16 May 2023

Kevin Schneider, PhD
Head, Department of Computer Science
110 Science Place
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, SK S7N 5C9

Dear Dr Schneider,

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.)

The Department of Computer Science at the University of Saskatchewan has posted advertisements for "two Lecturer Faculty positions (full-time, without-term)."

According to the advertisement, "We encourage applications from members of equity groups (e.g., women, members of a racialized minority, Indigenous persons, and persons with disabilities). The Department of Computer Science supports excellence and recognizes that principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion are fundamental to this goal. Recruitment will be guided by the strong commitment of the University of Saskatchewan, the College of Arts and Science, and the Department of Computer Science to diversity, inclusion, and equity."

This paragraph implies that the hiring committee will give preference to applicants who meet certain non-academic criteria. Preferring an applicant because of his or her race, ethnicity, cultural affiliation, sex or gender is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that decisions at universities be consistent with academic values. By privileging applicants who possess certain non-academic characteristics, the University of Saskatchewan is disadvantaging many qualified scholars for no reason related to their accomplishments, abilities or promise. Devaluing meritorious candidates cannot be a sound way to achieve academic excellence.

Taking group membership 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 professors want to be valued for the quality of their work, asking

them to identify their race, sex or other identity invites them to suppress their dignity or forgo applying.

To support excellence, a department must not screen out qualified scholars and must evaluate applicants on the materials in their dossiers, not by skin colour or sex. Further, using university positions to pursue non-academic ends such as the promotion of certain ethnic groups places burdens on scholars that are unrelated to their academic duties. It also diminishes the academic mission of the university. Attempting to serve non-academic ends at the expense of the merit principle signals that the University of Saskatchewan is not committed to being the best university it can be.

As well, the ads require that applicants include in their dossiers an "an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) statement."

Requiring applicants to swear fealty to a particular conception of university community and university goals amounts to imposing a political or ideological criterion on hiring and, as such, is contrary to the best university traditions of academic freedom and scholarly independence, traditions that enable scholars to fashion their own values and that enjoin hiring committees to consider fairly, on academic grounds alone, applicants who are critical of prescribed commitments and doctrines.

Asking for commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion ideology and practice pressures academics into serving a social movement they might well not support. It will encourage applicants to prevaricate or to misrepresent their actual views, and even to engage in self-deception.

Such demands are inconsistent with academic commitments to intrepid and dispassionate research, for they will cause scholars to shy away from speaking positions they believe might appear at odds with EDI means or ends. The academic mission of the Department of Computer Science will suffer either because promising researchers and teachers will be screened out of job competitions or because a chilling orthodoxy will envelop the university. To require that prospective professors show they hold a particular set of views regarding social relations and responsibilities cannot but undermine candour, respect for intellectual autonomy and academic values generally.

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

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