for themselves, and didn’t really explain why my career should be ended because of the criticisms that I was making.

The most astonishing evidence that MRU presented was that I had said that “I will fight to the end to make the university an academic space once more”. This, according to Ford, was evidence of me having “implacable views and attitudes”, not being able to “play with others in the sandbox”, and the fact that I was a “square peg in a round hole”. Why this would be a problem in a job that supposedly prizes independent thought and critical thinking was not explained. That a university would argue that a professor cannot be reinstated because they are concerned about maintaining academic standards indicates a terrible state of affairs.

Ford also seemed to be supporting Arbitrator Jones’ position that I should not contest Mount Royal University’s pronouncements if I considered them to be fundamentally flawed. Arbitrator Jones was demanding that I accept responsibility and show “remorse” for my conduct, when I had provided a [detailed analysis](#) of why my behaviour was justified.

In this analysis, I had demonstrated that none of my social media commentary was harassment according to the standards that were applied to other faculty members. Contesting the arguments of those in authority, however, is apparently not allowed and my principled intellectual disagreement with MRU was accepted by Jones as a reason why I could not be reinstated. Furthermore, all of my detailed arguments and evidence were conveniently ignored.

The most interesting part of the proceedings was when the

chair of Alberta Labour Relations Board, Gordon Neko-laichuk, asked whether there was a difference between MRU and the MRFA positions about what factors could be considered by the arbitrator in deciding against reinstatement. Could something that I would have been allowed to do as an employee be used as a “reason” by the arbitrator to justify my lack of reinstatement? In response to this query, Chahley argued that it didn’t make sense to say that I couldn’t come back to work because I was doing things that would have been permissible if I had engaged in them in the workplace. It wasn’t reasonable for Arbitrator Jones to rely on such factors, according to Chahley, because he provided no analysis in his decision. In order for Arbitrator Jones’ decision to be “reasonable”, he would need to explain why people being upset about my views would justify denying me reinstatement.

The fundamental point that still needs to be decided, therefore, is whether my right to “respectfully” criticize the ideas of colleagues and the practices of MRU and the MRFA – something that is protected by the Collective Agreement – will be upheld. So far, this has not happened because the prescribed doctrines of Indigenization and trans activism take precedence over academic freedom and freedom of expression. Support for violations of academic principles has continued because the labour relations framework acts to justify previous decisions.

The Alberta Labour Relations Board decision on the appeal is expected within 90 days. With this decision, three things are possible: 1) the decision will be upheld; 2) the decision will be sent back to the same arbitrator; or 3) the decision will be sent back to a different arbitrator. If it is the first possibility that occurs, the MRFA will have to decide whether the decision will be appealed to the courts.

Whatever the decision, we at least have been able to get MRU to write down why it believes that I should no longer be a professor at this institution: because I am a professor who is criticizing those who are trying to destroy the academic character of the university, I cannot be allowed to return to work. The fact that this is MRU’s position is shocking but not surprising. When MRU decided to pursue the Indigenization of the university in 2014, and demanded that indigenous “ways of knowing” be “respected” and “valued”, it ceased to be an academic institution.

It is entirely possible that our universities are lost and cannot be saved. If this is the case, I will still continue to “fight to the end to make MRU an academic space once more” so that the destruction of our academic institutions can be documented for future generations.

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freedom and the Kamloops215Deception. You can read more about her case and her work on the website <https://wokeacademy.info>.

#### BAD RULES WHERE NO RULES ARE NEEDED

Mark Mercer

My department has a small but lively and successful Master's program. Rarely do we have more than one student enrolled in it at a time and only about every three years does someone graduate. And yet our majors and honours students benefit from having a graduate student in their midst and we professors are always keen to work with an advanced student. It would be a shame were budget woes to incline university administrators to close this program, but close it they might.

Last month, I was on the examining committee for a Master's thesis that was critical of obscurantism and make-believe profundity in twentieth-century continental philosophy. The student's supervisor was a department colleague of mine and I had been the student's advisor. An outside examiner, who had had no contact with the student, completed the committee. The candidate did very well defending his thesis and the committee members were impressed. A thesis defence is an occasion for academic engagement with an intellectual problem to come directly into contact with disciplinary and institutional standards and traditions, creating a community of minds and aspirations within an institution. It is the sort of thing that gives a university a reason for existing.

I had missed the previous Master's thesis defence in my department, two years ago; the last defence I had attended occurred before the pandemic year. In the seven years since that defence, the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research at my university had changed the procedure, and not for the better.

In the olden days, the candidate's supervisor asked the first question, and the unwritten rule was that that question would be an invitation to the candidate to give us an overview of the thesis, to state its main conclusion and central argument, and to tell us something about the motivation behind writing on the topic. Nowadays, the chair of the session directs the candidate to give a presentation.

In the olden days, the session lasted about two hours, and the final twenty or thirty minutes was reserved for questions from the audience. Nowadays, ninety minutes and no discussion with audience members.

In the olden days, the chair might begin with an observation or a joke, but nothing was scripted other than the introduction of the candidate and the examining committee. Nowadays, as well as calling the session to order and introducing the group, the chair reads two items from a

script. One is a statement recognizing the hard or time-consuming work everyone has put in; the other, as I'm sure you have anticipated, is an official university land acknowledgement.

I'll discuss in the next issue of the Newsletter the requirement that the chair speak a land acknowledgement. Here I will consider the three other innovations.

Least offensive among them, one might think, is the recognition of hard work. One could suppose that it serves the useful functions of putting people at their ease and indicating the modest grandeur of the occasion. But the statement that we've all worked hard could well be false. Perhaps one or another of the committee or candidate has shirked his duties or cut corners. I would rather we didn't risk beginning with a falsehood. But supposing it is true, as it likely is, nonetheless the chair has no reason other than its likelihood for thinking the statement true. He's just muttering a formula. So now suppose that it is true and that, in addition, the chair knows it to be true. We have all worked hard and the chair knows we have. Despite her sincerity, the audience cannot know that the chair is speaking sincerely, for she's reading from a script she's required to read from.

My point is that the statement of recognition is but a piece of cant. It's not even politeness. It clouds the room with artificiality.

I'll add that it also constitutes condescension. *Of course* we worked hard. It is our pleasure to work hard on matters of intellectual significance and it is our pleasure to assist the next generation of scholars. If someone wishes to evaluate our efforts, please let them speak to the academic quality of our hard work.

The chair then directs the candidate to give a presentation regarding his thesis work. This innovation expands the chair's responsibilities at the expense of collegiality and mentorship. It is the supervisor who has guided the student and overseen his project. To acknowledge the relation of mentor to student, the supervisor should take the floor after the chair's introductions, so that he may, with pride, invite the candidate he has shepherded to this moment to address the group.

After a second round of questioning from each of the three committee members, the chair closes the session without inviting audience participation, and she retires with the committee to fashion the decision. This is unfortunate not only because members of the audience might want to ask a question or pursue an idea. (At the defence in question, three people told me they would have wanted to engage with the candidate.) It also means that the defence does not serve as an introduction of the candidate as a peer to members of the academic or disciplinary community. Although not yet pronounced a Master, the candidate has no other natural opportunity to take his place publicly as a

newly recognized authority on an intellectual matter. The committee (we suspect) will judge him worthy of being engaged by established scholars and members of the public; questions from the audience at his defence would confirm that he has acquired the status of Master of his academic area.

