



# *Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship*

## **Board of Directors**

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

Rodney Clifton, Ph.D. (U. Manitoba)  
clifton@ms.umanitoba.ca

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

Tom Flanagan, Ph.D. FRSC (U. Calgary)  
tflanaga@ucalgary.ca

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

John Mueller, Ph.D. (U. Calgary)  
mueller@ucalgary.ca

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

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

## **Past Presidents**

Clive Seligman, Ph.D. (UWO)

Doreen Kimura, Ph.D. FRSC (SFU)

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

23 July 2015

Glenn Vollebregt, MSc, CMA  
President and CEO  
St. Lawrence College  
100 Portsmouth Avenue  
Kingston, Ontario  
K7L 5A6

Dear President Vollebregt,

I am writing as the president of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS), a national organization of university faculty members and others dedicated to the defense of academic freedom and reasoned and respectful debate. (For further information, please see our website at [www.safs.ca](http://www.safs.ca).)

According to an article on the website of the CBC (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/prof-rick-coupland-no-longer-at-st-lawrence-college-after-alleged-homophobic-remark-1.3161900>), posted on 21 July, St. Lawrence College has dismissed Rick Coupland as a teacher of business because of his Facebook comment "It's the queers they should be hanging, not the flag," in reference to a rainbow

flag being raised in St. Petersburg, Florida. St. Lawrence College found this comment to violate its code of conduct for professors.

The decision to terminate Professor Coupland's contract raises serious questions about the commitment of St. Lawrence College to the goals of a liberal education. Our task as teachers is to help our students to think and value for themselves, for their own good reasons. Serving that task requires that members of the college community be free to express their views as they will. Punishing a member of the community for acts of expression is contrary to open discussion and debate and sends a message to students that they must not be candid about what they think or feel.

No matter how deplorable the attitudes behind Professor Coupland's remark, they are best addressed, at least by educators, through criticism and discussion, not by ruling his expression out of bounds. St. Lawrence would have done well, for instance, by organizing a lecture or panel discussion of homophobia. Unless it can be shown that Professor Coupland meant his comment as a threat of violence or an incitement to violence, both of which seem unlikely on the face of it, it is inappropriate for an educational institution to take the type of action you have taken.

If members of the St. Lawrence community can, by the St. Lawrence code of conduct, be punished for the content of what they say, then that code of conduct is inconsistent with academic values and sound pedagogy.

Thank you for your consideration of these remarks. We look forward to hearing from you. With your permission, we will be pleased to post your reply on our website together with this letter to you.

Sincerely,

Mark Mercer  
President  
Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship  
[president@safs.ca](mailto:president@safs.ca)

Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy  
Saint Mary's University  
Halifax, NS B3H 3C3  
(902) 420-5825  
[mark.mercer@smu.ca](mailto:mark.mercer@smu.ca)