



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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22 March 2023

Gervan Fearon, President
George Brown College
St. James Campus, Building A
200 King Street East
Toronto, ON M5A 3W8

Dear President Fearon,

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.)

It was dispiriting to learn from your “Statement from the President” of 15 March that George Brown College intends to sign the Scarborough Charter on Anti-Black Racism and Black Inclusion. The [Scarborough Charter](#) is a profoundly anti-academic document. Committing George Brown to the goals and methods of the Charter damages even further the College’s ethos of free and dispassionate inquiry and its academic mission.

The Charter addresses five main areas: hiring, curriculum, research, ways of knowing, and responding to anti-black racism.

In hiring, it advocates using race as a factor. Taking academically irrelevant factors such as race into consideration is not a sound way of creating and maintaining an excellent faculty.

The Charter directs administrators to pressure departments and professors to reorient their research and teaching. It thereby encourages institutions of higher learning to infringe upon departmental autonomy and to violate academic freedom. Changes in research, curriculum and teaching must stem from the professional judgement of professors if they are to be academically sound. The Charter also recommends that researchers begin with liberatory goals and tailor their research to fit.

The Charter counsels respectful treatment of what it calls “Black expertise and knowledges.” But at a college, black expertise and knowledges, if there are any such things, must not be protected or placed out of reach of criticism. Scholars must be left free to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of whatever ways of knowing present themselves.

According to the Scarborough Charter, combatting anti-black racism on campus requires increased administrative oversight, including “disciplinary measures and protections against reprisal.” This would affect candour, freedom of expression and academic freedom, as students and professors will self-censor rather than risk saying something that might get them into trouble. Oversight and control also degrade relations among individuals, making it difficult for people to treat each other as intellectually and morally autonomous agents.

Whatever barriers might still exist against full participation by black students and professors at George Brown College, those barriers are best addressed simply by insisting on fairness and high academic standards.

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', written in a cursive style.

Mark Mercer, PhD
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Cc.: