



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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January 24 2024

Melanie Spence-Ariemma
Vice-Provost, University of Guelph-Humber

Re: Professor Paul Finlayson

Dear Dr. Spence-Ariemma,

I am writing you as President of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS), an association of Canadian scholars committed to the principles of academic freedom and the merit principle. You can read more information about our organization at www.safs.ca.

Our organization would like to voice our concerns regarding the case of Dr. Paul Finlayson at your institution. According to media reports in December, Finlayson was suspended with pay from teaching following comments he made about the Israel-Hamas war on social media.

If you read the comments that he posted they may appear to some to be harsh. However, as a faculty member Finlayson should have the right to express his views on the issues of the day as a matter of extra-mural speech. The collective agreements which the University of Guelph-Humber has signed give voice to this important concept: namely that "universities are communities in which the right to criticize all aspects of society is valued and respected" (UofG, 7.04) while the Humber agreement states

that "faculty shall be free to act and speak in their capacity as public citizens" (13.05(iii)). But if such speech outside of work can lead to suspensions from teaching it will make other faculty wary to chime in. This would deprive our society of the voices of faculty members and the important contributions that they can, do, and hopefully will continue to bring to the social debates on the issues of the day be they polite and genteel or sometimes brusque.

We hope that you will consider the importance of defending the rights of faculty to academic freedom and extra-mural speech so that the faculty of Guelph-Humber can continue to make important contributions in civil discourse without fear of censure.

Sincerely,

Robert G. Thomas
President, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship.