



Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship

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18 February 2018

Mylène Boisclair, Directrice générale
Cégep du Vieux Montréal
255 Ontario Street East
Montreal, QC H2X 1X6

Dear Madame Boisclair:

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 your administration's decision to suspend Professor Jean Laberge for comments he made on social media and in an interview with Radio-Canada, as reported on the CBC News website (<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/jean-laberge-cegep-investigation-extended-1.4530069>).

If this report is accurate, it would seem that by suspending him, Cégep du Vieux Montréal has violated Professor Laberge's freedom of expression in a way harmful to your college's mission. Nothing in the report indicates that Professor Laberge has harassed or discriminated against any of his students or colleagues. He has simply voiced unpopular ideas, and, moreover,

voiced them only outside the classroom.

Professor Laberge has stated publicly that homosexuality is a limited vision that does not lead to human fulfilment. Whether one agrees or disagrees with him, or whether one thinks it well- or ill-advised of him to offer such opinions, Professor Laberge should be free to state his mind without facing sanction from Cégep du Vieux Montréal, a place of higher education.

His colleagues and students at the Cégep are free to respond to his views critically and to explain to professor Laberge where he is mistaken, if they wish to do so. Bad ideas should not be countered with punishment but with discussion and better ideas.

This is especially true at a Cégep or other institution of education. Suspending Professor Laberge sends the signal to the students at Cégep du Vieux Montréal that force and sanction are the appropriate way to deal with views they don't like.

Because an essential role of a college is to provide an atmosphere in which the free expression of ideas is possible, professors should not be disciplined or suspended for saying what they think.

Professor Laberge has also said that homosexuals disgust him. This might cause one to suspect that Professor Laberge is disposed to treat his homosexual students badly. But it does both Professor Laberge and his students a disservice to suspend him for actions of disrespect he has not in fact performed. In any event, Professors Laberge's attitudes and the influence they might have on his behaviour should first be topics of critical discussion. Sanctions and punishment should follow only upon actual discriminatory or harassing actions.

We respectfully ask you to respond to our letter and explain the rationale behind your decision to suspend Professor Laberge. 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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