



# *Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship*

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29 August 2022

Michael Benarroch, PhD  
President, University of Manitoba  
Room 202 Administration Building  
66 Chancellors Circle  
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2

Dear President Benarroch,

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 University of Manitoba I.H. Asper School of Business is seeking to fill two faculty positions, one tenured or tenure-track, the other for a permanent instructor (position number 32170 and position number 32168). According to the advertisements for these positions, they are restricted to scholars who are Indigenous.

Reserving academic positions for members of specific races or ethnicities is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions be made on academic grounds only. By requiring candidates for academic appointments to possess certain non-academic characteristics, the University

of Manitoba will disadvantage promising scholars for no reason related to their academic accomplishments, abilities or promise. Excluding 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 because others may see them in stereotypical ways and wrongly undervalue their work. In addition, because scholars want to be valued for the quality of their research, their teaching, and their contributions to intellectual life, asking them to apply on the basis of their race, ethnicity or other identity forces them to suppress their dignity or forgo applying. 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.

According to the ad, the goal of restricting the positions according to race or ethnicity is to “promote reconciliation through business scholarship.” Promoting reconciliation is not an academic goal. Using academic positions to pursue non-academic ends places burdens on scholars unrelated to teaching or research and diminishes the academic mission of the university. Attempting to serve non-academic ends at the expense of the merit principle signals that the University of Manitoba is not committed to being the best academic institution it can be.

The best way to achieve equal opportunity and eliminate discrimination is to recruit and appoint scholars simply according to merit.

Because restricting positions on non-academic grounds is wrongfully discriminatory, doing so cannot serve to create a fair and equitable university. This normalizing of identity characteristics is bound to have long-lasting, unwelcome consequences, not only because it suggests that a candidate’s appearance or identity is a significant indicator of his or her promise as a scholar, but because it institutionalizes practices that have led to some of the worst outcomes in human history. Good intentions alone are never enough to exonerate such discreditable practices.

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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