Weeks before the defence, I sent a message with my objections to the new procedures to the dean and the associate dean of graduate studies. I received a formulaic response from the dean (from someone I've known and been friendly with for the twenty-six years I've been at my institution) and nothing from the associate dean. In his response, the dean pointedly declined both to criticize my reasoning and to provide reasons for the changes. He simply and irrelevantly explained that the graduate coordinators in the various departments came up with the rules intending thereby to create a standard procedure for everyone.

So, what might be good reasons for the changes? Perhaps the statement recognizing everybody's hard or time-consuming work is meant to satisfy the need so many people have today to be acknowledged, recognized and affirmed. Well, if that's the concern behind it, a statement read by the chair about the university tradition of the Master's thesis defence would work much better. All those who contributed to the occasion could hear themselves lauded as contemporary carriers of a long and significant tradition.

Why strip the supervisor of his prerogative to show pride in the candidate by no longer having him invite the candidate to speak of his research? Perhaps today's procedure of having the chair begin the actual defence part of the defence is the result of a supervisor or two in the past having bungled the job. Maybe a supervisor tore into a candidate by asking a tough question, and by asking it even before the audience had a good sense of the candidate's work. One problem with unwritten rules is that not everyone reads them; another problem is that some who have read them don't think unwritten rules are rules one must follow.

Perhaps the rule excluding the audience from engaging with the candidate and, thereby, welcoming him as a Master into the community was also intended to shut down bad behaviour. Questioners can be rude or quarrelsome, or seek to belittle the candidate. Doing away with questions from the audience might therefore be intended to prevent emotional abuse or at least to save decorum.

Bringing the candidate's presentation under the office of the chair and sending the audience away before they can ask a question might, I'm speculating, have been adopted as solutions to problems of bad behaviour. Some evidence in favour of this reading is that the sheet from the faculty of graduate studies that sets out the rules goes on to condemn incivilities like intruding on another committee member's question and arguing with another committee

member.

The sort of thing graduate studies is up to, recklessly throwing rules at problems, is not unheard of at my university. Our tendency, and a strong tendency it is, is to react to local difficulties or unpleasantness with university-wide regulations. Departments used simply to vote on the next department chair and then inform the dean of their decision. But two factions in a particular department each conspired to set up their man as chair, and now in all departments, candidates for the chairship are first vetted by the dean and then the dean oversees the election in the department. (That's just one example.) It would be in character for the faculty of graduate studies to respond to isolated minor incidents of incivility with strictures meant to prevent anything untoward happening the next time.

What we need, of course, is not a utopia of rules, but rather administrators willing and able to take miscreants aside and explain to them the anti-academic nature of their behaviour. Administrators—or anyone else who wants to do it. A university would be a better university for having a culture of criticism, one that includes criticism of specific instances of bad behaviour, than to adopt yet another code of conduct. Now, all this would have to be very informal. Criticism must have none of the trappings of discipline. I fear our university culture, though, is too much a work or professional culture these days, as opposed to an academic one, for collegial critical discussion to be possible. (See my [essay](#), "Is Informality Simply Too Dangerous?")

I would say that we lose much more than we gain when, to avoid relatively rare problems that we could handle otherwise, we institute rules and regulations that prevent us from aspiring to excellence. (Another artificial desert we're instructed to call peace.)

What about the drive to regularity, which is the motive for standard procedures all must follow that the dean of graduate studies explicitly cited? We may well want certain regularities when it comes to matters having academic significance. That a thesis examination committee have three and only three members, that the outside reader not communicate with the candidate before the defence but simply evaluate the thesis, that each committee member get two rounds of questioning, first fifteen minutes, then eight minutes.... There's value in having all departments do this sort of thing the same way. (But no exceptions?) There's no value, though, in regulating that which is academically insignificant. The chair of a thesis defence might favour just getting down to business after calling for order and introducing everyone. Or he might pause to recognize everyone's hard work. Or he might take moment to explain the significance of a thesis defence. Or the candidate's supervisor or department might ask the chair to do or not to do one of these things. It really should be up to the people involved in the event.

I've tried to make two points in this essay. The first is that the three new procedures or customs I've discussed are inferior to the old ones they replace. A chair's welcome that recognizes everyone's hard work is insincere cant and misses the fact that quality is what matters. Having the chair direct the candidate to give a presentation ignores the relationship that has developed between the candidate and his supervisor. Ending the session without questions from the audience fails to honour the new Master's position within the academic community.

The second point is that none of the three customs, old or new, is properly a matter for regulation. Regulations here are impositions that serve to alienate academics from their institution. The matters in question are not proper matters for regulation for they do not involve ensuring the quality of anything of academic significance. No one is better as an academic for following them and following them serves no academic goals. They are not even required to solve coordination problems.

It can and should be left up to chairs, supervisors, committees and departments how the session is run, given the rules to ensure that the thesis and its defence pass only if they meet high standards of academic quality. A thesis defence is less impressive and less true to its significance if the audience is not invited to ask questions, but let us leave it to the people on the ground to decide whether to end without audience participation. Some of us will roll our eyes when the chair recognizes all the hard work that prepared us for this day, but if a committee or department craves that sort of thing, let them have it. Universities should be much more anarchic places than they are, I'd say, but at least we shouldn't be under the thumb of rules for the mere sake of regularity.

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#### WHY THERE IS NO SYSTEMIC RACISM AND DECOLONIZATION IS A ROAD TO NOWHERE

*Sinclair A. MacRae*

“The truth is not up for debate.” – Protestor sign at a rally denouncing Frances Widdowson

“The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth: if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error.” – John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*

Those of us concerned about academic freedom have mainly questioned its erosion as a right *de jure*. Considering the rise of cancel culture, academic mobbing, emotional safetyism, and various other coercive conformity techniques, we have rightly focused on ensuring that institutional protections for academic freedom remain robust. However, the threat to free inquiry and the pursuit of academic excellence from the withering of academic freedom rights *de facto* is also disturbing. Academic freedom loses its point when it becomes a dead letter, which happens when academics value in-group acceptance and status over subjecting their beliefs to the ethically regulated marketplace of ideas. It is not simply ignorance but conformity of thought that could lead someone to assert that the truth is not up for debate.

#### Why There Is No Such Thing as Systemic Oppression

To see how conformity of thought can subvert the functioning of academic inquiry consider Social Justice Theory (SJT) claims regarding systemic oppression. SJT proponents have successfully implanted in the public consciousness the notion that society is plagued by systemic oppression of various types: systemic racism, colonization, the patriarchy, transphobia, ableism, and so on. According to an Ipsos Reid [poll](#) from 2020, 60% of Canadians agree that there is systemic racism in Canada with nearly half (48%) agreeing that Canadian institutions such as “government, the police, the courts, the education system, and journalists” propagate it. More recently a 2025 Leger [poll](#) found that 49 per cent of Canadians reported having observed “evidence of systemic racism” embedded in government, social systems, and the law. And according to a 2022 Universities Canada [survey](#) almost 90% of Canadian Universities have or are creating a decolonization plan for their institution.

But what does it mean to say that the “system” is racist or colonizing or that it is causally efficacious? What even is it? A system is a collection of interconnected parts functioning as a network or mechanism to produce some intentional outcome. For example, a car is a system designed and manufactured to be a means of transportation. Similarly, a group of humans can form a network to achieve some common goal, as when members of a political party unite to elect representatives. Crucially, both are the product of intentionality. The car is a product of intentional design; the party is driven by the shared sense of purpose and common goals of its members. On this analysis claims about systemic racism or the need for decolonization literally make sense only on the assumption that the people who constitute the system, group, or network are united in their endorsements of racism and colonization. For as the number of people in this collective who reject racism and colonization increases, the claim that the “system” is racist and colonizing weakens, and so too do claims of sexism and

the “patriarchy”, and so on across the other categories.

