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ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND ITS LIMITS: WHEN FACULTY
BEHAVE BADLY
Glen Williams

The several arguments for defending free expression in universities are well known to readers of this newsletter. Many, perhaps most, of these defences are drawn from the work of John Stuart Mill, the nineteenth century’s most illustrious liberal thinker, and are regularly deployed here to check administrative overreach against nonconformist faculty members.

But there is another side that merits consideration - what are the responsibilities or obligations of individual faculty members in respect to nurturing academic freedom within their institutions? Mill considered freedom of expression as a social benefit with obligations for its promotion falling equally on the shoulders of individuals, their governors, and society at large. For example, in *On Liberty* he writes “the only way in which a human being can make some approach to knowing the whole of a subject, is by hearing

what can be said about it by persons of every variety of opinion, and studying all modes in which it can be looked at by every character of mind. No wise man ever acquired his wisdom in any mode but this; nor is it in the nature of human intellect to become wise in any other manner.”

Mill’s view was the received gospel among scholars in Canada’s liberal universities when my academic career began more than half a century ago. As undergraduates we were taught, mostly without prejudice, all the predominant approaches in our fields along with their historical antecedents. A commonly held notion was that the open and pluralist system of higher education in western countries produced flexible and creative problem-solvers who could more readily adapt to changing external circumstances than those in the soviet bloc who were indoctrinated in the rigid dogmatic truths of “scientific socialism.” Academic freedom was the bedrock on which pluralist liberal universities stood.

My discipline is political science. When enrolled as a student in Ed Broadbent’s third year modern political thought

course in late 1967, I first bumped into the idea that faculty members might have social responsibilities and obligations in exercising their academic freedom.

During the course, it was whispered among his students that Broadbent would soon be running for parliament as the NDP candidate in Oshawa. However, my recollection is that he never discussed his candidacy or the NDP election platform in class except perhaps to confirm that he would be running. Everyone, including Professor Broadbent, operated on the unspoken understanding that his ongoing partisan activism was a private activity which was not fully compatible with his teaching role as a university instructor. I remember being deeply impressed by his professionalism and restraint in the circumstances and by the fair and balanced way he treated with equal enthusiasm the socialist, liberal, and conservative thinkers he had placed on our syllabus.

Broadbent's clearly demarcated line of division between his public teaching duties in the classroom and his private pursuit of partisan politics outside the university was unremarkable for his time. And, I employed it as my point of reference through my own full time teaching career at Carleton University, only rarely encountering colleagues who would openly challenge it.

Carleton's collective agreement with its faculty union defines academic freedom as "freedom in carrying out teaching and in discussing their subject." The plain sense wording of this clause makes it clear that the freedom of professors "to discuss" is circumscribed by its direct relevance to the subject matter they have been assigned to teach—that which is openly published in the written form of a course outline/contract for students and departmental colleagues. Of course, academic freedom goes beyond classroom teaching; it also includes communication in an academic setting of the professional, scholarly research findings of a professor.

During my nearly four decades of teaching, it was always my understanding that a professor's personal opinions on world events, religious affiliation, voting preferences, NHL hockey teams, laundry soaps etc. etc. were not covered by academic freedom because the protections offered by academic freedom were never designed to extend far outside one's field(s) of professional expertise. (In my own case, and in keeping with the liberal view that university students should be given the opportunity to consider "every variety of opinion," I always promised in the first lecture of my undergraduate courses that by the end of the course they would absolutely not know my personal opinion of the several different approaches to the subject that would be reviewed in the weeks to follow.)

Let's be clear—freedom of speech is not the same as academic freedom. Academics can claim the same rights to freedom of speech as any other private citizen when

they speak outside of the classroom on political or social issues. But one ceases to be a "private" citizen when one trades on their institutional affiliation to add legitimacy/special weight to the expression of their private political opinions—i.e. opinions not flowing directly from their professional, scholarly research agenda—either inside or outside the classroom. And so, academic freedom in a professional setting and a private citizen's right to freedom of speech (and politick) should never be conflated. Nor should it be possible for academics to shelter their non-academic politicking by claiming to enjoy a special set of rights absolutely not available to employees of other corporate or state enterprises in society, namely academic freedom.

But increasingly academic freedom and freedom of speech have been conflated in academic life. This conflation has been a feature of the woke Cultural Revolution that swept through campuses in the decades after the Cold War.

Woke thinking shattered the value consensus that supported the norms and institutional conventions surrounding academic freedom. In fact, wokeism is hostile to the very existence of a liberal university in a liberal democratic polity. Its views have little or nothing in common with the defences of free expression that flow from the liberalism of Locke, Madison and John Stuart Mill. Wokism is instead grounded in the authoritarianism of Rousseau, who invited the educated in society to "force" the masses "to be free" and the totalitarianism of Lenin who prescribed dictatorship by an enlightened, revolutionary "vanguard party" since the working class by itself could never transcend trade union reformism.

The woke turned the liberal university's normative foundations upside down. Rejected as oppressive was the liberal view of the university as a community of individual scholars where merit is determined solely by scholarly accomplishments. Instead, the woke imagined the university as a battleground for group power struggles—organized primarily around biological markers such as sex, skin colour, and ethnocultural origin—between the oppressed/marginalized and the "privileged" who are their historic oppressors. The woke history of the west is an account of the continuing theft by European colonialists and their descendents of the land and possessions of non-European 'victims' of colonization.

To summarize, wokeism does not understand academic freedom in the same manner that liberals might because wokesters have little or no regard for the natural rights of individuals. While they might appropriate the language surrounding academic freedom, they employ it to further their political agenda through weaponizing it to protect their own speech while denying its protection to those whose speech they find offensive.

The ugly anti-Jewish turmoil on Canadian campuses that

followed in the wake of Hamas' brutal October 7, 2023, terror attack on Israel is, unfortunately, rich in illustrations of how wokeism has been assailing the conventional norms and institutions that underpin those of us who seek to defend traditional liberal academic freedom. Jews on campuses have faced the double whammy of guilt by association with the woke-demonized "settler-colonial" state of Israel along with an accompanying resurgence of the many garden-varieties of age-old anti-semitism.

On such example—Natalie Knight, Langara College—is already familiar to readers of this Newsletter from Issue 97, February 2024. Knight, an English instructor, gave an off-campus speech in which she praised Hamas' terror attack on Israeli civilians as an "amazing, brilliant offensive" and then, following the lifting of her brief suspension by the College, participated in a march on Langara campus to encourage like-minded supporters to "'know that you can have the right to speak out, and you can face repression, and still win.... They made it seem like I did something wrong,' Knight opined" (*Langara Voice*).

By her own account, Knight believed she was entitled to shelter her activism and political incitement to others on campus under the academic freedom umbrella that protects scholarly research and teaching. In deciding to dismiss Knight, the College referenced its duty to "support a safe, respectful, and inclusive learning and working environment"—in short, it sought to protect academic freedom on its campus from an incendiary and divisive activist attack.

It was not just pro-Hamas individuals like Knight behaving badly; groups of professors, claiming the shelter of academic freedom, also banded together to lend their on-campus megaphone to broadcast pro-Hamas talking points. In April 2024, a "Palestine Solidarity Committee," created by York University's Politics Department, submitted its recommendations after being mandated to "develop departmental policy/protocol to define and address anti-Palestinian, Islamophobic, and anti-Arab racism to ensure the protection of students and faculty to speak about, teach about, and support Palestine freely and without fear of reprisal."

In its nine page report, the Committee declared that on-campus supporters of Israel were racists—guilty of "anti-Palestinian racism." "Zionism is a settler colonial project and ethno-religious ideology in service of a system of Western imperialism that upholds global white supremacy," the report proclaimed. And, disagreement with their opinions would be racist because "anti-Palestinian racism also includes censoring those standing in solidarity with Palestine and Palestinians."

No surprise, their direct attack on freedom of expression in the academy is grounded in the language of academic freedom. But academic freedom is placed in the context of

"upholding and strengthening York University's commitment to decolonization, equity, diversity and inclusion," and we are later told that "academic freedom does not require neutrality." Academic freedom is portrayed as overlapping activist political speech—"the Department of Politics is resolute in its support of all members—faculty, staff and students included—who speak up about the current war in Palestine and Israel and who bring their expertise and experience to bear on public conversations."

Even long-established professional associations for the promotion of scholarly research have fallen under the sway of the woke at the cost of free expression and academic freedom in the academy. Take, for example, the Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA), which was founded in the early twentieth century to further the professional, academic study of politics in Canada. Its Articles of Incorporation contain an unambiguous declaration of institutional neutrality obviously designed to guard against the possibility of the organization being hijacked at any point in its future by political activists or partisans—"The Association as such, will not assume a position upon any question of public policy not directly related to the discipline of political science or commit its members to any position thereupon."

Even so, that's exactly what happened at its Learned Society meetings at McGill University in June 2024. The CPSA Executive moved its sessions off campus in solidarity with the pro-Hamas campers then "occupying" McGill property. "The violence committed by Israel's government and military against innocent Palestinians must stop," declared an executive-authored email which went on to glorify the protesters "courageously speaking truth to power" and incorporated weblinks to contribute financially to their cause.

Stripping a professional scholarly organization of the neutrality needed to serve all its members in equal measure through the promotion of free and open expression, the CPSA Executive abused their fiduciary trust and unmasked themselves as crude political activists. Letters protesting their activist email were left unanswered or, sometimes, a short reply would be generated containing the dismissive, patronizing phrase "while I don't propose to engage with the substance of your remarks." Academic freedom cannot survive where scholarly institutions lose their neutrality and determine that academics who dissent from woke orthodoxy must be "forced to be free." Academic freedom requires an environment where persuasion trumps coercion. Authoritarian minds, convinced of their own moral superiority, default to coercion.

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turing, 1879-1994 (Third Edition).

SUBSTANTIATING DISMISSALS OF FACULTY MEMBERS

Peter Bowal

A gradual transformation taking hold on Canadian university campuses is the quiet but certain silencing of independent and conservative voices. For all the lip service about embracing tolerance and viewpoint diversity, the academic world bends ruthlessly toward ideological conformity. Faculty and students who refuse to proclaim and support the dominant left-leaning belief system rarely thrive in the creative arts, humanities, social sciences and professional schools.

Candidates with independent dispositions and conservative worldviews are more likely to be passed over for hiring in these departments. As Thomas Sowell is quoted as saying, “the next time academics tell you how important diversity is, ask how many Republicans are in their sociology department.” If they were hired in an era when quality prevailed over ideology or otherwise managed to score a precious tenure track position by sufficiently veiling their political orientation, they may find themselves more likely to be red-circled, ignored, not renewed, marginalized or harassed out. If that does not work, the politicized academic administration and militantly disagreeable colleagues may choose a frontal attack: make a case for termination for cause on the basis of harassment, toxic and violent thoughts and words, causing offence, denying truth, making folks mentally distressed and ill, (x)phobic, misogynist, colonialist, and (invariably, for good measure) racist.

HR departments assert privacy of personnel files and impose gag orders on their victims, so it is impossible to know how many Canadian faculty members, even tenured ones, are terminated from their positions each year. Academic unions are often in the grip of the same left-leaning enchantment and are unmotivated or incompetent to effectively assist their terminated faculty members. The professoriate would be stunned to learn of the fragile state of academic freedom in Canada today. The number of faculty members being culled on personal and ideological grounds, under a range of pretenses, would shock and concern everyone.

My proposal in this article is simple: *any termination of faculty members' academic employment should undergo the same substantiating process of collective scrutiny that was exercised in their hiring.* In other words, *terminating* a faculty member should follow approximately the same process of authentication and consensus that the *hiring* decision utilized.

¹The opening narrative, while essentially true, has been altered in non-substantive ways to conceal identities.

Case Illustration

A long-serving tenured full professor at a Canadian public university who refused to cover for his dean's incompetence was summarily terminated.¹ A situation arose where the dean assumed the senior faculty member would deceive his students to conceal the dean's mismanagement. The dean, who had never discussed the impending inconvenient truth with the faculty member, was livid when the faculty member spoke honestly with the students. When a few of them sought answers that proved embarrassing, this humiliated dean immediately suspended the tenured faculty member and hastened to terminate his employment and, inevitably, his academic career.

