



# *Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship*

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2 August 2022

Leo Groarke, PhD  
President and Vice-Chancellor  
Trent University  
1600 West Bank Drive  
Peterborough, ON K9L 0G2

Dear President Groarke,

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).)

Trent University has recently invited scholars to apply to become Trent's inaugural Jarislowsky Chair in Trust and Political Leadership. From the advertisement, it is hard to see how this Chairship is an academic position. The ad seems to seek a person committed to a set of non-academic values who will promote those values, primarily by inculcating them in students. Where traditionally academics are invited to engage in the free and open pursuit of knowledge and to help students to become able to think for themselves, the Jarislowsky Chair will begin with certain social or political conclusions and attempt to pass them on to others.

The ad states that the position involves "training the ethical politics, fiduciary responsibility, and democratic governance." It continues: "the Jarislowsky Chairs network's aim is to professionalize ethical and fiduciary responsibility in political and public service by developing certification in trust and political leadership, and providing the foundation for successful and impactful careers in politics and public service."

In Stephen Jarislowsky's words, the goal of the program "is to ensure our governments are led by inspiring, highly trusted, reliable men and women who exercise fiduciary responsibility.... [I]t's a question of how we are going to strengthen and build trust in our public institutions, our organizations and ourselves."

Humanities and Social Sciences dean Mark Skinner adds: "We look forward to enhancing a learning environment that inspires generations of professionals in politics, government, and public service with integrity and a commitment to ethics, democratic values and responsible

governance.”

It does not appear from these statement that students will engage in arguments for and against various theses regarding ethics, democracy, fiduciary responsibility and government. Instead of leading open, critical discussions, the Chair will train students to be trustworthy, reliable and responsible and inspire in them commitments to ethics and other values. None of these are academic goals.

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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