In response a SJT believer might insist that the presence of a few brave exceptions does not render the patriarchy dysfunctional, just as the presence of a few defective parts may not prevent a car from running. However, once the dispute turns into a numbers game, charges of systemic oppression lose their power, as SJT supporters know. If they pursue this line of thinking, then their dramatic allegations of racism, sexism, transphobia, et cetera buried deep within the “system” become subject to disconfirmation merely by showing that most people explicitly reject the offensive beliefs attributed to them, which, of course, they do. Note, for example, that 89% of the respondents to that Ipsos Reid poll from 2020 agreed that “racism is a terrible thing”. Only people who are *not* racists would think this. Think not? Then compare: if 89% of people thought that cruelty was a terrible thing, then they would not endorse cruelty or be cruel. This leaves believers in systemic oppression the task of trying to defend the desperate claim that despite what most people say, they are really oppressors because they exhibit implicit biases, as evidenced, for instance, by their acts of microaggression. However, not only is this a piece of incredible overreach that misattributes the automatic responses of our System or Type 1 cognition to us, but it also misunderstands the nature of wrongful discrimination.<sup>1</sup>

Consider sexism, which consists of two components, one factual, the other evaluative. To be a sexist one must believe that there are physical differences between the two sexes, which is true, and one must believe that one sex is superior because of such differences *regardless of context*, which is obviously false. Thus, someone who thinks that only men can produce sperm is not a sexist but those who think that these and other such differences justify, say, the exclusion of women from the political process, for example, by denying them the vote, is ludicrous and sexist.

Claiming that most people, or a critical mass of them, endorse manifestly ridiculous beliefs is a non-starter. People overwhelmingly reject wrongful forms of discrimination. Thus, SJT supporters instead must assert the more dramatic claim that the *system* is the source of egregious social ills. On this view systemic oppression is everywhere because the system is everywhere. Furthermore, considering its pervasiveness, the only way to rid ourselves of systemic forms of oppression is to overthrow the system, starting with our major social institutions. Unfortunately for SJT, this reasoning rests on a simple logical error – the informal fallacy of composition – which consists in fallaciously inferring that a feature of the individual members of a group is also a feature of the group as a whole. Since they cannot defend the idea that most individuals hold discriminatory beliefs but refuse to give up their conviction in systemic oppression – the continued existence of which

is their *raison d'être* – they insist instead that “society”, or the “system”, is oppressive.

However, the sense in which a group of agents, such as a political party, is a system is unlike the sense in which a car is one. Whereas it makes sense to attribute agency to the car’s designer or designers, because the component parts are mere things, it makes no sense to attribute literal agency to a political party or any other group of agents. The members of a political party are agents, but there is no centralized, disembodied super-agent that directs the actions of its members, just like there is no centralized, disembodied super-agent that is “society” or the “system”. Therefore, there is no such thing as systemic oppression – no systemic racism, no ongoing colonization, no patriarchy, no systemic transphobia or ableism, and so forth. All such talk is nonsense. There are only a minority of individuals who hold racist or sexist beliefs and perform racist or sexist actions.

The SJT belief in systemic oppression is generated by an ideological commitment, which is the sort of thing that happens when you espouse misology. It’s the sort of thing that happens when you employ coercive-conformity techniques to suppress dissent; when you prevent truth from colliding with error and engage in audience-limitation techniques by indulging in obscurantism. This is what happens when academic freedom becomes a dead letter.

A cynic might observe that claiming that an all-powerful, pervasive, but largely invisible “system” perpetuates various types of “systemic” oppression might seem a hard nut to crack for those concerned with eradicating social injustice, because any solution to a specific problem will never eliminate the “deeper” problem with systemic oppression that lies beneath it. Indeed, since those “deeper” problems don’t exist, they are unsolvable, and so the campaigns against systemic racism and for decolonization can never end. Decolonization is a road to nowhere. So why manufacture an imaginary problem that cannot be solved? A cynic might observe that this is a clever way of ensuring that the self-righteous and self-appointed opponents of “systemic” oppression never run out of “work” while simultaneously releasing them from ever having to acquire any actual expertise.

We are not plagued by systemic racism. The SJT belief in systemic oppression is a non-empirical, non-falsifiable house of cards that turns SJT into just another form of pseudo-science, akin to phrenology, astrology, and homeopathy. The resulting divide between SJT believers and, say, liberal academics is not essentially political. It is a division between incompetent academics and serious ones.

### Capitalism

It gets worse. Defenders of SJT also anthropomorphize

<sup>1</sup>On the distinction between System or Types 1 and 2 cognition see Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Macmillan, 2011.

capitalism, which they regard as a prime agent of systemic oppression. However, this will only sound plausible to those who do not know what capitalism is. It is a type of market economy in which decentralized private actors make decisions about the allocation of goods and resources, some substantial percentage of which are held in the form of private property, via interactions that are coordinated through a set of competitively determined prices. Capitalism is a kind of market exchange mechanism that brilliantly responds, via the price mechanism, to the immensely complicated problem of how to fairly satisfy our needs and desires given that we value things differently because we are different. Capitalism's critics have notoriously failed to propose any meaningful alternative to it. Centrally planned economies inevitably fail to respond to our individual differences and although they bear some resemblance to what SJT means by a "system", since capitalism is marked by its *extremely decentralized nature*, it is the antithesis of the sort of super-agent directed system that SJT sees perniciously operating everywhere.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the SJT complaint that capitalism is a principal agent of systemic oppression is an absurd and ignorant embarrassment for the view.

The central problems with capitalism are not with its existence but with the various challenges to ethically regulate it, including with maintaining its decentralized essence by placing strict limits on market tendencies towards cartelization and the forming of monopolies. Imposing such ethical regulation requires *actual* specialized expertise in such areas as ethical governance and administration, tax law, finance industry and campaign finance reform, forensic accounting, insurance industry and mergers and acquisitions regulation, actuarial science, and so on. Obtaining such expertise has *nothing* to do with becoming an "expert" in anti-racism, indigenous ways of knowing, gender performativity, critical dietetics, hermeneutical homicide, standpoint theory, the mysterious power of words, how to "decolonize knowledge", how to occupy Wall Street, and so forth.

### The University "System"

Finally, SJT takes the same view of the university as it does of capitalism. Universities also perpetuate systemic racism (hence the need for DEI offices); they are transphobic; they embody the patriarchy, and so on. However, as with capitalism, the university system functions well when individual academics act as *decentralized* agents pursuing academic excellence by exercising their academic freedom rights to pursue their scholarship and research as they see fit, to read and study as individuals rather than as demanded by some totalitarian ideology, to ex-

press principled dissent, and to discharge their academic duties to engage in the ethically regulated contestation of ideas. The university functions properly, in other words, when its agents embody the very antithesis of the sort of "system" SJT accuses it of being. Of course, seeing the proper functioning of academic teaching and research in this decentralized way is difficult for those who embrace a dogmatic ideology that turns academic freedom into a dead letter.

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### KING'S UNIVERSITY COLLEGE'S PRESIDENTIAL INSTALLATION IN 2026: SACRED FIRE – LITURGY OF THE WORD – RECONCILIATION ÜBER ALLES

*Heinz Klatt*

#### Preface

King's University College is a nominally 'Catholic' undergraduate college with ca. 3500 students and ca. 100 faculty in London, Ontario. It is publicly known as a Liberal Arts College affiliated with Western University and Saint Peter's Seminary. I have been employed at the College since 1975 and retired as Professor Emeritus in the Psychology Department in 2004.

