



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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11 October 2022

Robert Gordon, PhD
President and Vice-Chancellor
The University of Windsor
401 Sunset Avenue
Windsor, ON N9B 3P4

Dear President Gordon,

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.)

I wrote to you on behalf of SAFS on 3 October of this year in connection with six tenure-track positions the school of computer science at the University of Windsor is seeking to fill. Applicants to those positions are to include in their dossiers a statement of commitment to Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization (EDID). As well, Windsor encouraged applicants who belong to certain racial, ethnic and gender groups to self-identify as such, presumably to increase their chance of being shortlisted.

Over the last week that many if not most of the job ads posted by the University of Windsor, from various departments, require a pledge of fealty to EDID principles and practices and suggest that preference will be given to scholars from particular racial, ethnic and gender groups. Indeed, the associate professor position the School of Social Work is advertising is *restricted* to scholars from a racial or ethnic group.

Requiring applicants to state a commitment 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, inclusion and decolonization principles and practices 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 EDID means or ends. Windsor's academic mission 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 hold a particular set of views regarding social relations and responsibilities cannot but undermine candour, respect for intellectual autonomy and academic values generally.

Restricting positions on such non-academic grounds as race, ethnicity, sex or cultural affiliation is a violation of the merit principle, the principle that academic decisions be made on academic grounds only. By restricting a position to candidates who possess certain academically irrelevant characteristics, the University of Windsor is disadvantaging many promising scholars for no reason related to their academic 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 scholars want to be valued for the quality of their research, their teaching, and their contributions to intellectual life, asking them to identify their race, ethnicity or other identity forces them to suppress their dignity or forgo applying. Finally, recruitment that takes non-academic criteria into account 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.

Because restricting positions on non-academic grounds is wrongfully discriminatory, doing so cannot serve to create a fair and equitable university. This normalizing of identity characteristics 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 "Herb Stein". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark Mercer, PhD
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