The dean only had to convince her friend, the outgoing Provost, to authorize the firing and she wasted no time to do that behind the scenes. The termination came during the summer break when everyone was hiding from Covid. The successful 30-year tenured career of the faculty member was over in seven weeks.

When the feminist lawyers for the academic union looked at the grievance the following year, they decided this was a good time for the professor to retire. They prepared no defence. The university's lawyers, on the other hand, rebuked the dean and Provost ‘what were you thinking – there is no cause for this dismissal!’ A settlement was imposed. The faculty member was gone and never worked again.

In the end, this kneejerk, personal, scapegoating takedown of the professor cost the university close to a million public dollars. It caused immeasurable grief for the faculty member and his family, major disruption for students, and reputational damage to the university. Everyone had lost something from the experience. Within two years, the dean returned to being a regular professor and the Provost resigned and left the country.

Similar scenarios play out at public universities across Canada. It could be an act of insubordination, a competitive slight, a political squabble, or difference in academic perspective. Some thin-skinned dean or department head has a falling out with a faculty member and seeks to enact vengeance. What is no more than a personal disagreement quickly escalates into a classic power struggle whereby the academic boss puts everything on the line to terminate the colleague, and is often able to do so quickly and privately.

The Academic *Hiring* Model

The modern academic hiring process – as part of collegial governance of the institution – is notorious for being overly democratic, representative, consultative and agonizingly slow. It is a crawling ordeal expected to follow internal policies, university-wide policies, traditions and recruitment framework minima in the Collective Agree-

ment. It is also expensive in terms of faculty time and money invested when shortlisted candidates are invited in succession for multi-day campus visits.

A Committee is struck by election or appointment at some local level, with four to seven members which include one or more representatives of students, staff members, subject area (departmental) colleagues and external faculty members. Usually someone from the disciplinary area will be designated as Chair to steer this Selection Committee, whether that person wants to or is experienced or gifted in doing so. The Committee may start by defining the role being filled and ideal characteristics sought in the successful candidate.

After labouring for up to six months, the Selection Committee's appointment recommendations are technically only advisory to the dean. Some deans have rejected the recommended candidate(s) and restarted the whole process, sometimes with a newly reconstituted Committee the following year. Ultimately, the dean's recommendation is also advisory to the Provost and still subject to the President's approval.

This expensive, protracted process recognizes that a tenurable position is a privileged, highly coveted, lifetime public job which requires different intersecting skill sets for long term success. Since few tenured faculty members resign young, the initial appointment potentially is a hiring decision for an entire career that could impact generations. In addition to overhead costs, these increasingly scarce lifetime academic jobs pay out millions of dollars in salary and benefits over that time. Accordingly, it is fitting to tap the brakes, slow the process, fully canvas the open market, and carefully deliberate, using explicit agreed-upon criteria, to identify and land – by consensus, if not unanimously – the best candidate.

The Academic *Firing* Model

While I consider the hiring model can be excessive and cumbersome in practice, it seeks to ensure fairness by prescribing clear rules and procedures to be followed in every case. It diffuses responsibility for the final decision over several people. It prolongs the decision so everyone has time to carefully consider and compare the options in the spirit of genuine analysis and collegial governance. It is a model designed to minimize the impact of political predispositions and personal preferences.

At the other end of the employment spectrum controlled by the university – dismissal for cause – there is inexplicably no provision for collegial governance. The dean or department head, an administrative office holder for a fixed term of service, is not the employer but is often permitted to act as such. Usually, there are no faculty and school-level

policies that govern termination for cause. The topic may be considered too awkwardly repulsive to warrant a policy. Many academics mistakenly assume tenured faculty members are never terminated.

Since the professor in question is a member of the academic union, the Collective Agreement will normally prescribe the process for termination for cause. The factual test for sufficient cause for termination of a tenured faculty member is the same as for any other employee, namely that one has unilaterally breached the employment contract in a substantial way that objectively renders continued employment unviable. Applied to the academic context, the language of the Collective Agreement would read something like: termination for cause where “good and sufficient reason” exists, which includes gross misconduct, incompetence, or persistent neglect of an academic member's duty.²

The critical issue is ‘who gets to decide what constitutes (for example) gross misconduct?’ This concern is even more salient where the contours and protections of academic freedom must be evaluated and applied. I maintain that the collective judgment of a representative Committee sitting in judgment of the dean or head's condemnation should be instituted in lieu of the current commonplace method of the dean or head and Provost abruptly and decisively ending one's academic career in a private process.

Deans and heads can cultivate animosity, as well as unmerited favour, for individual faculty members in their unit. Even single incidents to which the administrator takes umbrage, such as the uttering a controversial word or thought, taking a conscientious position in the name of collegial governance that is viewed as un-cooperative, questioning a policy or proposal, refusing to participate in pronoun protocols, speaking truth to power, and resisting expectations to lie for the dean (as happened in the case described above) – other colleagues should assess with fair procedure whether these should end one's career. As it is now at most Canadian post-secondary institutions, the dean or head can serve as accuser, prosecutor, judge and sentencer. The Provost is intended to be an independent authority but they are rarely objective as to a dean or head who they appointed and who reports to them, in comparison to a regular faculty member. Provosts have an interest in trusting their deans.

Conclusion

A university's unilateral termination for cause of a continuing faculty member who possesses academic freedom is as consequential as the original appointment of that faculty member. The recruitment and appointment process is heavily regulated for collegial governance, legitimacy and

²A Collective Agreement, at most, might contain a speed bump to slow the firing, such as requiring any replacement instructor to come from the ranks of current faculty or waiting two weeks to hire from outside. However, unions, in their alacrity to please university employers, can and do waive these obstacles.

transparent fairness. By comparison, the termination process – invariably private, quick, and lacking in procedural safeguards – merely involves one highly motivated administrator and another aligned academic administrator to confirm the decision.³

The process for firing a continuing faculty member for cause should be as robustly authenticating and substantiating as the process in play for hiring one. Terminations should be taken out of the hands of the accusing dean or head and transferred to a Committee to grant the impugned faculty member the right to be heard and other procedural justice rights and take the time to objectively investigate and deliberate before sending its report to the Provost.

By now, some readers will think, ‘job discipline and dismissal is a private, personnel matter not for public disclosure’. True, universities are bound to keep such matters confidential, but employees can speak freely about their situation. Until shackled by a non-disclosure agreement as part of a settlement, employees can waive confidentiality and privacy. As a lawyer, I have seen privacy frequently and primarily used as a shield for disgusting employer behaviour. Leave it to the faculty member to decide what level of privacy should operate. Academic committees routinely deal with hiring, salary, rank, merit, promotion, tenure and other personnel decisions of their colleagues. They submit and are bound to confidentiality in all those matters. Termination-for-cause committees would be no different.

This reform would require negotiation and writing into Collective Agreements this substantiating process for terminations-for-cause, one that parallels the academic recruitment process. In my experience, unions use their regular re-negotiation cycles to tinker with increments, ceilings and compensation brackets. For their part, universities are not inclined to surrender any of their prerogative to discipline and terminate faculty members they despise. Even if that means risking harmful resentments that damage the collegial fabric, sustaining obscene internal costs and paying large bags of public money to discard faculty members a few administrators deem undesirable, institutions will continue to conceal the full costs of their imprudence and carry on.

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ACADEMIC FREEDOM AND FACULTY FEEDBACK

Derek Pyne

SAFS has highlighted many ways in which academic freedom violations occur at Canadian universities. However, little attention has been given to claims of defamation

against faculty providing feedback that, in some cases, has even been requested by the university. There also has been sparse discussion of union politics being involved in the making of harassment claims with respect to this feedback.

These are important issues not only because of the academic freedom violations involved but also because of the loss in value of the feedback. Presumably, there would be no reason for feedback if it is not genuine.

Much of the discussion below involves my experiences at Thompson Rivers University (TRU). However, some legal references are made to cases at other universities.

Feedback on Appointments to Academic Positions

In *Slavutych v. Baker et al.* [1976] 1 S.C.R. 254, the Supreme Court of Canada dealt with claims of defamation in cases where faculty are requested to provide confidential feedback. That case involved a faculty member in the University of Alberta’s Department of Slavonic Languages who was fired for providing very negative feedback on a colleague’s tenure application. However, the Supreme Court sided with the faculty member and found that qualified privilege applied.

In 2018, I provided feedback for the search committee for an Associate Dean’s position at TRU. This feedback was specifically allowed for in the Collective Agreement between TRU and its faculty union. Most of my feedback was about the then-interim Associate Dean, Raymond Cox, who was the university’s favoured candidate. I primarily listed publications he had in predatory journals, based on the accepted listings of such journals. I also warned that a lot of media attention was being paid to predatory publications. A Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) report cited my warning as a ‘hypothetical’ (Mac Lean and Graebner, 2019).

TRU claimed my feedback was defamation and responded by issuing an indefinite suspension. The then-president of SAFS sent a letter to TRU about the issue (Mercer, November 15, 2018).

The most basic defamation defence is truth. At no time did TRU deny the truth of my feedback. Moreover, when I mentioned the Slavutych case to the then-Human Resources Director, Larry Phillips, he responded by saying that ‘defamation was whatever he said it was.’

The union was only willing to file a grievance for a procedural issue, claiming that other issues were covered by using the phrase “and any other relevant article of the TRU/TR-UFA Collective Agreement”. Later, TRU objected to this interpretation. Subsequent union officials were willing to contest TRU on this point. The union’s lawyer came up with an imaginative, if less than honest, argument to support the union’s position. Nonetheless, a labour arbitra-

³Grievance arbitrations that follow the termination are also conducted in private.

tor sided with TRU and agreed that the grievance did not cover substantive issues (*Thompson Rivers University v Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association*, 2020 CanLII 108878 (BC LA)).

Moreover, early on, the union even argued that neither academic freedom nor *Slavutych v. Baker* were issues applicable to the case. In writing their submission to a BC Labour Relations Board (LRB) hearing, Weldon Cowen, on behalf of the Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of BC (which is the parent organization of the Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association), claimed that the submission was not confidential as required by *Slavutych v. Baker* (Cowen, 2019). This was in spite of the fact that the standard form the business school uses for such submissions clearly states: “Please submit your feedback form in confidence to [insert contact], no later than ...”

Cowen also repeatedly claimed that my academic freedom had not been violated. For example, he stated: “The association did not file a grievance alleging a violation of academic freedom because there is no evidence that Dr. Pyne’s academic freedom has been curtailed” (Cowen, 2019, p. 7).

Creating a Catch-22 situation, the LRB ruled that they did not have jurisdiction to address the question of academic freedom, and thus did not order TRUFA to file a grievance covering it (*Pyne v Thompson Rivers University* 2019 CanLII 68597 (BC LRB)). Nonetheless, the later CAUT report found that my academic freedom clearly had been infringed.

The LRB decision came out before the arbitration decision concluded that the grievance did not cover substantive issues. Contrary to the later arbitration decision, the LRB accepted the union’s position that the grievance did cover other issues.

It is likely that TRU’s real objections were to my original article on predatory publications by TRU faculty members (Pyne, 2017). They likely considered this a more politically acceptable way of retaliating against me for the article. After all, the feedback was confidential and could have simply been ignored. Nonetheless, if TRU really was concerned with receiving feedback, it is perhaps worse, as their actions ensured that they would be deprived of honest responses.

Retaliation for Criticizing the Union

TRU also took actions against me for criticisms I made of the union refusing to file grievances specific to the academic freedom violations discussed in the previous section. On June 10, 2020, I posted a link to a letter the Brock University Faculty Association had issued about the Tomáš Hudlický Academic Freedom case at their university.⁴ The main text in the posting simply stated:

Some good news for a change. Unlike Thompson Rivers University Faculty Association, it seems that some university unions are not opposed to academic freedom. One can debate some of the details of the following statement but the bottom line is that it comes out in support of academic freedom, even when it goes against the university, and the union’s, positions (Pyne, 2020).