It has become increasingly difficult to justify the 'Liberal Arts' label largely due to the College's active recruiting and pandering to Asian students who bring in the money and countless semi-literate Canadians. These students regrettably do not master the English (let alone French) language sufficiently to permit a liberal education unless heavily diluted.

The 'Catholic' label, as well, has suffered some caries treated with Muslim fillings. These restorative interventions take the form of at least one prayer room, an outsized illuminated tughra (the Sultan's signature) on an outside wall, commandeered respect for Muslim holidays for exams and probably other accommodations not advertised.

During the last decades the College has assiduously followed every faddish leftist dictate: it has prosecuted fervently on charges of sexual harassment (and been forced to remunerate the wrongly accused); it has raised the rainbow flag to celebrate the gays; it offers courses in women's studies, gender studies, peace, social justice and disability studies.

Most importantly the College has established an office in charge of Diversity, Inclusion, Equity and Decolonization

<sup>2</sup>My criticism of the concept of "systemic oppression" draws on and builds upon Joseph Heath and Andrew Potter's brilliant critique of the counter-culture's similar opposition to the "system" in their book, *The Rebel Sell: Why the Culture Can't Be Jammed*, (Harper Collins Publishers, 2005). I am also greatly indebted to Heath's *Economics without Illusions: Debunking the Myths of Modern Capitalism* (Harper Collins Publishing, 2010), especially on the topics of the nature and ethical regulation of capitalism.

(DIED) with its Director being paid \$140,000 p/a. Yes, the College has a mandate and commitment to decolonize Canada or at least its students! What do they do to decolonize the country? If I ever had taken courses in Decolonization I would perhaps have the answer.

Relatively new is the College's commitment to reconcile the Indigenous with the country. The installation of its new president on March 13, 2026 is the occasion for writing the satire that follows.

### **Guided by the theme Rooted in Tradition, Growing in Reconciliation, United in Community**

It is with bewilderment that I read the invitation sent out by Paul Wilton, "Executive Director of the President's Office and University Secretary", to attend the Holy Enthronement of the 10th President of Chief's (King's) University College. The pertinent email of Ann Hoffer, "Governance Coordinator", is careful to note that her pronouns are "she/her". It never had occurred to me before that "Ann" could be a bisexual, polysexual or even a reformed, recycled, transmorphed or otherwise transmogrified individual. Good to be told, because I would have been embarrassed to ask or show one of my eyes looking curiously askance.

The Sacred Fire – Liturgy of the Word, although not yet a sacrament to be enthroned, will take place at the chapel of Saint Peter's Seminary on March 19, 2026.

Our esteemed and likable colleague, Professor R. Ventresca (called 'Rob'), has chosen the Feast of Saint Joseph to reflect on the values of humility, service and community. Most importantly, his presidency will be guided by the theme of "Growing in Reconciliation". If Reconciliation refers to our ever-increasing and very costly love relationship with Canadian Indians then the College will be on an ambitious, expensive and enduring path.

When will we be reconciled? Will it be when all government and private property of land will have been expropriated and owned by descendants of the original nomadic hunter and gatherer tribes? Will it be when official Canadian bilingualism will be English and Inuktitut, as already practiced by our bilingual Governor General? When our new President makes the programmatic announcement that Chief's University College will grow in Reconciliation, he has certainly a goal in mind. Although we do not know what that final crowning state will be, we know, however, with certainty that it will be in the far future and that many more hefty and ruinous financial transfers must have been made in the meantime.

In 2025, \$32 billion (\$244 billion for the last 10 years) have been sent by the government. However, this was not enough. Did reconciliation grow after these myriad cheques, at least a little bit? We don't know. For context, it may be appropriate to mention that the average

annual government spending of the State of Luxembourg over the last few years has been 520,000,000€, a mere fraction of \$32 billion. After all, let us be proud that our Victimhood and Reconciliation Industry is well and forever growing.

One reason why I cannot attend the enthronement is my apprehension that Gregorian chant will be replaced by the hammering on some animal skin reminding me too much of the former Prussian army bands that accompanied occupying armies in Silesia.

Growing in Reconciliation will probably entail the abandonment of the venerable confessional for the timelier healing circle in which white settlers will confess their colonial sins and vices. Penance will not be 3 Ave Marias, however, but \$3 billion p/a, a welcome advance in our understanding of spirituality and true healing. The College's DIED Office will be helpful in determining the nature and gravity of our failings.

These therapeutic circles, embellished by sweet grass and the burning of *nota bene* sacred tobacco (!) rather than the venerable incense, that was first offered by a visiting king from the Orient in Bethlehem, have the further advantage in that they can replace Faculty Council meetings, with or without Sacred Fire, just the fire of academic debate.

During the actual posing of the mortar board on the head of the Chief by the Most Reverend Bishop or the local Indigenous Chief, I am sure growing in reconciliation means that the Dean will raise the Aboriginal flag next to the already existing Gay Flag in celebration of anal copulation on the College's campus. There will be, of course, multiple opportunities for repeated land acknowledgements. After all, does the College not occupy stolen lands?

Down the ages, our forefathers used to pray before innumerable events to give the activities the gravitas deemed important. Who can object today to the introduction of some updated religious prayer, in the form of land acknowledgements, into our lectures on psychology, economics, mathematics or Board meetings?

When we had the last Pope, old, ailing, handicapped and in a wheelchair, come from Rome to Canada to do public penance and to be humiliated because of 215 non-existing graves, everything mentioned above appears to be so anodyne that no sensible person can be expected to raise his voice in opposition.

The College forever "Growing in Reconciliation" will not be alone in its vanguard proposals but is actively supported by the NDP and others by declaring admirably and in the spirit of growing in reconciliation: "The residential school system was a genocide – designed to wipe out Indigenous cultures, languages, families and heritage. To downplay, deny or justify it is cruel, harmful and hateful.... Over a period of 150 years, more than 150,000 children were kid-

napped from their parents”, many were murdered or let die untreated when ill by Catholic nuns. And since it was the rule to be murdered and buried in secrecy, probably at night by nuns in their dark habits, it is justified to call the others “survivors” rather than “former students”.

Pope Francis’ coming to Canada for penance and absolution certainly contributed to a growing reconciliation, which was a wise decision for several reasons. Most importantly, he stopped the massive burning down of dozens of churches, fires which were started out of decades of fury and frustration with the laggards among us who do not feel the pain of people who mourn in front of non-existent graves of kidnapped and murdered children.

The Pope’s penance and humiliation in a wheelchair, however, cannot resolve the dilemma that Chief’s University College will have, i.e., how to navigate between, on one side, the criminalization of academic analysis, critique, downplaying and denial, and, on the other side, the exigencies of academic freedom. A college that strives for growing reconciliation will have to decide between reconciliation and truth, between the Sacred Hoop and the caduceus, between western science and indigenous science – a difficult dilemma between two equally meritorious and effective enterprises. The mandate to seek “Truth and Reconciliation” cannot be simultaneously sought, therefore. Reconciliation must first be achieved before Truth can be pursued.

“Obsequious devotion to reconciliation has become a pathology of Canadian character. It won’t end well” – Bruce Parry, 2026.

### Prayer and Confiteor

Eternal Spirit

Forgive us because we have sinned. We have stolen aboriginal lands. We have created residential schools for indigenous children under the pretense of wanting to save them from utter poverty, and to feed, clothe and alphabetize them, but instead have allowed these schools to apply the same cruel pedagogical measures that were used everywhere else all over the world. I remember, because posttraumatic disorders last a lifetime, how I was punished as a second grader for talking too much. I was obliged to stand for two hours in front of some thirty giggling girls of my age, with my face directed towards them. Pedagogy a century ago was cruel, and we continue teaching French with total immersion, the method that was used by the nuns!

