



# *Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship*

## **Board of Directors**

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

Janice Fiamengo, Ph.D. (Ottawa)  
fiamengo@uottawa.ca

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

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

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

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

Robert Thomas, MLIS (Regina)  
robert.thomas@uregina.ca

Frances Widdowson, Ph.D. (MRU)  
fwiddowson@mtroyal.ca

## **Past Presidents**

Clive Seligman, Ph.D. (Western)

Doreen Kimura, Ph.D. FRSC (SFU)

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

26 October 2020

Stefi Baum, PhD  
Dean, Faculty of Science  
239 Machray Hall  
186 Dysart Road  
University of Manitoba  
Winnipeg, MB R3T 2N2

Dear Dr Baum,

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 Faculty of Science at the University of Manitoba is advertising for two full-time tenured or tenure-track positions, each in any field of science. The ad states that "All qualified candidates are encouraged to apply; however, Indigenous Canadian citizens and permanent residents will be given priority." Other statements in the ad indicate plainly that the university is seeking to hire indigenous (First Nations, Métis, or Inuit) scholars.

Favouring applicants to academic positions on the basis of their race, ethnicity, or cultural affiliation is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions should be made on academic grounds only. Declining to consider fairly a significant proportion of qualified candidates cannot be a sound way to build an excellent faculty. As well, because favouring applicants on non-academic grounds is wrongfully discriminatory, doing so cannot be a sound way to create a fair and equitable university.

To the argument that scholars of particular races, ethnicities, or cultural affiliations bring different perspectives to the academy, I would note that hiring committees can and should look for the presence of new ideas and approaches in the research and teaching of applicants, not in their racial, ethnic, or cultural identity.

That the position involves duties toward indigenous students and indigenous communities is not a reason for giving priority at the outset to indigenous scholars. Hiring committees should judge individual applicants on their ability to fulfil these duties.

The University of Manitoba's academic mission of fostering research and teaching excellence can be better pursued by treating applicants according to their merits and hiring the best scholars from within wide applicant pools.

Hirings made by taking race, ethnicity, or cultural affiliation into account can have the effect of harming individual scholars from the designated group, because others may see them in stereotypical ways and wrongly undervalue their work. As well, because indigenous scholars want to be valued for the quality of their research and teaching rather than for their group membership, favouring them because they are indigenous forces them to suppress their dignity or forgo applying. Finally, favouritism in hiring can undermine respect for the ideal of dispassionate inquiry, as it tends to tie scholarship to advocacy and to create consensus around dogma.

Universities best serve the interests of discovery, of students, and of the communities they serve when they seek to appoint the candidate who, on academic grounds alone, best suits the position. To find that candidate, universities must not favour applicants on non-academic grounds. We ask that Manitoba prioritize no groups in its job advertisements and consider all qualified candidates for the Science positions on their merits alone.

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  
President, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS)  
6593, rue Jeanne-Mance  
Montreal (Qc) H2V 4L1  
president@safs.ca  
<http://www.safs.ca/>  
Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/safs.ca/>

Professor, Department of Philosophy  
Saint Mary's University  
923 Robie Street  
Halifax, NS B3H 3C3  
mark.mercer@smu.ca  
<http://professormarkmercer.ca/>  
<http://www.smu.ca/academics/departments/philosophy-faculty-and-staff.html>

Cc: Michael Benarroch, President and Vice-Chancellor

Janice Ristock, Provost and Vice-President (Academic)  
Teresa de Kievit, Associate Dean of Science (Graduate Studies)  
Krystyna Koczanski, Associate Dean of Science (Undergraduate Studies)  
Ben Li, Associate Dean of Science (Undergraduate Programs)  
Peter Loewen, Associate Dean of Science (Administration)  
Brian Mark, Associate Dean of Science (Research)  
Steven Harris, Head, Biological Sciences  
Joe O'Neil, Head, Chemistry  
Mike Domaratzki, Head, Computer Science  
Stephen Kirkland, Head, Mathematics  
Deborah Court, Head, Microbiology  
Robert Stamps, Head, Physics and Astronomy  
Liqun Wang, Head, Statistics