



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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2 March 2018

Heather Hemming, Ph.D.
Vice-President, Academic (Acting)
15 University Avenue
Acadia University
Wolfville, NS B4P 2R6

Dear Dr Hemming:

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.)

We would like to ask about Acadia's decision to conduct a formal investigation under your harassment and discrimination policy of psychology professor Rick Mehta for his having publicly expressed his views on current important social and political controversies.

How is this investigation not an infringement of Dr Mehta's academic freedom to comment on the matters of the day? How will it not stifle discussion about these matters on Acadia's campus? How will it not suggest to students that when they dislike what they hear, they should complain to an authority?

I have read many of Dr Mehta's postings and it is difficult to see how anything in them could be construed as discriminatory or harassing, under the commonly understood meanings of those terms. Dr Mehta's views might be unpopular with many people, but they do not constitute an attack on anyone and Dr Mehta seems not to have insulted or belittled anyone.

Acadia presents itself as a place of "rigorous liberal education; [striving to] promote a robust and respectful scholarly community; and inspire a diversity of students to become critical thinkers, lifelong learners, engaged citizens, and responsible global leaders." Investigating a professor for his views is hardly to treat him respectfully and it is certainly not consistent with inspiring critical thinking or citizen engagement.

Dr Mehta's colleagues and the students at Acadia are free to respond to Dr Mehta's views critically and to explain to him where he is mistaken, if they wish to do so. If Dr Mehta's ideas

are false or pernicious, they could be shown to be so through discussion and better ideas.

In your letter to Dr Mehta informing him that he is under investigation, you mention that complaints you have received concern not only the content of Dr Mehta's views but also his voicing them during his classes, the suggestion being that he has been wasting class time. Surely, though, if the concern is that Dr Mehta might have been going off-topic too often in his teaching, it could be addressed through simply raising the matter with him.

We respectfully ask you to respond to our letter and to explain the rationale behind your decision to investigate Dr Mehta. With your permission, we will post your response along with this letter on our website.

Sincerely,



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