



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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22 July 2022

Suzanne Fortier, PhD
Principal and Vice-Chancellor
McGill University
Room 506, James Admin. Bldg.
845 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, QC H3A 0G4

Dear Principal Fortier,

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.)

McGill University has recently invited scholars to apply for an appointment as Faculty Lecturer in the School of Computer Science. According to the [advertisement](#) for this position, applicants must include an equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) statement.

The requirement to submit an EDI statement amounts to a political or ideological criterion for 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 applicants who are critical of prescribed commitments and doctrines.

The ad states that the scholar appointed as Faculty Lecturer is to “participate” in the “enhancement of our program’s inclusiveness and student body diversity.” Having a commitment to EDI initiatives and goals is irrelevant to teaching excellence. A good teacher treats students as individuals who aspire to learn within an academic context. A commitment to EDI, on the other hand, might well involve treating students as representatives of groups of people, not as individuals with their own particular abilities and concerns.

The ad also states, “McGill implements an employment equity program and encourages members of designated equity groups to self-identify.” This suggests that being a member of one of the designated groups weighs in an applicant’s favour.

Preferring applicants who belong to specific races, ethnicities, sexualities or genders is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions should be made on academic grounds only. By favouring candidates for academic appointments who possess certain non-academic characteristics, McGill 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, scholars want to be valued for the quality of their research, their teaching, and their contributions to intellectual life, not their group membership. 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.

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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