



## *Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship*

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16 May 2023

Mathieu Blanchette, Director  
School of Computer Science  
McGill University  
3480 University Street  
Montréal, QC H3A 0E9

Dear Dr Blanchette,

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 School of Computer Science at McGill University is seeking to fill an appointment as full-time Faculty Lecturer. The advertisement for this appointment states, "McGill implements an employment equity program and encourages members of designated equity groups to self-identify."

Preferential hiring is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions be made on academic grounds only. By favouring candidates who possess certain non-academic characteristics, McGill University will disadvantage 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, seeking scholars for their race, ethnicity or other identity forces them to suppress their dignity or decline an advantage. 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 favouring candidates 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.

As well, the ad requires that applicants include in their dossiers "an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) statement."

Requiring applicants to swear fealty to a particular conception of university community and university goals amounts to imposing a political or ideological criterion on hiring and, as such, is contrary to 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 alone, applicants who are critical of prescribed commitments and doctrines.

Demanding evidence of commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion ideology pressures academics into serving a social movement they might well not support. It will encourage applicants to prevaricate or to misrepresent their actual views, and even to engage in self-deception.

Such demands are inconsistent with academic commitments to intrepid and dispassionate research, for they will cause scholars to shy away from speaking positions they believe might appear at odds with EDI means or ends. The academic mission of the School of Computer Science at McGill University will suffer either because promising researchers and teachers will be screened out of job competitions or because a chilling orthodoxy will envelop the university. To require that prospective professors show they hold a particular set of views regarding social relations and responsibilities cannot but undermine candour, respect for intellectual autonomy and academic values generally.

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', with a stylized, flowing script.

Mark Mercer, PhD  
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