



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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24 February 2021

Jean-Paul Boudreau, PhD
President and Vice-Chancellor
Centennial Hall
Mount Allison University
65 York Street
Sackville, NB E4L 1E4

Dear President Boudreau,

I am writing as president of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS), an organization of university faculty members, students 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.)

Mount Allison recently issued the following tweet: “The University would like to acknowledge complaints we have received about comments posted on a faculty member’s personal blog. We neither support nor agree with these inappropriate comments. We are actively looking into this situation.”

The professor alluded to in the tweet is Rima Azar, Associate Professor of Health Psychology, and the comments Dr Azar posted on her blog “Bambi’s Afkar” concern matters of public and academic importance such as freedom

of expression, university policies, the existence of systemic racism in Canada and teaching in a multi-cultural society.

SAFS is concerned that Mount Allison’s tweet violates Dr Azar’s academic freedom and will function to suppress discussion and inquiry at Mount Allison.

The Collective Agreement between the Mount Allison Faculty Association and Mount Allison states: “Members of the bargaining unit are entitled, regardless of prescribed doctrine, to freedom in carrying out research and creative activity, and in publishing the results thereof; freedom of teaching and of discussion; freedom to criticize the university and the faculty association; and freedom from institutional censorship.” Taking an institutional stand against the views a professor communicates breaches freedom of discussion and might constitute institutional censorship.

Universities must not entertain complaints about the content of the views of professors or students. Dr Azar is not alleged to have harassed anyone, committed fraud, or failed to perform her duties as a teacher and researcher. Mount Allison has no legitimate reason to look into Dr Azar's postings.

Academic freedom and freedom of expression on campus make it possible for professors and students to consider all ideas and points of view on any topic and to determine for themselves what is true or likely true. Without robust academic freedom, some topics or ideas can be declared out of bounds. Once that happens, critical inquiry and discussion are impossible. If Mount Allison is to be a place of critical inquiry, it cannot censure professors for the content of their views.

Universities can best support research and teaching by refraining from issuing statements supporting or attacking positions on matters of public interest or controversy. That the university has itself taken a position on a matter can inhibit professors and students from inquiring and making their minds up for themselves. Universities should not hold party lines so that members of a university community may speak candidly and follow the arguments where they go.

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, cursive script.

Mark Mercer, PhD
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Rima Azar, Psychology, Mount Allison University