



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

Board of Directors

Mark Mercer, Ph.D. (Saint Mary's)
President
president@safs.ca

Paul Erickson, MCP, RCC
paul@wperickson.com

Janice Fiamengo, Ph.D. (Ottawa)
fiamengo@uottawa.ca

Steve Lupker, Ph.D. (Western)
lupker@uwo.ca

Clive Seligman, Ph.D. (Western)
seligman@uwo.ca

Robert Thomas, MLIS (Regina)
robert.thomas@uregina.ca

Paul Viminitz, PhD (Lethbridge)
vimip0@uleth.ca

Frances Widdowson, Ph.D. (MRU)
widdowsonfrances@gmail.com

Past Presidents

Clive Seligman, Ph.D. (Western)

Doreen Kimura, Ph.D. FRSC (SFU)

John J. Furedy, Ph.D. (Toronto)

3 April 2023

Dale Keefe, PhD
Provost and Vice-President Academic
15 University Avenue
Acadia University
Wolfville, NS B4P 2R6

Dear Dr Keefe,

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, see our website at www.safs.ca.)

Acadia University is conducting two sets of focused academic hires, one for three Mi'kmaq or Indigenous scholars, the other for three African Nova Scotian or African Canadian scholars (positions 60001 through 60006). Both focused hires, then, are restricted to candidates of certain races, ethnicities or cultures.

Restricted hiring is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions be made on academic grounds only. By favouring candidates who possess certain non-academic characteristics, Acadia University will disadvantage other scholars for no reason related to their

academic interests, accomplishments, abilities or promise. Excluding meritorious candidates from consideration cannot be a sound way to achieve academic excellence.

Taking group membership into account when hiring has the effect of harming individual scholars because others may see them in stereotypical ways and wrongly undervalue their work. In addition, because scholars want to be valued for the quality of their research, their teaching, and their contributions to intellectual life, seeking scholars for their race, ethnicity or other identity characteristic forces them to suppress their dignity or decline an advantage. Finally, recruitment based on a non-academic criterion undermines respect for the ideal of dispassionate inquiry, as summoning people by identity or skin colour tends to confuse scholarship with advocacy and to create consensus around dogma.

Acadia University attempts to justify discriminatory hiring as part of its commitment "to advance EDI" and "in recognition of the systemic underrepresentation of Indigenous and Black

faculty at Acadia.” None of diversity, inclusivity or reflecting a demographic pattern is itself an academic value or goal. A university that would place non-academic values above its academic mission cannot serve its students or the community well. Sound social goals are best advanced by respecting academic values, holding people to high academic standards and making academic decisions on academic grounds alone.

The advertisement for positions restricted to African Canadian scholars states that, “The committee recognizes lived experience.” Lived experience is but raw material for scholarship. It is the quality of the scholar’s thinking that is of academic value, whether that scholar possesses lived experience or not. Evidence of the quality of a scholar’s thinking is to be found by reading his or her dossier, not by checking his or her skin colour.

Because restricting candidates on non-academic grounds is wrongfully discriminatory, doing so cannot serve to create a fair and equitable university. This normalizing of identity characteristics is bound to have long-lasting, unwelcome consequences, not only because it suggests that a candidate’s appearance or identity is a significant indicator of his or her promise as a scholar, but because it institutionalizes practices that have led to some of the worst outcomes in human history. Good intentions alone are never enough to exonerate such discreditable practices.

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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Mercer', with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

Mark Mercer, PhD
President, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS)
1801 Chestnut Street
Halifax, NS B3H 3T7
president@safs.ca
<http://www.safs.ca/>
Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/safs.ca/>

Professor of Philosophy
Halifax, Nova Scotia
sergechestnut@gmail.com
<http://professormarkmercer.ca/>

Cc.: Peter J. Ricketts, President and Vice-Chancellor
David Duke, Interim Dean, Faculty of Arts
Corinne Haigh, Dean, Faculty of Professional Studies

Suzie Currie, Dean of Pure and Applied Science
Erin Crandall, President, Acadia University Faculty Association
Claire Mallin, President-elect, Acadia University Faculty Association
Darlene Brodeur, Past President, Acadia University Faculty Association