

Academics at University of New Brunswick criticize professor for alleged racist positions

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Ricardo Duchesne, a social sciences professor at the University of New Brunswick in Saint John.

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More than two dozen academics at the University of New Brunswick have issued a public letter condemning the views of a controversial sociology professor as “racist and without academic merit.”

Ricardo Duchesne, who teaches at UNB’s Saint John campus, has “racist positions on multiculturalism and immigration,” says the letter, which was signed by 35 of Prof. Duchesne’s colleagues in the wake of recent revelations about his views.

“Cloaking these views in academic legitimacy is an abuse of his status as a professor,” it continues.

Prof. Duchesne, in a written response, rejected his colleagues’ criticism.

“It is rather rich for the academics who signed this letter to claim that the ‘hallmark of academic freedom’ is to subject views to criticism while at the same time seeking to deny my right to criticize the mandated ideology of diversity and mass immigration. None of the individuals who signed this letter has any scholarly background in the subject of Canadian immigration or multiculturalism,” he wrote.

“I am an immigrant born in Puerto Rico with a mixed-race background questioning an ideology initiated and supported by privileged whites. The word ‘racist’ has been overused beyond reason. The more immigrant diversity is promoted, the more the word is used against anyone who questions this diversity.”

Gary Waite, a UNB history professor who researches forms of racism, is among the faculty members who signed the letter.

“We are ... trying to make it very clear that racism has no place in academia,” Prof. Waite said. “It is not a part of scholarship. It is not just another controversial idea. It is just wrong ... and it should not be presented as credible by someone who has the office of professor here.

“I can say there isn’t a single historian that I know – and I know historians from around the world – who would be afraid to call what he says ‘racist.’ It just is.”

Prof. Duchesne, who immigrated to Canada from Puerto Rico, has taught at UNB since 1995 and holds a PhD from York University, according to his profile on the university website. He said his views have evolved from extensive scholarship. He publishes frequently on the blog of the Council of European Canadians, and in a recent conversation said that diversity through mass immigration is “downgrading European civilization.”

He has appeared on a podcast with Faith Goldy, a former Toronto mayoral candidate and Rebel Media host who was recently banned from Facebook for violating its community standards on organized hate. In 2015 Prof. Duchesne said the influx of Chinese immigrants to Vancouver had been “too fast” and that the pace of change was bad for the city.

UNB president Eddy Campbell said in a statement this week that the university is reviewing allegations involving one of its faculty members.

“We take these allegations very seriously. I want to remind the community that this will take time as it is important we follow the processes through which universities and the members therein are held accountable,” he wrote.

Prof. Duchesne said there is no formal investigation at this point and he is still allowed to teach. He said the school's administration has stood by the principles of academic freedom that are clearly stated in the faculty's collective agreement and include intellectual activity considered "unconventional, unpopular or unacceptable."

David Robinson, executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers, said this is not the first time Prof. Duchesne's views have attracted controversy. In 2015, professors at UNB also wrote a public letter condemning his views.

"It's an interesting case because for us academic freedom must always be given a broad and liberal interpretation, but that doesn't mean it's without boundaries," Mr. Robinson said, citing professional ethics, the standards of an academic discipline and rules prohibiting discrimination.

"The issue is whether there is any evidence to show that Prof. Duchesne, because of his extramural comments, is incompetent to be a teacher any more. That requires a thorough and rigorous investigation based on principles of due process and natural justice. ... We don't want to end up in a trial by social media."

Matthew Sears, a professor of classics and ancient history at UNB, has been vocal for some time on Twitter with his own views of Prof. Duchesne.

"Many of my colleagues are disappointed that the university hasn't taken a firmer stand on these issues up to this point," he said.