



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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20 September 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.)

The Faculty of Law at the University of Manitoba is seeking to fill a position in private law at the assistant or associate professor level (position number 32796). According to the advertisement for this position, candidates must support Truth and Reconciliation, the Calls to Action, and the principles of equity, inclusion, diversity, and respectful workplace.

These requirements amount to a political or ideological criterion for hiring and, as such, are inconsistent with 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. The University of Manitoba law faculty should be open to scholars critical of official stances and programs. Excluding scholars who reject the principles of equity, inclusion and diversity as anti-academic or contrary to treating individuals as individuals is not in keeping with the mission of a secular university and cannot be a way to create an excellent faculty.

The term “respectful workplace” suggests respect for identities and feelings, and not respect for intellectual or moral autonomy. Where respect for autonomy demands that we be open and candid with others and not seek to penalize them for their opinions, respect for identity often requires keeping one’s views to oneself and deferring to others. Respectful workplaces, then, are potentially hostile to academic values.

The ad lists among the responsibilities of the position “Incorporating the Calls to Action in teaching, curriculum and/or clinical content.” This phrase indicates a willingness by the

university to restrict the academic freedom of the professor hired. It is not asking simply that candidates conduct scholarship on the Calls to Action. Whether to teach in service to the calls is a decision to be left to the professor.

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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