

## Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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6 March 2023

Michel Barbeau
Director and & DSA Program Director
School of Computer Science
5302 Herzberg Laboritories
Carleton University
1125 Colonel By Drive
Ottawa, ON K1S 5B6

Dear Dr Barbeau,

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 <a href="https://www.safs.ca">www.safs.ca</a>.)

The School of Computer Science at Carleton University is seeking to fill a confirmation-track appointment in Computer Science at the rank of Instructor. The advertisement for this position states, "The School seeks to maintain its commitment to excellence and recognizes that increasing the diversity of its faculty supports this objective. As such, we especially encourage applications from candidates from groups underrepresented in Computer Science and/or with experience in mentoring students from such groups."

First, to maintain a commitment to excellence, a school would seek to hire the person best qualified or most accomplished in the field. Because diversity is unrelated to merit, attempting to increase diversity is not a sound way to foster excellence.

Second, that the department specially encourages applicants who belong to underrepresented groups suggests that the hiring committee will consider group membership a factor in an applicant's favour.

Preferential 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, Carleton will disadvantage scholars for no reason related to their academic accomplishments, abilities or promise. Handicapping meritorious candidates cannot be a sound way to achieve academic excellence.

1801 Chestnut Street, Halifax, NS B3H 3T7; e-mail: safs@safs.ca

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 ad directs applicants to submit a "a statement that identifies your strengths in advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion in your discipline and on campus as well as your future plans." Requiring applicants to an academic position 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.

Demanding evidence of commitment to diversity equity 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.

As well, such requirements 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 School of Computer Science will suffer either because promising researchers and teachers will be screened out of job competitions or because a chilling orthodoxy will envelop the department. 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,

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/

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