



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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21 November 2022

Marsha Chechik, Acting Dean
Faculty of Information
University of Toronto
140 St. George Street
Toronto, ON M5S 3G6

Dear Dean Chechik,

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 Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto is seeking to fill a tenure-stream position in User Experience Design or Human-Computer Interaction.

According to the job ad, “We seek candidates who have demonstrated a commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and the promotion of a respectful and collegial learning and working environment through their application materials. Candidates therefore must submit a statement of contributions to equity and diversity, which might cover topics such as (but not limited to): teaching or research that incorporates a focus on

underrepresented communities, the development of inclusive pedagogies, or the mentoring of students from underrepresented groups.”

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.

Demanding evidence of commitment to equity, diversity and inclusion ideology 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.

As well, 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 Faculty of Information at the University of Toronto will suffer either because promising researchers and teachers will be screened out of job competitions or because a chilling orthodoxy will envelop the university.

The University of Toronto may properly insist that professors treat students fairly and that they evaluate their work against appropriate academic standards. To require instead 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Mercer', with a long, sweeping underline.

Mark Mercer, PhD
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