In the comments section, I added a few tags to TRU and FPSE officials such as Weldon Cowan (mentioned above), Krista Lussier (the then Chief Steward of TRUFA), and Tara Lyster (then Vice President of TRUFA, and now President). TRU would issue a one-year suspension for this. The then-president of SAFS issued a letter criticizing the suspension (Mercer, July 27, 2020).

Unfortunately, unlike the Supreme Court’s decision regarding defamation, labour arbitrators have ruled that employers do have the right under harassment policies to interfere with union activities (one example specifically involving a university can be found in *Mount Royal Faculty Association and Board of Governors of Mount Royal University*, 2011 CanLII 152313 (AB GAA), <https://canlii.ca/t/jbh0j>, retrieved on 2024-09-11). Nonetheless, the same basic issues are involved. It prevents (in this case the union) from receiving honest feedback.

Conclusions

There is no reason for a university to request feedback and specify its submission in the collective agreement if it is not going to protect honesty. This is especially true when the feedback is confidential. It defeats the whole rationale for such feedback.

Supreme Court decisions, such as *Slavutych v. Baker*, serve no effective purpose as long as the union has control over the grievance process and refuses to file a grievance. Supreme Court of Canada decisions state that those providing such feedback have no recourse, as the union has a monopoly on representation (see *Weber v. Ontario Hydro*, 1995 CanLII 108 (SCC), [1995] 2 SCR 929, <https://canlii.ca/t/1frj9>, retrieved on 2024-09-11).

The only way I can see around this problem would be to have some independent organization, similar to provincial ombudspersons, empowered to accept academic freedom complaints. Currently, unions do not have a monopoly over Human Rights Commissions or Office of Information and Privacy complaints. This would simply be expanding the framework to academic freedom violations.

The problem with universities (and other employers) protecting union officials who act in accordance with their wishes is currently a greater problem, given that existing case law allows this. Nonetheless, having a third party

⁴The then-president of SAFS sent a letter to Brock University about this issue (Mercer, June 9, 2020).

handle these as academic freedom complaints would be a way around this problem.

A potential disadvantage is that this would create a separate framework for universities when one could argue that the same issues are involved in feedback in other workplaces. Nonetheless, it would be an improvement over the status quo, at least for some workplaces.

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THE POLITICAL BELIEF OF EDI: THE CASE OF THE MARCH 2021 AFC MEETING AT MRU

Frances Widdowson

From 2008-2021 I was a professor at Mount Royal University (MRU), where I received tenure in 2011. One of the reasons given for my hiring was my scholarship – research that challenged the “nation-to-nation” (or “parallelist”) position on aboriginal issues. My co-authored book with Albert Howard, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry: The Deception Behind Indigenous Cultural Preservation*, was soon to be published by McGill-Queen’s University Press. This book would be very critical of the “indigenization” elements of what would later become aspects of “Equity, Diversity and Inclusion” (EDI) initiatives at MRU.

My time at MRU was positive until 2014, as my academic freedom was protected by two principled administrators, Provost Robin Fisher and Manuel Mertin, the Dean of Arts. The most important example of this was when *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry* was published in October 2008. This created a firestorm in the nascent “indigenizing” area of MRU, and resulted in a representative of the students’ association sending an email to Provost Fisher demanding that I be disciplined. When Fisher received this email, he replied stating that MRU protected the academic freedom of its faculty and then he copied me on the correspondence. This defused any mobbing campaign that might have taken root at that time.

In 2014, however, two initiatives signalled the beginning of the end for MRU as an academic institution. The first was that Kathy Shailer—the diversity hire who had replaced Robin Fisher as Provost—announced in an Arts Faculty Meeting that we would be “indigenizing” MRU. The second was an “Equity Seminar and Workshop at MRU” hosted by the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), which promoted land acknowledgements on course syllabi and justified targeted hiring on the basis of identity characteristics. At the time, I couldn’t help wondering why CAUT, an organization formed to protect academic freedom in Canada, would be advocating for a prescribed doctrine.

The reason was that we were beginning to see the takeover of universities – both in terms of administration and the unions – by EDI ideology. This ideology is often difficult to understand because it involves the complex interaction of three, highly contested, terms. Furthermore, the meanings of the terms deployed by EDI activists are different than what is assumed in common usage. This article will attempt to shed some light on how these terms are deployed, as well as show how the imposition of this political belief ended up discriminating against me in an Arts Faculty Council meeting on March 5, 2021.

What are Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion?

In trying to understand what is meant by the terms “equity”, “diversity”, and “inclusion”, one comes to the realization that it is a tangled knot influenced by three major developments – “postmodernism”, “woke-ism”, and “diversity managerialism”. Postmodernism provides the foundation for both woke-ism and diversity managerialism because it constitutes a rejection of the Enlightenment’s acceptance of reason and the pursuit of universal truth. In postmodernism, objectivity is replaced with subjectivity, as it assumes that a system of power, not the extent to which an idea corresponds with reality, determines what is accepted as being true.

In universities, postmodernism’s denial of objective truth made the emergence of woke-ism – identity politics that purports to pursue social justice that has become totalitarian – possible because it created a lack of confidence in scholarly standards that enabled activist programs such as black studies and women’s studies to gain a foothold. These activist programs then took over the machinery of universities, resulting in policy documents demanding targeted hiring and admissions. The rhetoric of “woke” activists appealed to those identifying as “left-wing”, as it asserted that this would act to “dismantle” the capitalist system by “centring” the “ways of knowing” of those perceived to be oppressed. This assumption was based on the arguments of theorists like Herbert Marcuse, whose ideas were actually contrary to socialism as he had given up on the working class as the basis for revolutionary struggle. According to Marcuse, a socially just system would be built on the rubble of the old structure by enabling politically correct intellectuals like himself to combine their efforts with activists from the “ghetto” populations made up of black people, women, and sexual minorities.

Unlike “woke-ism”, diversity managerialism did not originate with university professors who initially were associated with socialism. Instead, it arose in the liberal public administration literature, specifically through the work of H. George Frederickson. Frederickson argued that “social equity” should be the third pillar of the administrative state (along with economy and efficiency). To achieve social equity, “shares” must be “adjusted” so that citizens could be “made equal”. Being “made equal”, in Frederickson’s view, concerned reforming the capitalist system through increasing the proportion of groups perceived to be underrepresented in managerial and professional positions. Having more blacks, indigenous people, women, and sexual minorities in decision-making roles, it was assumed, would eliminate aggregate inequalities between groups (but not within them) and put them on “equal” footing to bring about a more “just” social order.

Although there have been numerous attempts to unpack the term equity, as well as the use of diversity and inclusion to bring it about, one of the most illuminating discussions

comes from James Lindsay on his website *New Discourses*. Once one gets past Lindsay’s dubious contention that EDI is “Marxist”, “communist”, “socialist”, or a combination of fascism and communism, a number of important insights emerge. (Lindsay, who is usually an astute observer of manipulative language games, seems to think that the Communist Party of China is “communist” because of its title.)

In addition to seeing equity, not diversity, as the goal, Lindsay notes that because of the influence of postmodernism’s prizing of subjectivity over objectivity, attempts to reach conceptual clarity are undermined. Instead, the words used in arguments to support EDI embody Orwellian doublespeak and pretend to have one meaning when in reality another is being deployed. When the word “equity” is used, for example, it is generally assumed to mean anti-discrimination or equality of opportunity – such as removing barriers by providing disabled people with wheelchair ramps. What EDI activists actually mean, however, is that when high status management and professional positions do not proportionally represent designated members of groups declared to be oppressed, this is evidence that they are actively discriminating against them, and mechanisms must be put in place to artificially inflate their numbers.

The mechanisms used to bring about this conception of “equity” are diversity and inclusion. But, again, these terms do not use the commonly understood definitions. Diversity is not about ensuring that there are a variety of viewpoints to facilitate different sources of expertise being brought to bear on solving a problem, but increasing the number of members groups who are perceived to be marginalized. This also requires “inclusion” mechanisms to ensure that those hired or admitted can be retained. It is not enough to prevent discrimination; identities of targeted groups must be affirmed and celebrated so that they feel that they “belong”.

In universities, the affirmation and celebration of identities is connected to how “knowledge” has been redefined under the influence of postmodernism. Knowledge is no longer concerned with the correspondence of claims with reality or how true beliefs are justified; instead, it is tied to one’s “positionality” in a perceived hierarchy of oppression. EDI activists argue that the “way of knowing” of those designated as oppressed must be “centred”, resulting in the censoring of oppositional viewpoints and the purging of dissenters. In true Orwellian doublespeak, therefore, “diversity” means a homogeneity of ideas and “inclusion” results in the exclusion of any disconfirmation.

EDI as a Political Belief: The Case of the March 5, 2021 AFC Meeting

Although EDI poses as a neutral way to combat discrimination, as well as the “inclusion” of “diverse” perspectives, it is actually an ideology because it is a system of beliefs

and values that explains society and prescribes the role to be played by public institutions. The acceptance of such a political belief without question is destructive to all institutions because it attacks the principle of merit by insisting on including applicants who are less qualified. However, EDI is particularly pernicious in universities because, in order to protect academic freedom—the *raison d'être* of universities—political beliefs cannot be imposed on either professors or students. This is why MRU's Collective Agreement specifies “political beliefs” as one of the prohibited grounds of discrimination (22.1.1.).

The negative consequences of EDI for academic freedom can be seen with respect to one of its major initiatives—indigenization. Under the auspices of indigenization, MRU brought in targets for indigenous students to try to make the institution more “diverse”. It then initiated an Indigenous Strategic Plan from 2016-2021 so that the university could enhance “inclusion” by fostering respect for indigenous “ways of knowing”. This was followed, in 2019, by the university and the faculty association signing a memorandum of understanding to include “Indigenous knowledge” in tenure requirements. Finally, in 2021, the university initiated its “colonized mind” poster campaign, where faculty members and students were castigated as having deficient thought processes if they challenged, for example, the dubious claim that Christopher Columbus encountered indigenous people from the Americas in Ireland before he set sail for those shores.

Although the promotion of these EDI features pretended that they would be compatible with academic freedom, the demand for inclusivity resulted in critical viewpoints being censored and the ostracizing and purging of dissidents. There were many incidents of this occurring with respect to my case, eventually resulting in my firing in 2021, but one example will suffice. This concerned a question that I asked about indigenous “star knowledge” in September 2019, which then resulted in a further question on March 5, 2021 about whether we could discuss whether “indigenous science” was science. The latter question was one of the reasons why MRU decided that termination was the appropriate disciplinary measure on December 20, 2021.

In September 2019, I attended a talk by Gregory Cajete at the University of Calgary, and asked him a question about whether indigenous “star knowledge”, because it was pre-telescope, should be included in the astronomy curriculum. This resulted in Gabrielle Lindstrom (now known as Gabrielle Weasel Head) asserting that this was “harassment” because, in her view, asking if indigenous science was science was “racist and discriminatory”.

Although this comment was found not to be harassment by an investigator paid for by MRU, the matter did not end there. On March 5, 2021, at an Arts Faculty Council meeting, it was being claimed that many indigenous scholars had left MRU because they felt unsafe. Because

saying that indigenous science was not science was asserted to be “racist and discriminatory” by Gabrielle Lindstrom, and Lindstrom had recently left MRU after filing her complaint, I asked the Dean whether saying indigenous science was not science would be an example of making indigenous scholars feel unsafe.

This comment led an indigenous scholar, Leonzo Barreno, to say that he was “insulted” by my comment and found it to be “laughable”, leading me to put two words in the chat—“Insulted? Laughable?” As a result of my question and these two words in the chat, I was attacked by several faculty members. In response, I raised a “Point of Privilege” and said that I found this behaviour to be completely unacceptable, and that I was tired of being called a racist and a hater for making academic arguments. I also asserted that there was a terrible double standard in the Faculty of Arts, because, on the one hand, we were told to be “civil” and “professional”, and yet, on the other, people felt that they could attack me with impunity for asking a completely academically relevant question.