To our chagrin and shame, we have delivered these poor children into the merciless hands of Catholic nuns who, armed with their holy vows, in the end, murdered them

and clandestinely buried them in secret places where they are still reposing. Today, we regret that we cannot disturb these graves to satisfy curious white men without offending the spirits of these children. Graves are holy places not to be tampered with. The \$12 million for the unearthing of the skeletons, that so far has been allotted by the federal government, will be kept so that we can spend the money when we change our minds or when the children’s spirits will have evaporated.

Forgive us our niggardliness in just spending so far \$244 billion for reconciliation. Why did we not allot \$500 billion to alleviate the post-traumatic stress disorders of the Aboriginals? They would all feel so much better today.

Finally, to sum it up: we have updated Saint Paul’s Christian hierarchy of virtues of Faith, Hope and Love to the politically correct, more fashionable triad of Pandering, Mantras and following the Masses.

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### HOW THE LAW SOCIETY BENT MY CONSCIENCE

*Peter Bowal*

#### Introduction

Since October 2020, the Law Society of Alberta, the powerful regulator of lawyers in Alberta, has relentlessly sought to implant in its lawyers a curated typecast understanding of indigenous peoples today. This mandatory “cultural competency education,” an online course written by indigenous people and their advocates, force feeds what lawyers<sup>3</sup> are to know and believe about indigenous history and culture. The course title, *The Path: Your Journey Through Indigenous Canada*, drips of confidence in unnuanced precision and universality that rarely characterizes cultural study. Designed by an Ottawa-based indigenous consulting firm, NVision Insight Group Inc., the course is branded and opens up under a graphic of an indigenous work of art pretentiously entitled, “*Wisdom of the Universe*”.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout my 42 years as a lawyer in Alberta, continuing legal education was not prescribed. The Law Society trusted lawyers to remain current in their fields of practice. It disciplined incompetence. Even today, lawyers must only file annual Continuing Professional Development plans in which they identify and self-enforce a few learning goals.

Five years ago, *The Path* was mandated for Alberta

<sup>3</sup>Few exemptions are granted, mostly where one demonstrated having previously passed an equivalent course.

<sup>4</sup><https://www.lawsociety.ab.ca/about-us/key-initiatives/indigenous-initiatives/indigenous-cultural-competency-education/#:~:text=Lawyers%20becoming%20active%20in%20Alberta,Your%20Journey%20Through%20Indigenous%20Canada.>

lawyers. Failure to pass the course by the deadline led to automatic suspension (the Law Society is not known to act as quickly on other things). The course, funded by annual fees, has five modules and quizzes. It takes five to six hours to complete.

Participants were required to demonstrate a minimum 90% “correct” understanding on each of these modules. They had unlimited opportunity to select any answer but only one option was deemed correct. Proponents of this cultural education maintained the course was impossible to fail. Yes, but only if you readily ditched your conscience to affirm precisely what was commanded.

This article presents 15 of *The Path’s* questions and the only correct answers that the Law Society obliged us to endorse.

### My Prior Indigenous Cultural Competency

I am native-born (“native”, from Latin *indigena*) – and accordingly indigenous – to Alberta. Apparently I am not indigenous in today’s racial catalogues. My long-lived experience has taught me much about indigenous history and culture. My roommate (whose life was blessed with greater privilege than mine) during law school was Ojibway. I have had numerous indigenous friends, clients and co-workers, worked closely for years with Alberta Metis,<sup>5</sup> visited reserves, and served for a dozen years as a Justice of the Peace. I was raised near a reserve, have taught indigenous law in law school, had many indigenous students and taught courses to indigenous students only. The Law Society judged this as culturally deficient.

### Questions and Correct Answers

This is a sample of 15 random questions and their correct answers from *The Path* mandatory education. I was compelled to say these things, even where conscientiously believing them to be false.

#### 1. Indigenous people tend to look to the impact any decisions will have on several successive generations in the future.

*Required Answer and Commentary:* True. It’s true of all Indigenous cultures. Some note specifically that any decision should be considered in light of its impact on the next SEVEN generations.

*Concern:* What is the basis for this generalization?

#### 2. The language of the Metis people is:

*Required Answer and Commentary:* Michif. Although it incorporates elements of other languages, Michif is unique, distinctive, and an integral element of Metis culture.

<sup>5</sup>Metis Settlements Appeal Tribunal < <https://msat.alberta.ca/>>

<sup>6</sup><https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/michif#:~:text=Michif%20is%20a%20language%20spoken,Montana.%20Michif%20is%20mainly%20a>

*Concern:* This is not spoken by Alberta Metis. The *Canadian Encyclopedia* notes it is spoken by fewer than 1900 elders in other provinces.<sup>6</sup> The language of the Metis people is English and some speak Cree.

#### 3. One of the best ways to learn more about Indigenous peoples in Canada is to:

- a. check out Indigenous movies, magazines and festivals
- b. watch a movie like *Dances with Wolves*
- c. talk to friends or relatives who have worked in Indigenous communities
- d. follow conventional media reports about Indigenous realities

*Required Answer and Commentary:* (a.) The best way to learn about a people is to let them tell you their own stories. Indigenous media in Canada are thriving; check out the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network, *Windspeaker* magazine, or any of the emerging new writers and playwrights.

*Concern:* Why discredit the experience and observations of trusted friends and relatives? Is APTN more objective than conventional media reports or other films?

#### 4. The term “First Nation” is preferable the term “Indian” because it implies acknowledging a traditional nationhood of Canada’s original inhabitants.

*Required Answer and Commentary:* True. It’s a clear statement; Indigenous peoples formed the very first nations that took shape in this country.

*Concern:* For me, but not for thee? They refer to themselves as “Indians” in the course. It is questionable that indigenous Canadians ever enjoyed nation status under international law.

#### 5. The terms “Inuit” and “Eskimo” are both acceptable for referring to the Indigenous people of Arctic Canada.

*Required Answer and Commentary:* False. Eskimo is not acceptable in Canada. The term is still occasionally used by older Inuit in Alaska.

*Concern:* Are there objective studies on acceptability within this community or is this the interpretation of others?

#### 6. One common teaching element among Indigenous groups would be:

- a. online training

- b. illustrated guides
- c. on the job training
- d. storytelling

*Required Answer and Commentary:* Storytelling is an important tool for conveying social messages, history, and important teachings.

*Concern:* Are the other three “elements” wrong?

#### 7. Indigenous people do not pay tax.

*Required Answer and Commentary:* False. Only a few First Nations individuals who have a status card and live or work on a reserve are entitled to certain income and sales tax benefits. Inuit and Metis do not receive any special tax benefits.

*Concern:* Obviously, they pay *some* tax. See section 87 of the *Indian Act*.

#### 8. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was created as a result of:

*Required Answer and Commentary:* The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. The IRSSA allocated \$60 million for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, and mandated them to document and preserve the experiences of survivors.

*Concern:* Between 2007 and 2015, the Government of Canada provided some \$72 million to support the TRC’s work. Negative self-reported narratives were prioritized.

#### 9. All Indigenous groups hold their Elders in very high esteem.

*Required Answer and Commentary:* True. Respect for older members of the community, and recognition of their wisdom and importance, is one element all Indigenous cultures share.

