



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. OC, 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)

3 May 2021

Patrick Deane, PhD
Principal and Vice-Chancellor
Queen's University
74 University Avenue
Kingston, ON K7L 3N6

Dear Principal Deane,

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.)

SAFS has noticed that Queen's University frequently restricts academic positions on non-academic grounds. The Department of Geography and Planning recently specified that "Applicants must self-identify as Black persons including those from Africa or of the African diaspora (e.g., African and Africa descended people from the Caribbean, North America, Europe, or Latin America)." ([Job ad.](#)) Now the Department of Biomedical and Molecular Sciences is advertising for a Queen's National Scholar in Artificial Intelligence, Medicine, and Data Justice restricted to Black people and for a Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Immunology and Inflammation restricted to women. ([Available positions.](#))

Choosing 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 should be made on academic grounds only. By requiring candidates to possess certain non-academic characteristics, Queen's will disadvantage promising scholars for no reason related to their academic accomplishments and abilities. Declining to consider on their academic merits 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, 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.

Queen's is also requiring applicants to have a "commitment to the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion" and must include in their applications "a statement of experience with, and commitment to, facilitation and promotion of equity, diversity, and inclusion" (from the Geography ad). Current tenure track positions note that "Evidence that the candidates will develop research programs with diversity and equity in mind will also be considered in this process." These requirements state a political or ideological criterion for hiring and, as such, are contrary to the best university traditions.

Because restricting applications 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,



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

Cc.: Sam Hiemstra, Rector
Mark Green, Provost and Vice-Principal (Academic)
Barbara Crow, Dean, Faculty of Arts and Science
Jane Philpott Dean, Faculty of Health Sciences and Director, School of Medicine
Jenn Stephenson, Associate Dean (Academic), Faculty of Arts and Science

Lynne-Marie Postovit, Head, Biomedical and Molecular Sciences
Juergen Dingel, Undergraduate Chair, School of Computing
Mohammad Zulkernine, Graduate Chair, School of Computing