Even though my behaviour on March 5, 2021 was investigated and found not to constitute harassment, MRU decided to make it one of the reasons why termination was “an appropriate disciplinary measure”. Jennifer Pettit, the Dean of Arts, even claimed in an email exchange with the Provost that this constituted “the worst incident” of my alleged disruption of meetings. In the arbitration hearing, Dean Pettit continued to argue that I had “disrupted” the meeting, even though a video of the meeting was shown indicating that it was I who had been attacked by “disruptive” comments. Two faculty members, the previous Associate Dean Joseph Anderson and Sociology and Anthropology Chair Mary-Lee Mulholland agreed. Mulholland even mentioned that she had met with Leonzo Barreno at his home that evening to reassure him that the whole Sociology and Anthropology department was behind him because he was just “defending his people”.

Conclusion

The events that transpired in the March 5, 2021 Arts Faculty Council meeting are just one example of how the prescribed doctrine of EDI results in institutional censorship and the purging of dissidents. Because of the desire to achieve “equity” through increasing the number of indigenous faculty and students on campus, there is a need to prevent any questioning of indigenization to ensure that they feel they belong. Instead of telling indigenous scholars that it is inappropriate for them to ridicule people who are making academic arguments in a body of collegial governance, their “unprofessional” behaviour is responded to with coddling and assurances that they will be protected from “violent” words.

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AUTO-IMMUNE DEFICIENCY SYNDROME AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM

Tamari Kitossa

It is not self-evident to most that we are full throttle in an era of State-sponsored tyranny passing under the colour of the medicalization of everything. Where medical therapeutics are not imposed under the prescribed doctrine that ‘vaccines’ are the royal road to optimal human health, other doctrines, socio-psycho-political in nature, are weaponized by the governing and administrative classes on behalf of a ‘moral community’ against the heretics who espouse wrong-think.

To question these deep and pervasive doctrines, to expose them as iatrogenic, is warrant in the academy for the administrative vanguard of the moral community to adjudicate and pass judgment on both scholastic and identity conflicts. The censure of Tomáš Hudlický stands as an example. But, contrary to the Tri-Council Policy on Research Ethics, the administrative class is not alone in its efforts to censor ideas. The Bruce Gilley case stands as an example that the effort is now global. Editorial board members, journals and their publishers, and incensed mobs bearing figurative torches and pitchforks all add their names to letter campaigns against this or that intellectual miscreant who questions the voices in the moral community’s echo chamber. Walter Ullman’s account in *The Individual and Society in the Middle Ages* bears citation:

Publicly to hold opinions which ran counter to or attacked the faith determined and fixed by law as heresy, and the real reason for making heresy a crime was...that the heretic showed intellectual arrogance by preferring his own opinions to those who were specially qualified to pronounce upon matters of faith.

Closer to my point, Thomas Hobbes, the quintessential rationalist and Statist who, like Plato, despised any association that threatened the State is said by Robert Nisbett in *The Quest for Community* to have been “...suspicious of the universities, for these teaching bodies, he declared, have ever tended toward the support of ideas and actions that are not in the best interest of the State’s unity”.

The university in this context is a fractal of the centralizing State. Statements in the *Tri-Council Policy on Research Ethics* or by various universities about the sanctity and value of academic freedom, especially when inquiry is contrary to preferred doctrines and ways of thought, are little more than window dressing. We face a social con-

text in academia where collegiality is contingent on compelled performance, new speech norms and right-think. In a runaway DEI context, where the only diversity not tolerated is opinions that vary from prescribed doctrines, the contradiction inherent to its logic escapes none but the most heavily indoctrinated. Indeed, in *Propaganda: The formation of men’s attitudes* Jacques Ellul cautions academics/intellectuals that they are the most susceptible to indoctrination. Threatened by well-reasoned contrary ideas, institutional cover is granted to character assassination, mobbing, and, ultimately excommunication by loss of employment for those who defy the compelled doctrines of government and dominant academic opinions. The likes of Byram Bridle, Julie Ponesse, Frances Widdowson and Kenneth Westhues stand as ‘paradigmatic’ cases of the price paid for wrong-think.

Unlike my colleagues, I have not been made to join the proverbial breadlines, though there are many who wish that and worse for me. Over the course of my career my commitment to academic freedom has not been totally defined by character assassination, backbiting, (very public) defamation, threats to my life, and, more recently, considerable pressure from friends, colleagues and administrators to rescind my invitation to Frances Widdowson to speak at Brock University.

In fact, when I explained to a friend, a very high profile academic, that I was being mobbed at Brock for inviting Frances Widdowson, he was hardly sympathetic: “That bitch! She’s a Residential School Denier”. “So”, I said, “have you read her work”? The reply, which was thankfully honest, “You know, I haven’t”. Case closed! How many more have never read anything Dr. Widdowson has written or simply refused to attend a talk because of what they heard about her? Another colleague and friend at Brock resisted being bullied out of not attending Dr. Widdowson’s talk on academic freedom delivered to one of my classes was gratified she exercised her independence at bucking the in-crowd. While my colleague-friend did not agree with Dr. Widdowson on many points, there were others that led her to question and rethink her prior position. An academic not afraid of ideas! How novel! Another colleague who watched the video of Dr. Widdowson’s address for the Annual Tomáš Hudlický Memorial Lecture for Academic Freedom found her examination of the Kamloops case eminently sensible.

The other side to my struggle to defend academic freedom has found an ally in the BUFA Executive, which has been steadfast in defence of my own right to academic freedom. Though I am the face of academic freedom on its poster campaign, the Executive could have knuckled under as it did in defining academic freedom so narrowly as to proscribe reasoned arguments by colleagues who refused coerced medical therapy as per the (fraudulent) *Tri-Council Policy on Research Ethics*. To the credit of the BUFA Ex-

ective, they have solidly defended my right to present a well-documented criticism of Zionism-as-racism and analogizing the actions of the nation-State of Israel with the Third Reich of German National Socialism. And, in face of a serious pressure campaign by administrators to have me rescind my invitation to Frances Widdowson to speak to one of my classes about, wait for it, academic freedom, the BUFA Executive again stood firm.

Heir to the Republic of Letters, academic freedom is on life-support across Canada and the Western world. Like an auto-immune disease, it is attacking from within. It must be defended for it is a good worth defending. The consequence of its loss due to cowardice, ignorance, satiety, submission to identity politics or whatever is not hard to predict: easy management of the ‘herd’ by centralized authority, and, cultural ossification.

Powerful forces could not, or, maybe thought it unwise to stop Frances Widdowson from delivering an outstanding address as the inaugural speaker for Annual Tomáš Hudlický Memorial Lecture for Academic Freedom. In the fight against tyranny it is fool-hardy to celebrate cheap victories given by happen stance or one’s opponent. Frances Widdowson is a cautionary tale that, in facing the internal enemies of academic freedom, the prudent course is to know one’s enemy and then meet them with determination greater than their love of power. In my estimation, the best prophylactic against tyranny and corrosion from within academia is more, not less, academic freedom.

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A SUMMARY OF FRANCES WIDDOWSON’S BROCK UNIVERSITY VISIT AND A CALL TO ACTION

Ron Thomson

Over the past decade, Canadian university administrators have increasingly declared a de facto state of emergency against faculty members who challenge prescribed doctrines on campus. The administrative class has sought to marginalize professors who exercise intellectual autonomy, by labeling those who do not adhere to institutional “values” as “unsafe.” So-called “Human Rights” offices have been weaponized to create the illusion of imminent danger to students, allegedly caused by student exposure to harmful non-conforming ideas. Student and other community “victims” of these ideas are then deployed to manufacture feeble grounds for the dismissal of “dangerous” professors, tenure notwithstanding.

One such professor is Frances Widdowson, who was fired

by Calgary’s Mount Royal University in 2021. It came as no surprise that her firing was found to be unjust after her case was tested before an external arbitrator. In October 2024, Professor Widdowson was invited by several professors at Brock University to deliver the first Annual Tomáš Hudlický Memorial Lecture for Academic Freedom. Professor Hudlický, an organic chemist, was widely regarded as Brock’s top scientist, before he, himself, fell victim to the university’s anti-academic freedom policies. The memorial lecture was established to honor Dr. Hudlický’s legacy and to emphasize the importance of academic freedom. The lecture was also intended to remind us of the precarious position professors face when they challenge doctrines advanced by self-appointed university overlords.

Dr. Widdowson delivered two talks at Brock on October 29, 2024. The first addressed her firing in 2021 and subsequent arbitration, while the second, titled “The ‘Grave Error’ at Kamloops: How Does it Relate to Academic Freedom?” exemplifies opposition to one of Brock’s currently prescribed doctrines. Despite efforts to cancel her visit—from within the university and beyond—the events were largely successful. As a co-organizer, I was disheartened by Brock’s response. Multiple emergency meetings were reportedly held, with false accusations levelled against both Dr. Widdowson and the event organizers. The Chair of Sociology, the department which was asked to sponsor the talks, is alleged to have privately attempted to coerce cancellation, even meeting with the Dean of Social Sciences during the pressure campaign. Brock’s curiously titled ‘Campus Safety Services’ and the university Registrar (in her oversight role for room bookings) were also drafted in attempts to intimidate the organizers, warning of grave safety risks to students should the talks proceed. To their credit, campus security personnel later reported not being able to find any evidence of a legitimate threat to student safety, having reviewed hours of footage of Professor Widdowson’s visits to other Canadian university campuses.

In the end, no in-person protests occurred at Brock. While the administration succeeded in limiting organizers’ promotion of the events, the many student attendees engaged in respectful discussion and debate. Dr. Widdowson skillfully addressed ill-formed allegations and questions about her academic work, which first received critical acclaim with her co-authored book, *Disrobing the Aboriginal Industry*, published by McGill-Queen’s University Press in 2008.

Why did Dr. Widdowson’s visit to Brock not result in the sort of protests she has experienced elsewhere? Two factors may explain this. First, Brock lacks a critical mass of local Indigenous activism found in other university communities. Second, Brock University was badly embarrassed as a result of a 2021 meltdown by campus activists, which was widely reported in *Quillette* and the *National Post*. Some of those same activists were reportedly advised to

stay silent during Professor Widdowson's visit. Moreover, the leader of the shameful 2021 episode may have been neutralized by a generous \$200,000+ administrative salary. Attempts to indirectly stir up a social media mob against Dr. Widdowson's visit also largely failed, confined to ad hominem attacks by Brock's surrogates in the wider activist community.

Frances Widdowson and those who invite her to university campuses would not be a target if enough faculty members were to establish a culture of regularly inviting scholars with so-called dangerous ideas to our campuses. Researchers such as Professor Widdowson need decoys to provide cover for what are critically important national conversations. Faculty coalitions at some universities have begun the work of creating such decoys, by holding semi-regular talks on controversial topics, most often sponsored by Heterodox Academy and/or local SAFS chapters. These events serve as a model for what is possible if enough professors push back. For example, a recent Laurier event, thoughtfully critiquing EDI policies, was met with no protest at all, despite previous such events attracting the ire of professional activists, including some from senior administration. With enough such events, administrators' game of wack-a-heretic will ultimately lose steam. Importantly, to be successful, topics for such events should not focus on the particular interests of organizers, but should broadly target any topic for which there appears to be a university-wide prescribed doctrine. Professors need to use their tenure for its intended purpose, or it will lose any remaining force.

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WITH INDIGENEITY, UNIVERSITIES AREN'T FOLLOWING
THE SCIENCE

William McNally

Imagine if a university faculty member claimed to have developed a vaccine for the common cold but refused to publicly present her methods or evidence. How would the university react? With intense suspicion.

Why? Because if an idea isn't publicly explained, then it can't be falsified. Falsifiability is the possibility of finding evidence which contradicts a theory's predictions. Falsifiability is the backbone of the scientific method. If advocates won't present their theory with enough detail to allow others to test the theory's predictions, then the theory can't be falsified. If a theory can't be falsified then it falls in the category of non-science, which includes religion, the

paranormal and hoaxes like Prof. Ranga Dias's superconductivity 'discoveries' at the University of Rochester.