*Concern:* This is a general statement of aspiration, not a statement of fact and practice. For example, anyone passing through Vancouver’s downtown Eastside might question how elders are held “in very high esteem”. Claims to ethnic esteem-granting cannot be accurately evaluated by outsiders.

#### 10. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples creates new and special rights for Indigenous Peoples.

*Required Answer and Commentary:* False. UNDRIP is an international instrument to enshrine existing rights that “constitute the minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the Indigenous peoples of the world.”

*Concern:* Ask non-indigenous residents of British Columbia about this.

#### 11. While hunting was originally an important part of Inuit life, it has largely faded away as Inuit move into settlements and enter the wage economy.

*Required Answer and Commentary:* False. Hunting is still very much part of Inuit life right across the Arctic, and a valuable element of contemporary culture, local economies, and the food supply.

*Concern:* This is a matter of personal perspective. How much is “largely faded away” (objectively much has faded away) and how much is “still very much part of . . . life”? The statement is true for Inuit who have moved into the wage economy.

#### 12. About 6000 Indigenous children died in residential schools.

*Required Answer and Commentary:* True. The real number may, in fact, be higher: the Federal Government stopped recording the deaths around the year 1920, after the chief medical officer at Indian Affairs suggested children were dying at an alarming rate.

*Concern:* Among these selective assertions, the real number is likely *lower*. As of May 24, 2002 (*after* this course was released), the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation’s Memorial Register had 4,130 confirmed names, but this list includes people who were memorialized who did not attend residential schools. This question implies that Residential Schools were the *cause* of these deaths. It has been documented that a far greater proportion of indigenous children were dying *outside* of the Residential Schools.

#### 13. Richard Wagamese is a renowned Indigenous actor.

*Required Answer and Commentary:* False. He is an award-winning author.

*Concern:* Why is knowing about this person essential to the practice of law?

#### 14. The goal of the Indian Act of 1876 was to “achieve a just nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and First Nations.”

*Required Answer and Commentary:* False. The goal was to “civilize” First Nations, regulate all aspects of their lives and eventually assimilate them into Canadian society, which failed.

*Concern:* The question and commentary are polemical. They contain several subjective interpretations of 150 year old “goals.”

#### 15. A trauma-informed perspective asks clients, not ‘What is wrong with you?’ But instead, ‘What happened to you?’ Lawyers can advance the broader societal goal of reconciliation by:

- a. **acknowledging the traditional territory where you live and work**
- b. **studying trauma-informed approaches to lawyering**
- c. **understanding that cultural competency is only the beginning**
- d. **familiarizing yourself with Indigenous court-connected services**
- e. **seeking out Indigenous perspectives through books and media**
- f. **all options are correct**

*Required Answer and Commentary:* All options are correct. As Senator Murray Sinclair said, “Reconciliation will be about ensuring that everything we do today is aimed at that high standard of restoring that balance to that relationship (between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in this country.)”

*Concern:* This is contemporary activist opinion, not a serious question.

## Conclusion

Lawyers invest significantly in earning the right to practice their profession. Their competence is already continuously monitored and disciplined by the competitive market, the Law Society and the law of negligence. Many ask why they are required to affirm the cultural contentions of a small number of others in order to remain in the profession for which we have qualified?

Critics pushed back against this education, calling it forced cultural indoctrination replete with woke and sanitized perspectives of a nomadic lifestyle that left few receipts. Why is it essential to know any culture’s creation mythology, of sacred great grandmothers, giant turtles, and feather dances?

Some course information was vague and confusing. For example, it states a half million indigenous people were in Canada before the first European contact, but as the course continued the number exploded implausibly to “more than 2 million”. What “first European contact” is referenced? The first recorded contact occurred around 1000 AD with Norse Vikings at L’Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland and Labrador. Sustained European contact began in the late 15th century with explorers like John Cabot (1497) and Jacques Cartier (1534).

The course content, driven by social justice activists, is fundamentally a parade of historical grievances seasoned with the moral superiority and idealization of a culture, which some view as not fully representative of contemporary reality. The mandatory education is an assortment of selective narratives calculated to present indigenous peoples in the best light of victimhood.

Much of the content is mere opinion, aspirational, or unverifiable over-generalization to homogenize and airbrush the histories and cultures of disparate groups. It talks down to people. It bears the underlying social justice objectives of rubbing our noses in it, facilitating moral conformity and explicitly forcing us to record our agreement with these claims on pain of losing our livelihoods. Many lawyers resisted, concerned about what next direction an over-reaching Law Society might take with respect to compelled speech and belief.

If the ideas are so good, why are they declared mandatory? They must be exceptionally valuable and indispensable to rise to that level. *The Path* mandatory cultural education did not meet that standard.

In the next article, I will describe the efforts that ultimately led to the revocation of this educational requirement.

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## THE GUARDIANS NEVER SLEEP

*Joanne Boucher*

On March 3, 2023 I was scheduled to present a talk for the Department of Political Science at the University of Winnipeg. The title of the talk was: “The Commodification of the Human Body: The Case of Transgender Identities.” The poster for the talk was distributed one week prior to the event and contained this short description: “This talk will focus on the economic interests involved in transgenerism. The role of government, corporate-funded lobby groups, the medical industry, and the bio-technology sector will be highlighted. This will serve to illustrate the ways in which the human body itself is increasingly becoming commodified for profit.”

On the basis of these three sentences an array of faculty from the University of Winnipeg and University of Manitoba, students, and members of the public were mobilized into outrage. The concerns of these people – based exclusively on the imagined veiled message/s contained in the blurb – were given free rein. Their fury was limitless and founded on mind-reading and fantasy. The three sentences did a remarkable amount of heavy lifting. Various people detected all manner of bigotry in the three sentences: transphobia, white nationalism, and anti-Semitism. Go figure.

On the “evidence” of the poster there were calls to cancel the talk. The University of Winnipeg’s President, various Deans, Department Chairs, faculty members, and students were sent countless telephone and email missives ranging from those posing simple questions to full-blown invective and conspiracy theories. The media eagerly reported the

controversy. Faculty members and students were sought out and quoted in various media outlets warning of the potential dangers of the talk. Opposition was mobilized – by faculty members. On the day of the talk, lo, at that very dark hour, a demonstration was held in front of the university to protest a talk whose content they did not hear. There was also the option to attend a “Trans Love Cupcake Hour” in a university classroom at the same time as the talk.

The University administration refused to cancel the talk, but it had to be held on-line as there were credible threats of disruption and potential violence. I was contacted by the Winnipeg Police Service and was in frequent contact with the Head of Security of the University. The University of Winnipeg Faculty Association was conspicuously silent on the question of academic freedom and the targeting and harassment of a faculty member. Well, to be fair, it was somewhat awkward as key protest organizers were on the Association’s executive committee. They could hardly be expected to denounce themselves now could they? Poor dears.

The talk went ahead – on-line. The detractors’ verdict on the talk differed. Some complained there was no there, there. It was dull, sub-par, poorly researched, overwhelming, uncaring, faux Marxist. One week later, a roundtable discussion was held at which various critics analysed the talk. The presentations made were then published in a University of Manitoba journal, *At the Forks*. I have only recently been made aware of the existence of this journal and the entire issue devoted to denouncing the talk. This journal is, shall we say, obscure. However, the wild claims made therein have prompted me to respond and offer some thoughts on the events of three years ago. I do understand that in our social media, split second attention world, to discuss events of three years ago is equivalent to discussing the Peloponnesian War. Nonetheless, it’s worth discussing as it illustrates, once again, and always again, the same mode of argumentation, the same types of claims, the same appeals to emotion, the same irrationalism, the same projection, the same victim posture by academics that have been manifest in countless outbreaks of political hysteria on university campuses in Canada and the US.

