



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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15 February 2018

Carolyn Watters
Provost and Vice President, Academic
Dalhousie University
Halifax, NS B3H 4R2

Dear Dr Watters,

I am writing as president of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS), an organization of university faculty members and others dedicated to the defense of academic freedom and the merit principle in higher education. (For further information, please see our website at www.safs.ca.)

I am writing to you because it has come to our attention that the search for a new vice-provost student affairs at Dalhousie “will be restricted to racially visible persons and Aboriginal Peoples at this time” (<http://thechronicleherald.ca/metro/1545239-dal-restricts-search-for-new-vp-to-racially-visible-indigenous-candidates>, quoting you).

Hiring according to race, ethnicity, or cultural affiliation is a violation of the merit principle, the principle according to which academic decisions should be made on academic grounds only. It is also wrongfully discriminatory.

According to the *Chronicle Herald* article linked to above, Jasmine Walsh, the assistant vice-president of human resources, says that this discriminatory hiring is part of Dalhousie’s efforts to increase the number of people from underrepresented groups on campus. The best way for a university to attract people to campus is to adhere to university values of scholarly community and fairness. A fair competition to identify the person best suited for the job would serve to promote Dalhousie’s reputation among all scholars and students.

Discriminatory hiring is sometimes said to be warranted on academic grounds by the need for role models and mentors for minority or indigenous students. But whatever qualities make for good and inspiring administrators, those qualities are present or absent in individual scholars, not in scholars considered as members of ethnic groups. Students are best served by hiring committees that look at the qualifications and skills of individual candidates rather than candidates taken to represent a group.

Indeed, hiring on the basis of race, ethnicity, or cultural affiliation might have the effect of

harming individual minority or indigenous scholars, because it may lead others to see them in stereotypical ways. It is conceivable that qualified minority or aboriginal scholars will not apply for your position, wanting to be valued for the quality of their work rather than for their skin colour or cultural affiliation.

Universities best serve the interests of discovery, of students, and of the community at large when they seek to hire the candidate who best suits the position. To find that candidate, universities must not exclude any qualified applicant. We ask that you remove the discriminatory intention from your job search and consider all qualified candidates on their merits.

We respectfully request that you respond to our letter. With your permission, we will post your response along with this letter on our website.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Mercer', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Mark Mercer, PhD
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Cc: Jasmine Walsh, Assistant Vice-President, Human Resources, Dalhousie University; Richard Florizone, President, Dalhousie University