This background is relevant to a recent panel event at Wilfrid Laurier University where one side declined to show up. Our Heterodox Academy Campus Community invited Dr. Frances Widdowson to speak on the topic: "What is Indigenous Ways of Knowing (IWK) and What is its Place in the University?"

Widdowson is a political scientist with expertise in Canadian indigenous politics. She has written multiple books and edited a collection of essays titled "Indigenizing the University". Widdowson criticizes IWK in part because it is usually presented as a 'prescribed doctrine,' which limits the academic freedom of its critics.

In the spirit of viewpoint diversity and academic rigor, we wanted another panelist to explain IWK sympathetically.

Our preferred panelist was Laurier's AVP of Indigenous Initiatives. We invited him twice, but he ignored our emails. Then we asked the President and VP Academic to help us find a panelist. They didn't reply either. We also invited four Indigenous Studies faculty members who either declined or failed to respond. We couldn't find a proponent of IWK who would appear in public.

Lacking a human, we turned to generative AI.

Specifically, we asked ChatGPT to create questions for Dr. Widdowson from the perspective of an advocate for indigenization and decolonization. As inputs, we provided ChatGPT with two YouTube video transcripts: one featuring the AVP of Indigenous Initiatives on the subject of Decolonizing Laurier and the second by Dr. Widdowson arguing that Indigenization Destroys Academic Freedom.

The VP Academic got wind of our plans and sent me the only formal communication we ever received—a scolding email accusing us of using GenAI to impersonate an indigenous person. In the email, the VP forbids our use of GenAI and asserts that our plan precluded any "potential for real academic engagement with ideas." That claim rather misses the point. Having no one at the university defend the idea is what made it difficult for anyone to engage with it.

The night of the panel, no administrator or Indigenous Studies faculty member attended (video here). Many attended another, private event that was purposely scheduled at the same time. The Laurier Indigenous Students Association organized a protest, titled "We do not welcome Frances Widdowson." They claimed that "Widdowson's presence is harmful to BIPOC communities. She invalidates the experiences of Indigenous peoples." At the protest, they engaged in a megaphone call-and-response shouting "Widdowson" and answering "out". Evidently, no one had explained the university's commitment to free enquiry.

In summary, when invited, none of the experts on IWK agreed to present the idea in public. They avoided our event and their students protested it. This is not how universities are supposed to work. By not engaging in conversation, advocates of indigeneity block our ability to assess their claims. Do they expect us to accede on the basis of their identity? That is a bad system for assessing truth claims and it's not science—it is a violation of Rauch's empirical rule that no one person or affinity group has personal authority.

The senior administration didn't ignore our emails because they lack expertise. On the contrary, IWK is included in the university's collective agreement, and the new Indigenous Strategic plan calls for "[i]ncreasing the Indigenous content across all disciplines..."

The plan also calls for "decolonization" which it defines as "the overhaul of knowledge production to balance power between Indigenous and western ways of knowing". In other words, the plan aims to supplant the scientific method with something they won't explain in public.

Decolonization advocates will claim that my criticism is privilege-preserving pushback. Another example of western ways of knowing hegemonically oppressing indigenous ways of knowing. But that's a self-serving Kafka trap, which is a rhetorical trick to avoid criticism. It works like this: I question the nature of your oppressed identity (e.g., your way of knowing) and you complain that my question is an example of your oppression.

This begs the question of how truth claims are adjudicated under the decolonial framework. If advocates won't tell us, then how can we decide if 'overhauling' the university is a good idea?

Apparently, faculty aren't invited to participate in this decision. As their response to our invitation reveals, indigenization and decolonization advocates don't want to persuade. They are bringing revolutionary change to the university. They say so in the strategic plan and in their published writing. They aren't going to make their case in public and you had better not ask questions or you might end up like Frances Widdowson, fired from your tenured position.

This isn't how universities ought to work. The purpose of universities is learning. The method of learning is founded on rationality, free inquiry and falsifiability. Areas of inquiry that eschew those foundations fall in the category of non-science and don't belong at the university. They belong in seminars, which are institutions that teach topics where foundational questions can't be asked.

When a university creates departments of non-science, places adherents in administrative positions and strategizes about converting to non-science, then it is abandoning its *telos*. A university that abandons its *telos* is a bad

university. If it is publicly funded, and the public discovers the bait and switch, then the public will vote to withhold funding. This is what awaits Canadian universities that follow the path of Wilfrid Laurier University. It is time for Provincial governments to wake up and insist that their universities focus on the search for truth, not on social justice and decolonization.

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ACADEMIC DISCUSSION AND THE VULNERABLE STUDENT

Mark Mercer

"You might have come to college hoping for the kind of late-night philosophical debates your parents speak fondly about from their college years" (pp. 196-197). This sentence, with its troubling "might" (why would someone indifferent to late-night philosophical debates want to come to college?) is from *Try to Love the Questions: From Debate to Dialogue in Classrooms and Life*, a recent book of advice to undergraduate students. The author, Lara Hope Schwartz, continues by scolding her young would-be intellectual: "No one owes you a chance to debate them nor an explanation why they won't.... Respect people's boundaries."

A few pages later, Schwartz addresses the student on the receiving end of unwanted discussion. Schwartz is concerned that this student might worry that his urge to flee from his debate-pressing classmate is unworthy of an apprentice academic at a university. "You are the manager of your own time," she reassures him. "There is no one on this green Earth with the power to make you debate them" (p. 205). Schwartz instructs the unwilling student that while "vigorous dialogue" is wonderful, it is also dangerous, for "mental health challenges can happen any time" (p. 206). One must first of all look after one's wellbeing ("Your capacity to love questions tomorrow depends on taking care of yourself today").

What a dispiriting account Schwartz has given us of university life. Schwartz is right, of course, that you shouldn't pester someone who'd rather not engage with you or engage with you on that particular topic. Perhaps there are times this point should be made to specific people, but does it really need to be insisted upon? Schwartz, it seems, would have young would-be intellectuals scared of being disciplined should they try to engage someone in discussion without obtaining consent first.

Schwartz does not spurn debate as a part of the university experience, but she values dialogue much more highly and would have debate yield to dialogue whenever possible. I agree with her about the shortcomings of debate, but at least debate is, or feigns to be, about getting some matter right. Dialogue, by contrast, is about understanding and appreciating each other and learning where the other is coming from and why he thinks and values as he does. Dialogue is happy to leave inquiry into the matter at hand right where it was. What matters is that we get to know each other.

Better than either dialogue or debate, I'd say, is discussion, critical discussion. Both debate and dialogue might figure as stretches within a discussion, but discussion is focused on understanding the matter at hand, not on understanding each other; and, unlike debate, discussion resists being used to score points.

You and I, I hazard, came to university precisely in search of late-night philosophical discussions—whether conducted late at night, over lunch or in the classroom. You are likely as saddened as I am by the appearance of a guide to university that tells the enthusiastic discussor to knock it off. It might not be surprising that a contemporary author addressing students takes the side of the vulnerable young person who could need counselling after finding themselves in a debate. But it does indicate where we stand.

I received my doctorate in 1991, during the last days of the most recent spell of academic philosophy pursued as a blood sport. Part of the goal in philosophical discussion when conceived as a blood sport is to humiliate one or more participants, to show not just that someone is mistaken but also that he is an idiot. Professors who engaged in philosophy as blood sport attempted to prove idiots of not just their colleagues, but of the authors of the papers they assigned in their classes, and of visiting speakers, as well. Biddable students endeavoured to show that a classmate or two was an idiot. On occasion, a professor would seek to show one or another student to be an idiot. This was not a proud time for academic philosophy.

I would note that even at the height of philosophy as blood sport, it was nonetheless a minority pursuit. Very few professors and students engaged in it. It did happen, though; and, distasteful as it was, for those given to it, it came with a little thrill. And because it could happen, out of nowhere, that someone would tear into you, most of us students were a little more reserved about participating in discussion than we wanted to be or should have been.

Happily, by the late 1990s, philosophy was hardly ever pursued as blood sport anymore. It disappeared because students and professors objected to the hurt feelings it caused and its general unpleasantness. Many said that the atmosphere of predation was turning women students and professors off and should no longer be tolerated for just that

reason. It turned many men off, as well, though perhaps not in such proportion.

We can be glad that combative discussion, along with the intention to expose others as stupid, does not mark academic philosophy these days. But we cannot be entirely happy with the reasons for its demise. More significant than being unpleasant is philosophy-as-blood-sport's inconsistency with academic goals. Seeking to belittle others does not advance the quest to understand the matter at hand. The serious problem is that engaging in combat derails the discussion, bringing it to serve purposes unconnected to academically sound pursuits such as creating theories and finding answers.

Making things about feelings—or, worse, about the feelings of women or other sub-groups—alienates us from the academic mission. When the purpose for which people gather at a university takes a backseat to the emotional health of vulnerable students, even sincere desires to inquire into the world turn out to be suspect and must be monitored. We cannot be surprised that a book intended to orient newcomers to university life cautions students to pay attention to the effects their eagerness to participate in the life of the mind can have on their classmates. We cannot assume that everyone here cares to have late-night philosophical discussions, even though “here” is a university.

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HOW BAD ARE THINGS REALLY? AN MRU CASE STUDY

Kathy Drake

I decided to investigate the question of how bad things really are at Mount Royal University (MRU) after I saw that a professor had a petition calling for her to be fired as a racist professor with 6000 signatures. I never thought that a university would ever cave to any sort of mob pressure. I found it disturbing when I read the petition description that there was zero evidence or support of any kind to back up the claim that the professor in question was indeed racist. And it made me concerned for what the climate at the university that I had enjoyed attending prior had become. This concern grew enormously when I learned that the tenured professor had been terminated. This professor was, of course, Frances Widdowson, who has now been found by an arbitrator to have been wrongfully dismissed but not reinstatable.

After reading about professor Widdowson's case, my curiosity about what the heck was actually going on at MRU grew significantly. I felt like I needed to investigate the sit-

uation to attempt to gain a better understanding, and the best way to do this would be for me to become a student again at MRU.

I was in a unique position to do so. MRU used to be a college, and I held a Bachelor of Applied Ecotourism and Outdoor Leadership (ETOL) from it, and so I applied to the upgraded university version of the degree—Bachelor of Health and Physical Education with a major in ETOL. This allowed me to be a part-time student. But the priority for me was not to get a degree, and especially not if the university was not a university in the principled sense of the word.

I was hopeful that maybe it wasn't that bad, but it was worse than I could possibly have imagined. I am going to do my best to walk the reader through what I experienced as concisely as possible to come to the grave conclusion that MRU is completely ideologically captured. The institution uses indoctrination and propaganda inside and outside of the classroom and promotes absurdities that are presented as unquestionable facts with zero evidence. The propaganda is then upheld with authoritarian enforcement.

When I returned to campus I noticed large billboard sized posters around the school that would make claims and then declare that “you have a colonized mind” if you did not believe them. This was incredibly disturbing to me as I knew that an academic institution is not supposed to promote any sort of prescribed doctrine if it wants to avoid indoctrination. As well, more recently, there have been TV screens in the hallways with looping messages of unsubstantiated, and arguably absurd, claims that ran for a week for “indigenization and decolonization”.

I also noticed as a student that there was a strong sense of fear. Speech was so excruciatingly chilled that not only would there be little to no meaningful controversial private conversations, but there were more often than not “crickets” in response to a professor asking for student participation and addressing the class, unless there were grades attached to class participation. This was a significant change in and out of the classroom from when I had first gone to school in the early 2000's.

To counter this pervasive fear I became more bold and overt in my heretical opinions over time, signaling that I was not a member of their ideological cult. I do not use the term cult as an alarmist nor in any hyperbolic sense, and I do not take the term lightly. The proof is in the code of conduct itself on the MRU website, which is highlighted on the page of the X account @MRUCivis. The code of conduct states that members of the MRU community have a responsibility to uphold the core values of MRU, and the hyperlink for “core values” then leads to an expansive list for the new strategic plan including “Equity, Diversity and Inclusion” and “Indigenous Knowledge”. The members of

the community include faculty, students and even visitors to the campus, according to the MRU website. Who knew that joining a cult with enforced values could be as easy as stepping foot on publicly funded property. Welcome to MRU!