I’ll discuss one piece in the journal in some detail, “Academic Freedom and Narratives of Transgender Identity” by Dr. Peter Ives. In contrast to some of the other papers, Dr. Ives presents his discussion in a rather detached and contemplative manner. This is unlike the big picture, dramatic, hyper-emotive tone of other articles. For instance, Dr. Jason Hannan, of the University of Winnipeg, could not quite contain his hysteria in his introduction to the issue. He writes “Although framed in neutral-sounding academic jargon, both the event title and the event description contained blaring red flags, readily identifiable even to casual readers. The most obvious was the scare

term ‘transgenderism.’ Like its close siblings ‘postmodern neo-Marxism’ and ‘critical race theory,’ ‘transgenderism’ is a term of art for reactionary culture warriors seeking to inflame public opinion by sounding the alarm about some nefarious political plot.” And if that wasn’t alarming enough, Hannan declares that “the talk was part of a much larger and more general global explosion of transphobic discourse.”

Without any evidence, then, he declares that the poster and the talk were part of an international plot, a blaring red flag that any clear thinking, right minded person could decipher with a savvy understanding of “reactionary culture warriors.” You know the ones. They make you do things you don’t want to. They announce a talk and then they make you, yes, they make you, get upset and panic and catastrophize. They trick you into a crazy reaction. As he puts it: “L’Affaire Boucher followed a familiar pattern: the announcement of a controversial talk followed by calls for its cancellation followed by condemnation of ‘cancel culture.’”

Much the same perspective was offered by Dr. Adele Perry (coincidentally the wife of Dr. Ives) from the University of Manitoba. In a long Twitter thread dissecting the talk she writes: “Mainly the talk was intellectually bereft: thinly researched, the hot-take of someone who has little stake in the matter they are addressing, no real understanding of research ethics, and a glib commitment to ‘academic freedom’ imagined in almost libertine terms.” (I wish she would have elaborated on the libertine angle, which sounded interesting.) She concludes with her damning indictment as she also detects a scheme, a plot to trick people to make fools of themselves: “I would rather have attended the rally & translove cupcake hour ... Mainly I left the webinar feeling like we have been played. All of us: the people who were legitimately concerned for what this talk meant for an already threatened community. The people who platformed the talk & then supported it; those of us who showed up to witness. The speaker stirred things up & refused to engage with what was the predictable outcome of their words. What a damn week.”

Here, I would suggest, we have toddler logic. We’re in “the dog ate my homework” territory. The inability to take responsibility for one’s own reactions and actions is stark. No one made anyone do anything. Faculty members and students have agency. There was no need to get upset about the (much maligned) poster or imagine the contents of the talk as calamitous. There was nothing predictable about any of this. Faculty and students could have just waited, listened, participated, commented, and criticized the talk – just like grown ups, just like academics are expected to behave.

In contrast, then, Ives’s paper in *At the Forks* seems moderate and impassive. He discusses the distinction between freedom of speech and academic freedom. He argues that

academic freedom is, indeed, a separate category, and that academic freedom comes with certain responsibilities and is legitimately exercised only within specific parameters. His purpose is to discuss whether or not I should have been allowed to give the talk – on strictly academic criteria. He reaches the conclusion that, based on my lack of expertise on transgender issues, academic freedom should not have applied in this case. I should say, though, that Dr. Ives never quite explicitly states this though the implication is unmistakable. In making his case, though, there is ample misrepresentation of my academic research and publishing record, unsubstantiated claims, straw man arguments, and extraneous information offered and speculation, as per Hannan and Perry, about my motivations for giving the talk. I will give some examples of these problems in what follows. I have italicized the most pertinent sentences:

“Unlike free expression, academic freedom is a central principle within an academic system of knowledge production and teaching that includes peer-review, where other scholars evaluate work based on their expertise in the fields involved, ethics reviews, and other assessments such as University Senate curriculum committees, to judge the quality, appropriateness, and validity of the ideas being expressed. *Such processes increasingly require that the communities being studied are consulted in the research, in this case people in the trans community. While in the case of public talks like this one, presented by a university department under the logo of the University often do not involve as clear an adjudication processes [sic] as academic publications or course proposals, academic freedom does not give any faculty member a right to expound about whatever they wish from a university platform. To my knowledge, Professor Boucher does not have any peer-reviewed publications or research grants concerning issues of transgender health. Her talk did not engage with the academic peer-reviewed research on transgender identities.*”

Multiple curious claims are made. For example, he proposes that the research process in universities “*increasingly require[s] that the communities being studied are consulted in the research, in this case people in the trans community.*”

First, my talk was about the medical industry and new medical technologies and interventions that deal with the configuration of human bodies – the interaction between medicine, industry, and the commodification of the human body as a trend. It was not about “the trans community.”

Second, is it true that “*such processes increasingly require that the communities being studied are consulted...*”? What is the evidence for this? Is this a requirement that applies to all types of research in the social sciences? Where is this written? What are the protocols? Who is determining these new policies? Do they apply to research in its earliest stages?

Third, and directly connected to this point, is that my

field of research is political theory. Not one of the texts I study or teach involves interviews or any systematic consultation with human subjects. Political theory centrally involves textual analysis to decipher the meanings of specific works, to hypothesize, for instance, about ontological and epistemological claims, potential contradictions, theoretical coherence, and conspicuous silences. Texts are often understood to be, as it were, in conversation with one another and the pressing history events in which they were written. Thus, those examining political thought in seventeenth century England tend to think about the century long disputes between Crown and Parliament and the Civil War. This is what political theorists do. Dr. Ives ought to know this given his work is precisely of this nature. The question is why would he say this? It seems, in my view, that the intent is to invent new standards of research out of whole cloth for political theorists in order to indicate to the reader – that I deviate, don’t obey rules, and am, consequently, engaged in a sort of academic fraud. Though to give Dr Ives his due, at least he refrains, unlike Drs. Hannan and Perry, from the explicit imputation of conspiratorial motivations for presenting the talk.

This spirit of generosity (well, it isn’t much but in the context of the hysteria I’ll take what I can get) is also evident when Dr. Ives concedes that giving a department talk does not require the most rigorous of academic standards (as would be applied in a peer review publication process). He writes, “*[I]n the case of public talks like this one, presented by a university department under the logo of the University often do not involve as clear an adjudication processes [sic] as academic publications or course proposals...*” Fair enough.

However, he adds the stinging caveat: “*academic freedom does not give any faculty member a right to expound about whatever they wish from a university platform...*” The implication is clear: my talk was simply an opportunity to blather on about whatever I wanted. Clearly, there was no genuine academic or scholarly interest on my part. Just spouting off. (Again, small mercies, he does not attribute the desire to spout off as connected to a vast global conspiracy).

If this sneering comment is not enough to make the point, Dr. Ives adds an ostensibly factual note. He states: “*To my knowledge, Professor Boucher does not have any peer-reviewed publications or research grants concerning issues of transgender health. Her talk did not engage with the academic peer-reviewed research on trans gender identities.*” It goes without saying that Dr. Ives did not ask me personally about this. He is certainly correct that I do not have any publications directly on the topic of the talk. However, as any university researcher is aware, this is frequently the entire point of a department talk: to present new research, test ideas, and hopefully get some feedback and suggestions from the (usually) miniscule audience. It

is absurd to suggest that faculty members must have a research grant or a publication to legitimate the presentation of their research. Is this the case at any university? Is this what Dr. Ives wishes to be the new norm in universities?

