



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)

2 November 2020

Vianne Timmons, PhD
President and Vice-Chancellor
Memorial University of Newfoundland
St. John's, NL A1C 5S7

Dear President Timmons,

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.)

Memorial University of Newfoundland is seeking to hire up to five professors for full-time tenured or tenure-track positions. The ad states that Memorial is conducting "a targeted search for Indigenous scholars."

Restricting 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 invite all qualified scholars to apply cannot be a sound way to build an excellent faculty. As well, because restricting 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.

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, inviting them to apply 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 research, students, and their communities when they seek to appoint the candidate who, on academic grounds alone, best suits the position. To find that candidate, universities must not restrict searches on non-academic grounds. We ask that Memorial University of Newfoundland remove the restriction to indigenous scholars from its advertisement and instead consider all qualified candidates for the available 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,



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://professormarkmercerc.ca/>
<http://www.smu.ca/academics/departments/philosophy-faculty-and-staff.html>

Cc: Dr Mark Abrahams, Provost and Vice-President (Academic)
Dr Neil Bose, Vice-President (Research)
Mr Glenn Blackwood, Vice-President (Marine Institute)
Dr Jeff Keshen, Vice-President (Grenfell Campus)
Dr Donna Hardy Cox, Associate Vice-President (Academic), Students
Dr Gavan Watson, Associate Vice-President, Teaching and Learning and Director of the Centre for Innovation in Teaching and Learning
Dr Aimée Surprenant, Associate Vice-President (Academic) and Dean, Graduate Studies
Ms Susan Cleyle, University Librarian
Dr Ashlee Cunsolo, Interim Dean, School of Arctic and Sub-Arctic Studies
Dr Ken Jacobsen, Interim Dean, School of Arts and Social Science (Grenfell Campus)
Dr Isabelle Dostaler, Dean, Faculty of Business Administration
Dr Karen Goodnough, Dean, Faculty of Education

Dr Greg Naterer, Dean, Faculty of Engineering and Applied Science
Dr Todd Hennessey, Dean, School of Fine Arts (Grenfell Campus)
Dr Linda Rohr, Dean, School of Human Kinetics and Recreation
Dr Jennifer Simpson, Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Dr Margaret Steele, Dean, Faculty of Medicine
Dr Ian Sutherland, Dean, School of Music
Dr Alice Gaudine, Dean, Faculty of Nursing
Dr Shawn Bugden, Dean, School of Pharmacy
Dr Travis Fridgen, Dean, Faculty of Science
Dr Michele Piercey-Normore, Dean, School of Science and Environment (Grenfell Campus)
Dr Heather Hair, Interim Dean, School of Social Work