I think this says a great deal about our society at large that there has not been overwhelming outrage over this fact and it is time to sound the alarm. MRU is located in Calgary, Alberta where the provincial government wants universities to submit reports on free speech. MRU, however, has a free speech policy that it does not adhere to. Outside of the professionalism and decorum expected within a classroom when one is operating within an academic capacity as student or faculty, the university should not be policing conduct or speech that one utters on their personal social media or blogs, nor in private conversations. But I have found while trying to determine the boundaries of free speech and free expression on campus that MRU feels absolutely entitled to control these arenas of expression. These areas should not be more restrictive than Canadian society at large. The determination of that should be within the legal system for individuals to enforce if the law has been broken, but should not be enforced or determined by internal Kangaroo courts of the university itself, as there are obvious conflicts of interest. I discovered personally that being a “member of the MRU community” means there will be authoritarian overreach. This includes policing private conversations. In my case, I disagreed with a man who identified as a woman that he was a woman when he broached the topic. I stated that being a woman is not a feeling.

The overreach and destruction of personal liberty and free expression at MRU also includes surveillance of, and code of conduct investigations initiated over, personal social media posts when convenient for them. It is “rules for thee and not for me” at MRU. I had a post where I was wearing a t-shirt saying “Where are the bodies?”—a reference to the Kamloops Indian Residential School finding of anomalies with GPR. The professor, Gabrielle Weasel Head, targeted me in one of her posts. She displayed my image with the words “This pic is one of a student at the university I teach at” and made some very disturbing statements, implying that my motivation was hatred and racism. She then invoked the contested indigenous genocide narrative, accusing me of “...denying ongoing abuse and genocide of indigenous people today”.

The specific details around my case, including the posts mentioned above and my private conversation, was discussed at length on the “Dangerous Speech” podcast (Episode 171) hosted by Obaid Omer.

The erosion of personal liberty with the authoritarian response from the school resulted in me being forced to check

in with Security 15 minutes before and after class and not being allowed to remain on campus outside of those times. This was all because I said words, on my own time, that I wished to express. At the same time, MRU's free speech policy states that, although civility and mutual respect are valued, they cannot be used as an excuse to sanction speech.

As well as this authoritarian muzzling of speech, it is also apparent that MRU no longer exists as a secular institution. It is teaching indigenous spirituality in an immersive way, not objectively as a subject of anthropology. I go into detail about this on the podcast "Rational Space Disputations 37" on Frances Widdowson's YouTube channel. But I have discovered more since that episode in regards to the implementation of spiritual and religious practices being integrated into the university, from "sacred objects" being displayed to prayer ceremonies involving faculty in an official MRU capacity and funded by the school. For example, there is a large buffalo skin showcased in a hallway of the recreation wing, and this was painted and displayed in conjunction with religious ceremonies. The painting on the hide includes a spider web, which is invoking an indigenous creation story: "What comes out of our mouth either hurts or heals people". This is a message that perhaps could be interpreted as speech being the same as violence, further showing that safetyism and consequentialism are prioritized over the protection of free speech and expression at MRU.

Either we have free speech, or we do not. Without free speech we do not have free thought. Free speech includes protecting insults and "low value speech". It includes mockery and offensive speech. In the question and answer section of the MRU website's freedom of expression and free speech page, if you scroll to the bottom of the page they take a leaf out of Idi Amin's book. He was the military dictator of Uganda, and, to quote him almost word for word, he said "There is freedom of speech, but I cannot guarantee freedom after speech". MRU says free speech does not mean freedom from consequences, but those consequences should be determined by a legitimate body. They should also concern whether a student breaks the law, and not be the arbitrary reaction of an authoritarian university that is captured by an ideological cult.

I suspect that MRU is not unique, and the implications of my experience have impacts that go beyond the campus into society at large, further eroding our individual liberties.

Kathy Drake (katheryngladys@gmail.com) was a student at Mount Royal University until 2021, when she dropped out after being investigated by university administrators for thoughtcrimes. Her support for free speech can be followed on X [formerly Twitter] @nulamoonsnail.

CANADIAN STUDENTS AND FACULTY WALKING ON EGGSHELLS: CAMPUS EXPRESSION SURVEY

Tyrel Cameron Eskelson

The other day I had a random flashback to my undergraduate days at the University of Saskatchewan, some sixteen years ago. I was in the class of an excellent professor named Jason Zorbas, with whom I took four different courses, each of them dealing with American or Canadian politics. There are two points about this.

The first is that after all this time spent with him discussing politics, I still to this day have no idea what his political leanings were at that time. I have done my best to have the same outcome with my own students. The second point regards the flashback that I found remarkable. One day in Professor Zorbas's course on politics in the world since the end of the Cold War, we were discussing the topic of slavery in India. I just did a quick check which confirmed that roughly eleven million people live in some form of slavery in India today.

It was an interesting topic to discuss because it involved weighing the unshakeable immorality of slavery, versus the stark realities of, for example, an impoverished single mother, who would rather be an indentured servant with a roof over her child's head, than earn a meagre wage and live on the street. I distinctly remember playing devil's advocate to the consensus of the class, and offering an opinion that I did not hold, but tried to justify why this form of slavery might be preferred to penury on the streets.

What strikes me most about this today, in the holiday season of 2024, is that it never occurred to me that I could not make this kind of comment as an intellectual exercise. And indeed, no one, including the charming and knowledgeable Dr. Zorbas, was shaken by my comment. I reflect on the classroom atmosphere that year after reading the findings of recent surveys on campus expression published between 2022 and 2024. The surveys add more evidence to the unfortunate conclusion that, on Canadian campuses across the country, the atmosphere of academic freedom is de facto dead.

A 2022 study entitled "The Viewpoint Diversity Crisis at Canadian Universities: Political Homogeneity, Self-Censorship, and Threats to Academic Freedom," found that faculty in Canadian universities have become majority left-leaning and that this trend is increasing. More alarming than the homogeneity in political leanings among university faculty is what the study found on academic freedom and expression: "34 percent of all professors admit to self-censoring out of fear of negative consequences should their views on certain topics become known." Related to this finding, more than 30% of faculty "are prepared to limit academic freedom and 'cancel' their colleagues out of a commitment to their political views on social justice."

An American study found similar results to this.

A 2023 study of American universities found professors were self-censoring because they did not trust that their institution would support their right to academic freedom if publicly challenged. The study found that teachers struggled: “to balance an ethics of care with the discomforts inherent in robust discussions of fraught subject matter.” Instead of discussing what they think best in class, professors are pulling back, “depriving students of both exposure to and debate of important educational materials and appropriate levels of collegiate challenge.” It seems that on campuses across the continent, professors and students are afraid to say the wrong thing, even if it is the truth.

A recently-published study entitled “The State of Open Inquiry in Canadian Colleges and Universities” asked Canadian university students a variety of questions related to the topics of free inquiry, diverse viewpoints, and constructive disagreements. The survey found that students were most reluctant to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, even if it was relevant to the classroom discussion. A close second was a reluctance to discuss transgender issues because it attracts the easily-offended and censorious. These are two topics where entrenched and extreme views turn discussion into one of zero-sum morality, which views moderate or dispassionate opinions with the same contempt as the extreme views on the opposite side of the spectrum.

The survey concluded that students who hold moderate views tend to shy away from engaging with those who hold more extreme views. The authors argued that one way to address this phenomenon is for professors to encourage participation from moderate students and those whose views are still undecided.

The study also found that students did not engage in discussions because they feared the instructor might lower their grade, or publicly say that their thoughts were incorrect.

40% of respondents experienced negative consequences for sharing their opinions on controversial topics, and nearly 50% said they had witnessed another student experience negative consequences.

63% of respondents reported that they feared formal consequences if they expressed their honest thoughts and opinions during class. Students feared retribution from professors more than they were concerned about formal complaints from other students.

These results did not differ due to class standing or political leaning. Here the authors believe that professors need to do a better job communicating that they will not punish students for sharing their opinions.

These findings add to the growing concern that campuses and classrooms are deviating from the tradition that made

liberal science institutions such great producers and transmitters of knowledge: free inquiry. Canadian universities are supposed to be places where we read, study, debate, and learn to articulate the truth. The late journalist Christopher Hitchens wrote, in 2001, that, “In life we make progress by conflict and in mental life by argument and disputation.” He continued that, “There must be confrontation and opposition, in order that sparks must be kindled.” We do our best to learn and articulate the truth and submit the ideas to the intellectual community for open critique. The best ideas emerge from discerning and discarding the false ones.

I hope Canadian students in classes this 2025 year, and in those of the future, will get to experience the freedom to learn, to practice articulating the truth, and to not fear making a mistake; this is what I was fortunate to experience in Professor Zorbas’s class many years ago.

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THE TEACHER ORACLE OF SURREY

Jim McMurtry

I wrote a book in 2016 with the following on the back cover: “A memorable event in my teaching career was when I got fired. I was only months away from retirement when it happened. I was first given the chance to quit, but I’m not a quitter – except when giving blood. I’d been canned like tuna before in my life, but this time it was embarrassing for me and my family because it became a national news story. I’m not lying when I say my face covered half the front page of the biggest newspaper in Canada. Ironically, I was fired on the annual Fun Day at my school. I hope other people had ‘fun.’”

On February 21, 2023 the *National Post* featured me on its front page, its reporter (Michael Higgins) saying that “after four decades as a teacher, Jim McMurtry was fired Tuesday for daring to speak out. He first fell foul of authorities for speaking about the Kamloops Indian Residential School and for saying things not in line with official ideology.”

I am no oracle, which is a reference to the Oracle of Delphi that involved one virginal girl after another from nearby villages being taken to the clifftop Temple of Delphi in Ancient Greece as long ago as 1000 BCE. Each Oracle would

have her head placed over a vase of hydrocarbon gases, and her consequent drugged speech was mulled over as advice from the god Apollo. I just knew long ago that teachers are walking in a minefield, knowing at any instant their careers could blow up by saying the wrong thing or showing the wrong image.

If you don't know, even eating peanuts is a controversial act in schools these days owing to the number of children with serious allergies. So too is eating a hamburger as this may offend vegans, PETA or the Hindus who consider cows sacred. A hamburger in hand could offend a Muslim child during Ramadan, and if the hamburger contained pork, it could cause alarm among Muslims and Jews who would see it as *haram* or not *kosher*. The expression "you are what you eat" has taken on a new meaning.

George Orwell wrote in 1945 in an introduction to *Animal Farm* that "At any given moment there is an orthodoxy, a body of ideas of which it is assumed that all right-thinking people will accept without question. It is not exactly forbidden to say this, that or the other, but it is 'not done' to say it." The latest orthodoxy is for teachers to not stray from the script, even to deliver a joke about a chicken crossing the road as one could be labelled "anti-poultry," or against anyone who wears feathers or considers feathers a spiritual icon.

One hears platitudes like "take risks" and "teach outside the box." It is best to ignore them.

Orwell would have heard about the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial in Tennessee where high school teacher John Scopes was punished with a \$100 fine for teaching human evolution in a public school. What he did not live long enough to see is the amount of censorship weighing on teachers a century later: censorship from social media giants, censorship from the conservative or religious right, and censorship from the postmodernist left in the form of identity politics.

Schools were once envisioned as a marketplace of ideas where popular beliefs shared space with less popular beliefs. The goal was not to indoctrinate children or advance a particular dogma. The *First Amendment* to the *U.S. Constitution* in 1791 made this free-speech philosophy into law on our continent, as did the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in 1982 under Section 2. Our earliest educators in single-room log buildings dreamed of a beautifully diverse society with diverse ideas. Ever since we have been in the business of making accountants and ranchers, doctors and dental hygienists, home decorators and sales reps, preachers and secularists, disciplined employees and free spirits. Teaching practices that are held to the mainstream do not put this diversity to the test.

