



# *Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship*

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6 March 2023

Frank Harvey, PhD  
Acting President  
Dalhousie University  
Henry Hicks Academic Administration Building  
6299 South Street, Room 108  
PO Box 15000  
Halifax, NS B3H 4R2

Dear Dr Harvey,

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).)

Dalhousie University is seeking a scholar and administrator to be its new president and vice-chancellor. The announcement of this position reads: "The ideal candidate has a demonstrable commitment to, and significant experience in, advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility as well as to Truth and Reconciliation. ...they [the ideal candidate] will be capable of championing Dalhousie's commitment to inclusive excellence...."

That applicants be committed to the ideology and practice of diversity, equity and inclusion amounts to a political or ideological criterion for 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 applicants who are critical of prescribed commitments and doctrines.

Requiring a commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion ideology will narrow the applicant pool considerably by screening out excellent candidates, when Dalhousie should be looking to hire the best candidate for the position. Or it will encourage applicants to prevaricate or to misrepresent their actual views, and even to engage in self-deception.

Seeking a commitment to EDI and to Truth and Reconciliation signals to the Dalhousie campus that the academic mission of the university comes second. It also threatens to bring a

chilling orthodoxy to the university. To require that Dalhousie's new president 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.

The announcement includes a link to a "self-identification form" and language that suggests the presidential hiring committee will take race, sex, ethnicity and other non-academic factors will be taken into consideration in its deliberations. 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, Dalhousie University will disadvantage academic administrators for no reason related to their academic or administrative interests, accomplishments, abilities or promise. Undervaluing meritorious candidates cannot be a sound way to achieve academic excellence.

Taking group membership into account when hiring has the effect of harming individual scholars and administrators because others may see them in stereotypical ways and wrongly devalue their work. In addition, because university people want to be valued for the quality of their research, their teaching, and their contributions to intellectual life, favouring candidates 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.

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". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Mark Mercer, PhD  
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