



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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president@safs.ca

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lupker@uwo.ca

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seligman@uwo.ca

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10 February 2021

Karl S. Hele, PhD
Chair of the Search Committee
Mount Allison University
65 York Street
Sackville NB E4L 1E4

Dear Dr Hele,

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.)

According to a posted advertisement, only scholars who identify as Indigenous will be considered for an interdisciplinary tenure-track appointment in Mi'kmaw Culture that Mount Allison University is seeking to fill.
([https://www.mta.ca/uploadedFiles/Community/Administrative_department/s/Human_Resources/Employment_opportunities/Academic_full-time/ad\(108\).pdf](https://www.mta.ca/uploadedFiles/Community/Administrative_department/s/Human_Resources/Employment_opportunities/Academic_full-time/ad(108).pdf))

Choosing candidates for academic positions on the basis of racial, ethnic, cultural or other group identity is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions should be made on academic grounds only. By restricting applications on the basis of non-academic characteristics, Mount Allison cannot but pass over many promising scholars for no reason related to their academic merits. Declining to consider a significant proportion of qualified candidates is not a sound way to build an excellent faculty. As well, because restricting applicants on non-academic grounds is wrongfully discriminatory, doing so cannot serve to create a fair and equitable university.

Taking group membership into account when hiring can have 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 rather than for their racial, ethnic, cultural or other identity, having them apply on the basis of non-academic criteria forces them to suppress their dignity or forgo applying. Finally, invoking non-academic criteria can undermine respect for the ideal of dispassionate inquiry, as it tends to tie scholarship to advocacy and to create

consensus around dogma.

The ad states that “The ideal candidate demonstrates a broad experience in and commitment to Mi’kmaq culture.” While scholars should be committed to their areas of study, having a commitment to a culture is not itself an academic criterion. Indeed, it suggests a lack of critical perspective on the area of study is a positive quality in a scholar. The goal of research and scholarship, though, is not to validate or celebrate a culture but to understand it.

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 long, sweeping horizontal stroke at the end.

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

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