The new B.C. curriculum states that "What and how we teach our students has been redesigned to provide greater flexibility for teachers," emphasize "perspectives in a pluralistic society," and "recognize everyone has something to

contribute." Yet the Teachers Regulations Branch recently disciplined a grade 8 teacher for not using "respectful and developmentally appropriate teaching resources and instructional methods."

I cannot find anywhere any teaching standard or statute which explains what constitutes "respectful" or "appropriate" teaching resources, or conversely, what constitutes disrespectful/inappropriate resources, but I do know the boundaries of acceptable speech are drawing tighter. Schools are becoming averse to unorthodoxy, even though it is the adversity of the sand particle that makes the pearl.

Almost every day a story appears of somebody who has been fired or publicly shamed on social media for saying something that is interpreted as sexist, racist, homophobic, Islamophobic, etc. Our former premier, the late John Horgan, was condemned for saying in a provincial election debate that he did not see colour in others. He was forced to apologize because he violated the speech code of identity politics, but he was in a double bind as he would have been equally condemned if he had said he saw colour in others.

Teachers are particularly vulnerable to the cancel culture mob, as we work under a microscope. My Social Studies students and I would sit in a classroom with almost unlimited Internet access through computers, phones, screens and projectors. In another classroom at my school a teacher might be reading the esteemed novel *The Kite Runner*, which contains scenes of female decapitation and child sodomy.

In many classrooms around the province there are teachers of Genocide Studies 12 in which the content includes "acts of mass violence," the "evidence used to demonstrate the scale and nature of genocides," the "characteristics and stages of genocide," and the "strategies used to commit genocide" – at Nanking in 1937-8 it was killing contests and mass rape, and in the Holocaust, it was 1.5 million Jewish children in ovens.

The international *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, to which Canada is a signatory, states that children shall have the "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice." While teachers acknowledge there are certain restrictions in criminal law by which we are bound, and that these restrictions are necessary, there are no educational statutes and district standards delineating these restrictions.

The BCTF *Teacher* newsmagazine addressed the issue of teacher autonomy in a 2009 article by grievance coordinator George Popp, who wrote that "we should be prepared to defend our right to professional discretion in the performance of our duties or be prepared to watch our craft reduced to technique and scripts." The trend, however,

is toward more self-censorship, more infantilization of high school teaching resources, more coddling of senior students, and more emotional bubble-wrapping.

Few sand particles get into a closed shell.

Jim McMurtry (jimmcmurtry01@gmail.com) was a teacher, college lecturer and principal during a career that lasted over four decades. He received a Ph.D. from the University of Toronto in Educational Philosophy. In May 2021 he gained national attention for being removed from his French Immersion teaching job in Abbotsford for not telling his students that 215 Indigenous children at the Kamloops Indian Residential School were murdered by their teachers. His union is grieving his dismissal and defending him against his regulatory body, which seeks to cancel his teaching certificate for life.

INDULGENCE CAPITALISM AND THE END OF RATIONAL DISCOURSE

Christopher Nagle

The attack on freedom of speech, the rise of oracular faith-based perception and the decline of the rational Enlightenment are important as a free standing set of problems, but not nearly as important as what is underpinning their emergence.

When in the middle of a bizarre Lewis Carroll style epistemic battle and one's back is up against an existential wall, it is hard to gain and maintain strategic analytical insight and overview. Yet without it, we are stuck in the to and fro of front line ideological struggle with the perfidious other. And while that doesn't matter so much in the context of a village pump brawl, it matters a lot when the conflict takes in a whole culture across all its institutional platforms.

The decline of Marxism has coincided with loss of strategic thinking that explores the fundamental and long term strengths, weaknesses and performance of current class administration and the system it inhabits. We have to return to a notion of historically dynamic capitalism and how it is evolving, which might explain why we face the conundrums we do and suggest avenues to, if not successfully confront them, at least plan a rational retreat before forces whose momentum may be too great to stop.

That does not mean we need to prop up Marxism or convert to socialism. Conservatives should be as capable of macro-analysis as anyone else. Socialists should not have a monopoly on critiquing capitalism.

In my view, the roll out after the Second World War of what I call Indulgence Capitalism is where all our problems start, mature and come to fruition, by systematically deregulating and privatizing the commons infrastructure

on behalf of private and personal interests, unencumbered by responsible adult agency and accountability, that has undermined the rules-based and enforceable mechanisms for producing and maintaining that infrastructure.

Neo-liberal deconstruction of the economic commons didn't stop there. All platforms of the system, including the social and existential spheres were similarly affected, posing as 'liberating' 'empowerment', 'freed' from the strictures and 'repressions' of the past and stripped of the responsible agency that once came with civil rights, but later substituted by unqualified human rights.

Twentieth century world wars unleashed unprecedented productive output growth, and totalitarian mass mobilisation to facilitate it, for which there were no ready made equivalent peacetime growth models to take up the slack, once the wars stopped. What evolved in the post WW2 world was the transfer of wartime overproduction and consumption run by military machines designed to bomb enemy constituencies with fast use-by-date destructive ordinance, to marketing machines designed to 'bomb' peacetime constituencies with even faster use-by-date civil ordinance.

A war economy transmogrified into one of indulgence beyond the wildest dreams of all previous generations of our species, including their kings, aristocracies and bishops. And its voracious growth appetites ate everything in their path, from the natural world to human domestic infrastructure and governance.

To instrumentalise this shift required the take down of a culture and economy built around disciplined needs and wants in favour of fantasies of desire and their immediate realisation, regardless of longer term consequences. This was achieved with the relentless blurring of the boundaries between knowing fantasy and unknowing delusion, by bypassing evidence-based reason in favour of marketed perception/consciousness that became the main product of the system, thus reducing concrete goods and services to secondary imaginative icons.

Indulgence Capitalism is an intensely totalitarian system that no longer requires state-based authoritarian governance in order to create compliant populations who do not require external disciplines to get them to conform. 'The Matrix', for all its special effects entertainment narrative, is the fable-of-our-times in which almost the entire population has no idea what has happened to it, or what is driving the events around it, or even the nature of what it thinks is reality, as if it had been attacked, colonised and preyed upon by jewel wasps. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emerald_cockroach_wasp)

It should therefore come as no surprise that the dance of faith-based perception and reflective/logical reason should have become so muddled and opaque that faith becomes blind and reason, anybody's. Thus the language of the asylum becomes official institutional fiat. Publicrelation-smarketingthink becomes the mentor of truth. Criticism is discredited as prejudiced 'bigotry' and various "isms". Liberal values have been replaced by heresy sniffing neo-clerical dogma.

The university-based postmodernist retreat from evidence-based enquiry, open debate and competitive schools of thought, into linguistically mangled and authoritarian gobbledegook, is entirely in line with the rest of the architecture of discourse. It isn't an isolated bubble filled with laughing gas, because everywhere 'Things Go Better With Coke...' as messages from the sponsors bypass most critical faculties, most of the time.

Towards the end of the first third of the twentieth century, one of the fathers of public relations and marketing, Edward Bernays, engineered the take up of female smoking in public, not by organising a debate where he would argue the virtues of female smoking against his 'conservative' opponents, but by changing public perception through 'rebranding' cigarettes as female 'torches of freedom' and showing off attractive young women in film clips of the Easter Parades in 1929, that glamorised their smoking habit as...'empowering', alluring' and 'stylish'.

Opposition Crumbled

Postmodernism is a perfect fit within a dominant culture that is based around 'the lived experience' of subjective perception, with all the objective third party reality checks and balances removed by a massive industrial machinery that produces the main product of the system, which is not industrial hardware production (which has mostly been exported elsewhere) but consciousness production, to the extent that brand-based faith trumps critically autonomous evidence-based reason.

Universities are doing what institutions of higher learning have always done since their foundation in the Middle Ages, which was to produce administrative acolytes for the extant system of social administration at the time. They started as quasi ecclesiastical bodies, went on to oversee the growth of secular science, technology, philosophy and imperial enterprise, and now return to their roots in producing neo-clerical acolytes brimming with dogma, received truth and an ideological certainty that brands opposition as heresy. This seems like a full circle.

The massive change that has taken place over the last 50-70 years has a sustainability use-by date that is rapidly approaching. We have devoured our ecological and social/existential inheritance and things are beginning to go feral.

Nobody in the immediate future is likely to get more than a brief handle on what is coming at us, in much the same way as at the beginning of the modern period, when Martin Luther declared in 1517 that Papal Indulgences, which sold divine forgiveness in the next world for sins committed in this one, were unconscionable. It was a small spark, but late Medieval Europe convulsed and then exploded into the modern era.

In my view, the next 'big thing' will be the abandonment of Indulgence as a social and economic principle. This will be accompanied by a rise of 'back to basics fundamentals', as well as the return to firm boundaries for determining principled moral judgement, needs from wants and materialist rather than fantasy-based reality criteria. There will be respect rather than contempt for social authority, a loss of patience with infantile narcissism accompanied by insistence on the production of mature, secure and responsible adults, and rebuilding the infrastructure of social reproduction necessary to make that happen.

Up front, indulgence seems benign. Who doesn't like to be cut a bit of slack when it comes to a bit of sin (sub-optimal behaviour and attitude)? What is the harm of bending the rules, questioning boundaries and successfully making excuses? In the short term, not much, because it takes time, repetition and intergenerational forgetfulness and dissolution to wear down the infrastructure of virtuous conduct, other regarding behaviour, sacrifice for the common good and honest governance.

Over time, the losses start to compound and speed up until we arrive at where we are today, when things aren't looking good and may not be retrievable within what is now the 'ancien regime'. Indulged populations eventually bankrupt themselves in a milieu where nothing works, nothing is secure, nothing is resolved, everything is questioned, and the weak, feckless and deluded inherit the earth, at least for a little while, until the existential floor caves in under them.

Universities are upper strata exemplars of a larger culture whose core is rotten, whether we are talking about the space cadets in the financial system whose blind greed and adolescent moral exceptionalism (you had to be there to 'understand') almost destroyed capitalism, or the fatherless lumpenwelfariat on the urban mean streets, where the murder rates and the size of the drug busts are all they have left to advertise. They are all ingesting the same kind of cultural toxicity that deconstructs quality social product.

Debate is hard work. Critical judgement requires discipline, focus, maturity, capacity to listen to and understand all sides of an argument, assemble and order ideas and then work through them from a beginning, through a middle to a conclusion. And that has to be curated by educational mentors who have some standards that they can hold their

students to, so that they can learn to manipulate ideas intelligently and communicate them well.

That infrastructure is dying and being replaced by cartoon faith narratives which only require students to colour them in. Anything outside that doesn't compute. If challenged, the young acolytes run to mother superior for a cry 'n tissues. They are fragile little Peter Pans and Wendys. When cornered, they throw two year old tantrums. And their 'educators' so understand their injured feelings and so want to keep them 'safe' in the bosom of sexual diversity, racial virtue and the ideological status quo, where freedom of expression is encouraged, as long as it conforms to the 'progressive' line.

None of this is going to end well. We are entering what is euphemistically referred to as a 'transitional period'. Hang on to your hat, because, as some of the people eventually have to pull their heads out of the consumer troughs sufficiently to see what is going on around them, they aren't going to be either very happy....or forgiving of the false values they have been fed, and the denuded cultural landscape they find themselves in.

And if I am not wrong, the Trump presidency may well be the starting gun on that.

Christopher Nagle (c.d.eastmannagle@gmail.com) is a slightly autistic baby boomer who went to university just as the consumer society with its associated cultural shifts came on stream, leaving him with a debilitating sense that something awful had happened, but unable to put his finger on it. It took him nearly 30 years to even start to properly come to grips with why he felt so distressed and intellectually paralysed by what rolled out in front of him in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

DISSOLUTION OF LANGUAGE: WHAT IS LOST

Alex St. Germain

Not long ago, I was researching the human brain as it ages, with a particular interest in neural variance between the sexes. At 70 years of age, I guess I should be prepared. During my research, I was to discover that some references came with trigger warnings, which read like an apology. For example, the use of male and female was flagged. In an age of intellectual apex can anyone be so vulnerable, as to have something equivalent to a conniption over the words we use? It seems so. This suggests not only a pathology of our times, but it will obviously direct the erosion of our language, and ability to communicate. This is especially driven by sexual politics and the never-ending irrationality of pronouns. And to placate this growing insanity, we have the draconian legal excess dictating how we must speak. I refer to Bill C-16, and other "Bills" being

considered, which will reduce our right to free expression. And we must never ignore the cancel culture pomposity, the cudgel used in education, where indoctrination is the crowning achievement over that of erudition. As I see it, restrictions on speech and the perverting of language to satiate childlike fanciful thinking hamstring the very essence of a free society, including the edification of our youth. It will consequently extinguish critical thinking, which is now deemed extraneous.