Furthermore, it is straightforwardly and self-evidently the case that this talk was directly related to my research. Dr. Ives must know this, particularly given his reputation for meticulous if not obsessive attention to detail. The Department of Political Science (of which both he and I are members) has all of these records readily available. Years of activity reports are at hand for any interested faculty member to investigate. Here you would discover that I do indeed have a research record which precisely engages with what I call “body politics.” This entails, for example, studying aspects of, interpretations, and images of the human body, the female body, and medical technologies. This is the work I have done for decades. This exactly intersects with my interest in the medical industry and its approach to transgender bodies. Relevant publications include: “The Politics of Abortion and the Commodification of the Fetus” *Studies in Political Economy*, 2004; “‘A Window to the Womb’?: Obstetric Ultrasound and the Abortion Rights Debate” *Journal of Medical Humanities*, Spring 2004; “Masculine Power? A Gendered Look at the Frontispiece of Hobbes’s *Leviathan*” *Hypatia*, 2021; “Violence, Male Power and Contract Theory: Hobbes and Locke in Carole Pateman’s *The Sexual Contract*.” *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 2003. Moreover, I have taught courses over the years such as *Feminist Political Theory, Love and Sex in the Ancient World*, and *Love and Sex in the Modern World*.

Let us examine the next claim: “*Her talk did not engage with the academic peer-reviewed research on transgender identities.*” This is truly extraordinary. How exactly would Dr. Ives know this? Is he an expert in this field that he has never researched or published in? On what basis can he make this claim? He is in no position, *on his own terms*, to have any opinion on the matter.

Further, the notion that I did not engage with the “academic peer-reviewed research” is simply false. (Though how would he know?) One of the unstated assumptions here is that there is a specific literature, ‘the’ academic research. What is this? *Must* researchers engage with ‘the’ research? Who has made this determination? Where are the directives? *Must* everyone obey these directives even for a department talk?

In point of fact, the source on which I relied and cited the most was WPATH’s SOC8. This is the most recent edition of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health Standards of Care. But what is striking is the admonition about sources or lack thereof and the implicit demand – from whom? by whose authority? – that there is some key, must-have information that must be referenced – for a department talk. And presumably some

colleague such as Dr. Ives or some group will determine this, not the academic engaged in research.

Even if we grant the premise that I missed essential sources, one of the aims of a department talk is precisely to get this type of feedback. If the aim was to improve and engage with a colleague’s work, one would advise a colleague to look at a particular author, book, article, study, and so on. On the other hand, if the aim is merely to insult and discredit, then a fact-free claim will do the trick nicely.

In the following passage Dr. Ives offers criticisms of a procedural sort. Having ostensibly settled the matter of my utter lack of qualifications to speak on the topic, he now argues that proper protocol was not followed. Rules were broken. He then descends into gossip about the internal machinations of the Department of Political Science to strengthen his case that the talk was out of bounds in all ways.

He states: “[S]he was not invited by nor approved to give this talk by the Political Science Department’s Speakers Series Committee that would usually be responsible to make such judgements. Rather, the Department Chair decided that Professor Boucher should be given this platform, against the considerations of the Speakers Series Committee. These may seem like minor details; however, they show how once the controversy erupted with media coverage, a petition launched, and counter-events planned, the University President’s Office was faced with problematic options; remaining silent, issuing a statement, or cancelling the talk.”

There are several notable issues here. Dr. Ives says, “*she was not invited by nor approved to give this talk by the Political Science Speakers Series Committee that would usually be responsible to make such judgements.*” The first question that comes to mind is: How does he know about the internal machinations of a committee of which he was not a member? And, more importantly, why on earth choose to share such details in a published paper? The formality of language is also significant. To mention *the Political Science Speakers Series Committee* in this manner and declare that it is responsible for all judgements connected to granting the right to give a department talk affords an air of grandiosity to the mundane committee work in a very small department. The truth is the committee was composed of two faculty members. The truth is the committee of two had early in the academic year put out a call (as happens most years) for faculty members to present their research. The truth is that I had spoken to one of the committee members as early as October about the possibility of giving a talk. He had no problem with it at all and was ready to do any organizational work along with the departmental assistant that was required. It was only one committee member who opposed the talk – on specious logistical grounds. It was one person. So, the notion that the Chair of the Department decided that the

talk proceed “*against the consideration of the Speakers Series Committee*” is a comic and dramatic exaggeration.

But what is the point of all this? Why publish information of this sort? It appears to be an attempt to convey to readers – with real insider dirt -- that not only was I incompetent but also a party to a grave procedural injustice, a sinister breaking of the rules that ensure the institutional well-being of the University of Winnipeg. The pomposity of the claim juxtaposed with the sheer pettiness of the gossip is remarkable.

There is, of course, much more to be said about this and other meltdowns in universities. But there is always a through line, a persistent theme. Sections of the professoriate fancy themselves akin to Platonic guardians. They

possess knowledge of the true and the good. They attempt to dictate what is said, who is granted permission to speak, and who is forbidden. They offer fantastic statements about world events, history, ideas, science, and institutions. You name it, they know it. They have the answers to all questions. This is the source of their unremitting hubris and failure to take responsibility for any of their words and actions. No evidence is presented but, miraculously, they know. They are always right; how could they ever be wrong? What is obvious, though, is that behind all the benevolent glow of moral certainty is a will to power, a good old fashioned desire to dominate, marginalize, and silence all who dare disobey their ridiculous directives.

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#### SAFS ANNUNAL GENERAL MEETING

**Friday May 29 at the Delta Armouries and Saturday May 30th 2026 at the University of Western Ontario, London, ON**

**Friday May 29, 2026**

1:30-2:00 p.m. Registration and Coffee

Gunnery and Officer’s Club, Delta Armouries, London, ON

2:00-4:30 p.m. Sessions

4:30-5:00 p.m. *Cocktails*

5:00-6:30 p.m. *Dinner*

6:30-8:00 p.m. *Non-sectarian and Non-political in Principle* **Andrew Irvine**, University of British Columbia Okanagan  
The Eighth Annual Chris and John Furedy Lecture on the Contemporary University. Gunnery and Officers’ Club

**Saturday, May 30, 2026**

University of Western Ontario

8:00-9:00 a.m. *Registration and Coffee*

9:00-9:30 a.m. *Welcome and News From SAFS*, **Robert G. THOMAS**, President of SAFS

9:30 a.m.-12:00 a.m. *Sessions* ,

2:00-1:30 *LUNCH* (Dining Hall)

1:30-3:00 p.m. *Time, Place and Manner: Distinguishing Regulation and Censorship*, **Andrew Irvine**, University of British Columbia Okanagan

3:10-3:45 p.m. *Business Meeting*, SAFS Members only

4:00-6:00 p.m. *Casual Gathering*, (Beertown)

For registration information please see our [SAFS website](#).

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NOMINATIONS FOR SAFS BOARD OF DIRECTORS: 2026-2027

Any member of SAFS may nominate individuals for election as Director. These nominations must be received at the SAFS Office by May 2, 2026. Each member nomination shall contain the following information: (i) the signature of the person nominating and the signatures of two (2) seconders; (ii) the full name and address of the person nominated; (iii) a statement of the status and attributes of the person nominated, showing each person's qualifications to be a director; (iv) a written consent signed by the person nominated agreeing to be nominated for election and, if elected, to serve.

The current members of the Board being re-nominated are: Geoff Horsman, Kirsten Kramer, Zachary Patterson, Robert Thomas, Paul Viminitz, and Frances Widdowson.

The election will occur at the business session of this year's SAFS Annual General Meeting.

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