



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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7 September 2021

Petra Hauf, PhD
Vice-President Saint John
University of New Brunswick
100 Tucker Park Road
PO Box 5050
Saint John, NB E2L 4L5

Dear Dr Hauf,

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.)

UNB Saint John is inviting applications for a NSERC Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in Data Science and Modelling for Coastal Ecosystems. The [advertisement](#) for the position stipulates that “only applicants who self-identify as a woman will be considered for this opportunity.”

Reserving academic positions for members of a specific sex or racial, ethnic, cultural or other group is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions be made on academic grounds only. By requiring candidates for academic appointments to possess certain non-

academic characteristics, the University of New Brunswick will disadvantage promising scholars for no reason related to their academic accomplishments, abilities or promise. Excluding meritorious candidates cannot be a sound way to build excellent programs.

Taking a scholar's sex into account when hiring has 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 sex or other group membership, having them specify an identity forces them to suppress their dignity or forgo applying. Finally, recruitment based on a non-academic criterion such as sex undermines respect for the ideal of dispassionate inquiry, as summoning people by identity tends to confuse scholarship with advocacy and to create consensus around dogma.

The ad states: “The University of New Brunswick is committed to fostering diversity within our community and developing an inclusive workplace that reflects the richness of the broader community that we serve.” Pursuing non-academic ends such as reflecting the richness of the broader community will compromise UNB’s academic mission and ethos. Attempting to serve non-academic ends at the expense of the merit principle signals that UNB is not committed to being the best academic institution it can be.

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