



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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3 April 2023

Kristin Baetz, PhD
Dean of Science
University of Calgary
2500 University Dr. NW
Calgary, AB T2N 1N4

Dear Dean Baetz,

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 Faculty of Science at the University of Calgary is seeking applicants for a position as a tenure-track Assistant Professor (Teaching) in Data Science and Analytics. According to the advertisement, "This position is only open to qualified Black (e.g., Black Pioneer, African, Caribbean) scholars."

Restricted hiring is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions should be made on academic grounds only. By favouring candidates who possess certain non-academic characteristics, the Faculty of Science will disadvantage scholars for no reason related to their academic 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 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 tends to confuse scholarship with advocacy and to create consensus around dogma.

The University of Calgary attempts to justify discriminatory hiring as "a key step to ameliorate the under-representation of members of equity deserving groups at the university, to build a critical mass of scholars who reflect the diversity of our student body and the broader

community, to advance epistemic pluralism and the creation of new knowledges and ways of knowing, and to broaden the culture of inclusivity and engagement.”

Having a professoriate that reflects a particular demographic is not an academic goal. A university that would place non-academic goals and values above its academic mission cannot serve its students or the community well. And while advancing epistemic pluralism and creating new knowledges might be of academic significance, it would best be accomplished by looking at dossiers rather than at skin colour.

As well, the ad requires that applicants include in their dossiers a “Statement on equity, diversity and inclusion identifying the applicant’s contributions or potential contributions to advancing a culture of equity and inclusion.”

Requiring applicants to swear fealty to a particular conception of university community and university goals amounts to imposing a political or ideological criterion on hiring and, as such, is contrary to the best university traditions of academic freedom and scholarly independence, traditions that enable scholars to fashion their own values and that enjoin hiring committees to consider fairly, on academic grounds alone, applicants who are critical of prescribed commitments and doctrines.

Asking for commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion ideology pressures academics into serving a social movement they might well not support. It will encourage applicants to prevaricate or to misrepresent their actual views, and even to engage in self-deception.

Such demands are inconsistent with academic commitments to intrepid and dispassionate research, for they will cause scholars to shy away from speaking positions they believe might appear at odds with EDI means or ends. The academic mission of the Faculty of Science will suffer either because promising researchers and teachers will be screened out of job competitions or because a chilling orthodoxy will envelop the university. To require that prospective professors show they hold a particular set of views regarding social relations and responsibilities cannot but undermine candour, respect for intellectual autonomy and academic values generally.

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, PhD
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