



# *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. 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)

18 November 2020

Graham Carr, PhD  
President & Vice-Chancellor  
Concordia University  
Montreal, QC H3G 1M8

Dear President Carr,

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](http://www.safs.ca).)

The Working Group on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) at Concordia University released its report at the beginning of this month. SAFS is concerned about the implications of the report's recommendations for Concordia's commitments to academic freedom, the merit principle in hiring, the centrality of the academic endeavour to the university experience, and the prerogative of professors to set curricula and deliver courses.

The recommendations regarding hiring, for instance, would have members of hiring committees seated on the basis of their "diversity," that is, their race, ethnicity, sex or other such characteristics, rather than on their ability

to evaluate the research, teaching and other academic skills of job candidates. The hiring recommendations also suggest that committee members should favour applicants who fall into certain non-academic groups over others. This practice, however, is in itself wrongly discriminatory. Further, not only does it go against Concordia's own stated commitment against discrimination but is also contrary to Canadian principles of equality and fairness. Instead, the best way to build and maintain an excellent university is to seek to hire the best academics without regard to their group membership.

The recommendation that hiring committee members receive Equity, Diversity and Inclusion training would infringe on professors' judgements regarding the best use of their time and energy in preparing to undertake their tasks. And since not all professors accept the claims made about this training, requiring it of them infringes on their academic freedom to reject prescribed doctrine. As well, because it is "training," its tendency will not be toward free and open critical discussion.

The recommendation to test hiring committee members for “EDI awareness” and to have them sign a commitment statement is a violation of the right of faculty members at Concordia to serve the university without passing litmus tests.

The recommendation that new programs and courses be created related to EDI suggests that the pedagogical mission of the university is to bring students into correct social attitudes rather than to help them become independent thinkers capable of enquiring into the things of the world.

Because course syllabi are teaching materials, a requirement that they include value statements would violate the academic freedom of Concordia professors.

Overall, were many of the key recommendations implemented, harm would come to the academic ethos of the campus and Concordia would be shifted away from its academic mission. In effect, the report advocates sacrificing that mission so that other ends might be served. The most important responsibility of a Canadian university, though, is to serve its academic mission.

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, cursive script.

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  
sergechestnut@gmail.com  
<http://professormarkmercer.ca/>

Cc. Anne Whitelaw, Interim Provost and Vice-President Academic  
Guylaine Beaudry, Vice-Provost, Digital Strategy and University Librarian  
Anne-Marie Croteau, Dean, John Molson School of Business  
Pascale Sicotte, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science  
Mourad Debbabi, Interim Dean, Gina Cody School of Engineering and Computer Science  
Annie Gérin, Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts

Effrosyni Diamantoudi, Interim Dean, Graduate Studies, School of Graduate Studies

Lisa Ostiguy, Working Group Chair

Laurane Beyle, Working Group Coordinator

Mark Villacorta, Senior Lead, Diversity and Equity, Office of the Provost and Vice-President  
Academic