



## *Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship*

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25 October 2021

Michael Treschow, PhD  
Head, Department of English & Cultural Studies  
University of British Columbia Okanagan  
3333 University Way  
Kelowna, BC V1V 1V7

Dear Dr Treschow,

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 Department of English & Cultural Studies is advertising a tenure-track position in Environmental Justice and Cultural Studies. According to the [job ad](#), “preference will be given to Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour applicants.”

Favouring candidates for academic positions on the basis of racial, ethnic or other group identity is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions be made on academic grounds only, and it is inconsistent with the statement included in the ad that “UBC hires on the basis of merit.” By preferring candidates who possess certain non-academic

characteristics, the University of British Columbia will disadvantage promising scholars for no reason related to their academic accomplishments and abilities. Declining to consider fairly on their academic merits and their academic merits alone all interested scholars cannot be a sound way to build an excellent faculty.

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 or other identity, asking members of preferred groups to declare their race or heritage forces them to suppress their dignity or deny themselves an advantage. 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 calls for “candidates ... who make use of anti-oppressive and intersectional frameworks.” In doing so, the ad appears to require what amounts to a political or ideological qualification. This is contrary to the best university traditions of dispassionate inquiry and to the prerogative of scholars to approach their subjects of research as they will.

Because favouring applicants on non-academic grounds is wrongfully discriminatory, doing so cannot serve to create a fair and equitable university. This normalizing of racism is bound to have long-lasting, unwelcome consequences, not only because it suggests that a candidate’s appearance 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.

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". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

Mark Mercer, PhD  
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