



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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13 July 2022

David Docherty, Ph.D.
President and Vice-Chancellor
Brandon University
Room 116, Clark Hall
270 - 18th Street
Brandon, Manitoba R7A 6A9

Dear President Docherty,

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.)

Brandon University is seeking to hire an Indigenous Services Librarian to fill a full-time, tenure-track position. According to the [advertisement](#), this position is restricted to scholars who “Self-identify as Indigenous (refers to First Nations, Métis, or Inuit peoples).”

Reserving academic positions for members of specific races or ethnicities is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions should be made on academic grounds only. By requiring candidates for academic appointments to possess certain non-academic characteristics,

Brandon University will disadvantage promising scholars for no reason related to their academic abilities, accomplishments or promise. Excluding meritorious candidates 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, asking them to apply on the basis of their race, ethnicity or other identity forces them to suppress their dignity or forgo applying. Finally, recruitment based on a non-academic criterion undermines respect for the ideal of dispassionate inquiry, as summoning people by identity tends to confuse scholarship with advocacy and to create consensus around dogma.

That the position of Indigenous Service Librarian involves knowledge of indigenous cultures and proficiency in an indigenous language is no reason to restrict it to indigenous applicants. Neither is the requirement that the librarian work with indigenous students and members of indigenous communities. All scholars who fit the job requirements should be encouraged to apply. From their dossiers and through interviews the hiring committee can determine which candidates best fit the research, teaching and service needs of the university.

The position itself, as described in the ad, appears to be inconsistent with academic values and the academic mission of the university. The successful candidate is to be not only a scholar of “Indigenous knowledge systems, perspectives, and worldviews,” but to accept them as true or valid and to advocate for them in university initiatives. Traditionally, universities as places of intellectual engagement leave it to scholars to follow the arguments where they go. They do not dictate to members of the university community which views are the sound ones.

Because restricting positions 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 stylized, flowing script.

Mark Mercer, Ph.D.
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