The free exchange of language, hence ideas, has certainly been knotted and contorted by fanatical ideologues, which is loaded with consequences, especially for educators who must be ever vigilant so as not to offend and then find themselves before the alter of the sacrificial tribunal. What is most detrimental though is the free exchange of ideas, which cannot flourish in such an environment. Even as we foray into casual conversation, we are made wary of words we can and cannot voice as imposed by the victim hucksters—those charlatans who speak in the voice of the oppressed, using virtue catchphrases such as "love trumps hate, love is love, hate has no place here," and so on. However, it is a thin veneer concealing something more sinister. Their hue and cry for freedom is false. Rather, their call is to be liberated from the responsibility of freedom. The fight for liberty is born from the ground up, but not for Leftist woke radicals, who call for authoritarian oversight. How is this achieved? By creating more government in the guise of serving the public good.

DEI

Under the Trudeau government, bureaucracy has increased by 43%, while our population grew about 15%. More political administration allows for the regulation over our daily lives, the ever-slight tipping points against liberty. But education has followed suit by creating a bloated administrative overreach, advancing as it were the politics of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). Many institutions of learning require applicants to submit statements proving their commitment to DEI, thus creating an ideological echo chamber. In an editorial found in the *Dominion Review*, the author, Herbert Grubel, states that, in 2012, Simon Fraser University had 26 DEI staff. By 2022, that number rose to 140, begging the question why such an increase? And just how many dollars must be expended to maintain DEI administrators, and what is it they give in return that can be truly measured? We can safely assume that this is the reality of universities throughout North America.

What is Lost

When considering the manipulation of words and language, consider its ramifications. To mention the fact that woke extremists continuously demand the forfeiture of our right to free speech is bad enough, and I have already highlighted that free speech, and critical thinking, is in freefall. But not mentioned is imagination, diminished by postmodern

relativism, where the aesthetic goes to die. In some instances, books are either removed from library shelves or designated to some dark corner because they use an inappropriate vocabulary. And if woke incendiaries cannot sacrifice the art of the written word to the flames, books can certainly be rewritten, especially children's books like *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, and *Fantastic Mr. Fox*. Moreover, gone will be the elegance found in Caesar's *Gallic War*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Shakespeare's writings, and one of my favourites, *The Decameron* by Boccaccio. Likewise, do not assume that female authors are exempt. The masterful works like *Gone with the Wind* by Margaret Mitchell, Harper Lee's, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, just to mention a few, are already considered as cause for offence.

I am also disturbed by the woke assault against our Judeo-Christian heritage, which is, for the most part, different from spiritual foundations that are born out of the neo-secularism and a culture of self-hate that grips our civilisation. With that, an aversion to explore the wisdom of those who, thousands of years ago, grappled for answers to questions we still seek. Instead, we have outright condemned Christianity and the Bible to hateful irrelevance. I will make mention of the book by the late Northrop Fry—*The Great Code*, which should be recommended reading. As for our Judeo-Christian faith I will make the claim that it is foundational, which gave to us much of what our society is built upon, such as the dignity of the individual and separation of church and state. Unfortunately, the distinctiveness of the individual is now viewed through the lens of identity politics.

To Conclude

I fear what the future holds for my granddaughter, and that is why I am writing this piece. What inheritance will be given her if indeed we allow the beauty of our language to wither in the waistcoats of woke ideologues? The usurpation of any language is in an impediment to an enquiring mind, thus, the demise of wisdom. It is woeful indeed that the few voices of reason have been silenced, or face the heavy hand of censure. We are in a veritable battleground between reason and chaos, and I will challenge the woke pseudo-intellectuals to prove me wrong. It is concerning to realize the bleak future as the generation to follow will one day take their place in the adult world, for which they are not ready. As Lincoln supposedly wrote, "The philosophy of the school room in one generation will be the philosophy of government in the next."*

It is obvious to anyone with common sense that we are experiencing a cultural revolution, and, as in all revolutions, it has its own Lingua Franca, and so the utterances of DEI are pervasive in education and media. And as we suffer the ever-foolish sentiments of woke extremists, the Western heritage, and all that it encompasses, is threatened. This is especially the loss of the freedom to say no, which is the

death knell for our civilization. The intrusion into language begins early, where indoctrination begins—in our schools, which have become pathological playgrounds for DEI. It now has supremacy in influencing human faculties.

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Jamie Sarkonak, "Canadian Universities Using DEI," *National Post*, February 2023.

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*It should be noted that this quote is often attributed to Abraham Lincoln. However, some sources would disagree.

Alex St. Germain (alexbleo@yahoo.ca) was born in 1954 into a working class family, personally experiencing social injustice as a result of poverty. However, he never adopted the victim narrative so prominent today. St. Germain has worked in various factory settings, was a union man, and served in the military. For 35 years, he was employed in the social service sector, and, during his tenure, witnessed first hand the evolution of the fanatical Leftist, Woke ideology. He has fought against it, especially as it pertains to education.

NULLIUS IN VERBA

Grant Brown

Political scientist Wallace Stanley Sayre (1905-1972) has said that "Academic politics is the most vicious and bitter form of politics, because the stakes are so low." This is a corollary of Sayre's Law, which states that "In any dispute the intensity of feeling is inversely proportional to the value of the issues at stake."

(It might be objected that the stakes of academic politics are enormous - nothing less than the expansion and propagation of a body of knowledge, and thereby the fate of civilization itself. But the stakes in question in Sayre's Law are the stakes for the individual disputants: their standing within their academic unit, grants for travel to conferences, promotions, relief from teaching obligations.)

While cute, and probably containing an element of truth, I don't think Sayre captures the whole truth about academic politics. I would add that intelligence is a power, and power corrupts. Intelligence is at least as likely to be used as a sword as it is to be used as a shield (present company excluded, of course!). That is why university politics is so vicious. It is also why we should always be skeptical of putative "experts."

The idea that human intelligence is fundamentally an accoutrement of war derives from what I understand to be the leading theory about its evolutionary origins. It is commonplace to observe that brain size and elaboration, language sophistication, and the typical group size of human communities grew together, and quite rapidly at a period not-too-distant in evolutionary terms from the present. They seem to be bound up together. The advantages of living in larger groups rather than the isolated clans of our pre-sapien ancestors are obvious: larger group size offers protection against invasion by a hostile clan and improves the odds of success in predatory raids on them. The benefits of an increasing division of labour cannot be discounted as well.

The dangers of living in larger groups are less obvious but just as real. When groups reach a size where genetic relatedness is too attenuated to provide a reliable kin-altruistic basis for cooperation, selection pressures would come into play for abilities that facilitate the manipulation and exploitation of one's in-group members, so as to acquire a share of social resources in excess of one's marginal contribution. Before writing was invented, people living in unrelated groups had to remember the interactions they had with other group members in order to keep close track of debts owed and debts owing to them. Mental accounting was important to avoid being exploited by one's fellows. The ability to rationalize and articulate why one's own share should be bigger would have been favoured. Group members who were better able to disguise their exploitation from others and better able to detect exploitative attempts by others against them would thrive and leave behind more mature offspring; those with weak abilities in these respects would suffer and leave behind fewer mature offspring.

In this way, the diminishing dangers associated with inter-group conflicts were partially offset with the increasing risks of exploitation by in-group members. The favoured theory of the origins of human intelligence posits that it arose in an evolutionary arms race over intra-group exploitation, as the size of communities grew beyond the

closely-related clans that proto-humans lived in. People with better memories and a better intuitive grasp of cause and effect, people who were more acute observers of their fellows, better able to detect motives and character traits, would tend to be better able to defend against the exploitative attempts of others, and would tend to be better at exploiting others. The hereditary ruling class of old, and their supporting cast in the priesthood and administration of public affairs, was born. In modern times, this class has mutated into the credentialed class, the professional class, the expert managerial class.

The immense human capacity for self-deception, ably explored by Robert Trivers in "The Folly of Fools" (2011), was adaptive to this social environment. In a sentence: We fool ourselves, the better to fool others. Self-deception allows exploiters to believe that they really are deserving of their greater share, the better to convince the weaker of mind. Thus all of the professions have fancy codes of conduct that are more honoured in the breach. Academic research protocols are nice, yet we have a "crisis of replication" in the sciences coupled with an unprecedented level of publication retractions due to dubious or made-up data.

This all makes sense given the hypothesized genesis of intelligence. One should *expect* there to be a somewhat negative correlation between intelligence and morality. One should expect scientists and other experts to be no more moral than politicians or used car salesmen, on average. This would be particularly true if their training is in a particularly competitive or adversarial field (think of lawyers!), and more true the more directly relevant their expertise is to political or commercial interests. "Trust the experts" is a formula for sliding into an oppressive managerial state that serves its own interests.

Grant A. Brown, DPhil (Oxon), LL.B.(drgrantabrown@gmail.com) has been a SAFS member since almost its inception, and served on the Board of Directors from 2002 to 2009. He was, in retrospect, fortunate to have escaped the viciousness of academia with a nice settlement from the University of Lethbridge, in 1999.

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The SAFS Newsletter is published three times a year (Fall, Winter and Spring) by the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship and is edited by Frances Widdowson. ISSN: 1704-5436

The editor welcomes articles, case studies, news items, book reviews and letters. Send submissions by email to newsletter@safs.ca.

BEQUEST TO SAFS

Please consider remembering the Society in your will. Even small bequests can help us greatly in carrying on SAFS's work. In most cases, a bequest does not require rewriting your entire will, but can be done simply by adding a codicil.

Thank you,
Robert Thomas, SAFS president

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NOMINATIONS FOR SAFS BOARD OF DIRECTORS: 2025-2026

The Nominations Committee this year consists of the SAFS president, Robert Thomas (University of Regina), the SAFS past president, Mark Mercer (Saint Mary's University), and two SAFS members not on the Board of Directors, William McNally (Wilfrid Laurier University) and David Haskell (Wilfrid Laurier University—Brantford).

Long-serving SAFS board member Mark Mercer has decided to step down from the board. SAFS thanks Mark for his service to the society.

Any member of SAFS may nominate individuals for election as Director. These nominations must be received at the SAFS Office by May 17, 2025. Each member nomination shall contain the following information: (i) the signature of the person nominating and the signatures of two (2) seconders; (ii) the full name and address of the person nominated; (iii) a statement of the status and attributes of the person nominated, showing each person's qualifications to be a director; (iv) a written consent signed by the person nominated agreeing to be nominated for election and, if elected, to serve.

The current members of the Board being re-nominated are: Paul Erikson, Kirsten Kramer, Steve Lupker; Zachary Patterson, Robert Thomas, Paul Viminitz, and Frances Widdowson.

The Nominations Committee has received the nomination of Geoff Horsman.

Geoff Horsman, BSc, BSA (Saskatchewan), MSc (McGill), PhD (UBC) Associate Professor, Chemistry Biochemistry, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, Ontario.

Geoff has been a member of SAFS since 2021 and has been a Laurier faculty member since 2011. His academic work has focused on the enzymology of microbial natural products biosynthesis, but he has become increasingly involved in advocating for academic freedom and defending classical liberal principles in education. Since 2023 he has been co-chair of Laurier's Heterodox Academy Campus community, which promotes viewpoint diversity and constructive disagreement on campus. <https://www.wlu.ca/academics/faculties/faculty-of-science/faculty-profiles/geoff-horsman/index.html>

The election will occur at the business session of this year's SAFS Annual General Meeting, Saturday 9 June 2025.

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