



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

Board of Directors

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

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

Andrew Irvine, Ph.D. (UBC)
andrew.irvine@ubc.ca

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

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

Peter Suedfeld, Ph.D. OC, FRSC
(UBC)
psuedfeld@psych.ubc.ca

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

Frances Widdowson, Ph.D. (MRU)
fwiddowson@mtroyal.ca

Past Presidents

Clive Seligman, Ph.D. (Western)

Doreen Kimura, Ph.D. FRSC (SFU)

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

8 March 2021

Michelle Webber
President, Brock University Faculty Association
1812 Sir Isaac Brock Way
St. Catharines, ON L2S 3A1

Lynn Wells
Provost & Vice-President, Academic
Brock University
St. Catharines, ON L2S 3A1

Dear Drs Webber and Wells,

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.)

The Memorandum of Agreement (RE: Indigenous Faculty Appointments) of 10 February 2021 between the Brock University Faculty Union and Brock University enables departments and the library to target indigenous scholars when they hire a new member. Targeting involves either restricting the appointment to indigenous applicants or preferring indigenous applicants for the appointment.

Choosing candidates for academic positions on the basis of racial, ethnic, cultural or other group identity is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions should be made on academic grounds only. By seeking to hire on the basis of non-academic characteristics, Brock University cannot but pass over many promising scholars for no reason related to their academic merits. Declining to consider applicants on their abilities alone is not a sound way to build an excellent faculty. As well, because favouring applicants on non-academic grounds is wrongfully discriminatory, doing so cannot serve to create a fair and equitable university.

Taking group membership into account when hiring can have 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 rather than for their racial, ethnic, cultural or

other identity, having them apply on the basis of non-academic criteria forces them to suppress their dignity or forgo applying. Finally, invoking non-academic criteria can undermine respect for the ideal of dispassionate inquiry, as it tends to tie scholarship to advocacy and to create consensus around dogma.

The Indigenous Faculty Appointments MOA attempts to justify targeting applicants on grounds of race, ethnicity or culture by noting Brock's commitment to promote awareness of indigenous cultures and ways of knowing. Whether a particular scholar will serve that commitment well, though, is a matter of the nature and quality of his or her work. The best way to recruit and hire scholars who excel in the ways Brock wishes is to judge individual applicants from a wide pool on their research and teaching.

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', written in a cursive style.

Mark Mercer, PhD
President, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS)
6593, rue Jeanne-Mance
Montreal (Qc) H2V 4L1
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.: Amanda Villella, Director, Faculty & Staff Relations, Brock University
Gervan Fearon, President and Vice-Chancellor, Brock University
Dawn Good, Vice- President, Brock University Faculty Association
Gary Comerford, Chair, Board of Trustees, Brock University