



December 21, 2021

Professor Mark Mercer
Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS)
PO Box 33056, Quinpool Centre
Halifax, NS B3L 4T6

**OFFICE OF THE
PROVOST & VICE-
PRESIDENT ACADEMIC**

920 KANEFF TOWER
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CANADA M3J 1P3

Dear Professor Mercer,

I am writing in response to your letter received on November 23, 2021, written on behalf of SAFS. In this correspondence, SAFS challenges the Faculty of Environmental and Urban Change's search for a tenure track professorship in physical geography, seeking representation from Black scholars. In this challenge, SAFS asserts that focused hiring is "a violation of the merit principle" and that it is "wrongfully discriminatory" to restrict applicants on non-academic grounds. You also suggest that this approach could have the effect of "harming individual scholars because others may see them in stereotypical ways and wrongly undervalue their work."

With respect, York University strongly disagrees with these assertions. As one of the largest universities in the country with one of the most diverse communities of students, faculty and staff, we believe that academic excellence requires a diversity of knowledge and active participation in the collegium by faculty with a range of different scholarly perspectives, backgrounds and lived experiences. We are committed to upholding the principles of equity and inclusion with respect to Black students, faculty and staff within our university. An important action we are taking as a University is to dedicate a number of positions, including the one referenced in your letter, to increasing the representation of Black scholars at York.

As the Province of Ontario's Anti-Black Racism Strategy asserts: "The impact and consequences of our history have created systemic barriers that prevent people from fully participating in all parts of society. This is especially true for Black Ontarians of all backgrounds." In recognizing this deeply entrenched societal issue, we have appointed a senior advisor on equity and representation at the university, who will work towards building a more inclusive community. This includes increasing both the number of Black faculty members and academic programming focused on the experiences of Black people to ensure that York University is advancing shared goals of equity, diversity and inclusion.

We maintain a comprehensive and rigorous collegial hiring process for all faculty positions to ensure that only candidates who meet our high academic standards are hired. Every academic appointment at York University meets the merit principle. The hiring of Black faculty members in 2021-22 is an effort to address under-representation. This approach is fully compliant with human rights legislation and is not "wrongfully discriminatory" in nature. There are excellent Black scholars in Canada and beyond our borders and we expect to receive multiple applications for this position and others like it. In the unlikely event that searches do not identify candidates who meet our standards of excellence, offers of employment will not be made.

In summary, the posting to which you refer is supported by a strategic vision at York University, that recognizes values of excellence in teaching and learning; progressive thinking embracing inclusivity and cross-cultural knowledge; supporting social justice and social responsibility, in addition to social and fiscal responsibility. We stand behind the approach we have taken here



and decline your request to alter it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lisa Philipps".

Lisa Philipps
Provost & Vice-President Academic