



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. OC, 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)

29 November 2021

Patanjali Kambhampati, Ph.D.
Department of Chemistry
McGill University
801 Sherbrooke St. West
Montréal, Québec H3A 0B8

Dear Dr Kambhampati,

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.)

SAFS would like to commend you for the forceful stance you have taken in bringing to public attention the misguided practice of evaluating research proposals on diversity or inclusion grounds. We believe the *National Post* article "[Minority professor](#) denied grants because he hires on merit: 'People are afraid to think'" will do much to alert people to the extent and depth of this problem.

You are right that merit is the only consideration on which researchers should be hired and the only consideration funding agencies, especially government ones, should care about. So long as people are treated fairly, everything is in order. Indeed, concern about the race, sex, ethnicity or other non-academic characteristic of a researcher is just a step away from unfair treatment.

Recruiting or funding researchers on the basis of group membership will inevitably lower the quality of research, for the best candidates will sometimes be passed over. As well, that a research team was assembled on grounds other than the needs of the research business at hand demeans the research project, for it implies that that project's intrinsic goals are less important than an extraneous social goal.

A further point is that 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 represent their race, ethnicity or other identity forces them to suppress their dignity or forgo

participating. 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.

Because seeking to staff research teams on non-academic grounds is wrongfully discriminatory, doing so cannot serve to create a fair and equitable research culture. 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.

Again, then, SAFS commends you for refusing to let considerations other than merit influence your research practices and for revealing publicly the shameful practices of government funding agencies.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Mercer', with a stylized, cursive script.

Mark Mercer, PhD
President, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS)
1801 Chestnut Street
Halifax, NS B3H 3T7
president@safs.ca
<http://www.safs.ca/>
Facebook : <https://www.facebook.com/safs.ca/>

Professor of Philosophy
Halifax, Nova Scotia
sergechestnut@gmail.com
<http://professormarkmercer.ca/>

Cc.: Suzanne Fortier, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, McGill University
Christopher Manfredi, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic), McGill University
Alejandro Adem, President, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada
Manal Bahubeshi, Associate Vice-President, Research Partnerships, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada
Danika Goosney, Vice-President, Research Grants and Scholarships Directorate, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada
New Frontiers in Research Fund
Douglas Farrow, McGill University
Robert Edward Whitley, McGill University

Philip Carl Salzman, McGill University