

MRU fires professor who espoused benefits of residential schools and criticized BLM movement

University teachers association says it's rare for professor with tenure to be dismissed

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<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/frances-widdowson-mount-royal-university-fired-1.6303734>



Frances Widdowson had been an associate professor at Mount Royal University in the department of economics, justice and policy studies since 2008. (easyuni.com)

A tenured Calgary professor who made headlines in 2020 for criticizing the Black Lives Matter movement and espousing the educational benefits of residential schools confirmed Tuesday she has been fired.

Frances Widdowson had been an associate professor at Mount Royal University in the department of economics, justice and policy studies since 2008.

She gained notoriety in 2020, when she said the Black Lives Matter movement had "destroyed" the university, that residential schools gave Indigenous children an education that "normally they wouldn't have received," and that tens of MRU faculty members had opposed her.

It prompted more than 6,000 people to sign a petition calling for her firing.

At the time, MRU president Tim Rahilly said the school was "reviewing the concerns in light of our strong commitment to academic freedom and freedom of expression and our established expectations of the behaviour of all members of the MRU community."

On Tuesday, both MRU and Widdowson confirmed to CBC News that she had been fired.

"I was generally criticizing 'woke' ideas," Widdowson said.

"Basically, identity politics that has become totalitarian, and is imposing itself on the university, and preventing people from openly discussing ideas."

After initially confirming Widdowson was no longer with the faculty, MRU provided a lengthier statement on Tuesday evening that said it is committed to fostering expression and free speech, and strives to be a model for allowing opposing viewpoints to coexist.

However, it said, academic freedom "does not justify harassment or discrimination."

"Mount Royal employees have the right to work in an environment that is respectful and free from harassment," it read in part.

"The collective agreement and MRU policies outline a process for resolving issues of workplace conduct, and decisions are always made following rigorous due process."

In response, Widdowson said Wednesday the university has "failed to implement the campus free speech policy they were required to adopt by the Alberta government in 2019."

"Instead, Mount Royal University is spending hundreds of thousands of dollars policing Twitter while at the same time raising tuition and cutting back on program delivery," Widdowson said.

"The Alberta government, the Mount Royal University Board of Governors, and the public should be very concerned about the mismanagement of public tax dollars by the current administration.

"As these matters are slated for arbitration, these violations of government directives designed to prevent illiberal activists from abusing power will become a matter of public record."

'I'm pretty shocked,' says Widdowson

Widdowson's case is going to arbitration in about a year, and she said Tuesday this requires her to be guarded with details surrounding her firing until then.

"I'm pretty shocked, I guess," Widdowson said at the time.

"I knew things were being pretty poisoned, obviously, but I thought Mount Royal still was a university that valued intellectual exchanges."

She cited her stance on trans activism and Indigenous issues as two areas that contributed to an "academic mob" who tried to have her removed.

"I tried to defend myself from that mob, and then this led to all sorts of things that happened."

What that entails, she said, will come out during her arbitration.

- [**Protesters call for mandatory anti-racism course at Mount Royal University**](#)
- [**Open letter to MRU signed by hundreds calls for more action against racism as school president pledges change**](#)

David Robinson, executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, says it's rare for tenured professors to be fired, as the bar for what could be considered grounds for dismissal is high.

"Tenure is basically a guarantee that the only reason you can be let go from your position at a university or college is for just cause — that is, you engaged in gross negligence or misconduct," he said.

"You can't be dismissed for your political views, your disciplinary views, your research, your teaching, as long as it conforms to professional standards," Robinson said.

Complaints against a professor can be put forward by other professors, funding agencies or by students.

Robinson said the onus is on the employer to prove that there was just cause for dismissal.

With files from Sarah Rieger, Hannah Kost and Jade Markus

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