

– PRESS RELEASE –

SAFS Brock

A local chapter of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship



SAFS Brock is a collegial discussion forum open to all those (staff, students, and faculty, but also members of the wider Niagara community) persuaded of the importance of academic freedom for the university's fulfilment of its academic mission. The other aim of SAFS Brock is to defend the primacy of academic over non-academic criteria in all decisions regarding students and faculty, and so to preserve traditional standards and measures of academic excellence in teaching and learning, research and scholarship.

Goals

The goals of SAFS Brock are those of the larger national organization:

- Maintaining freedom in teaching, research, and scholarship.

In pursuit of their scholarly goals, members of the university may take positions that are not in accord with popular beliefs. We oppose measures such as speech codes, extra-legal tribunals and so-called anti-hate legislation that may infringe on the right and responsibility of the academic community (faculty and students) to teach and do research on controversial subjects.

- Maintaining standards of excellence in academic decisions about students and faculty.

Many universities have policies that are discriminatory to the extent that they favour groups of students or faculty on the basis of race, sex, etc. Such preferential treatment is unfair, is damaging to academic excellence, and stigmatizes the very groups so favoured. We espouse equality of opportunity but oppose preferential treatment.

Activities

- Speaking out publicly on campus and in the local press in favour of SAFS's aims, and against oppressive measures in the academic community.
- Keeping SAFS members abreast of developments through local newsletters, chapter meetings, guest speakers, conferences, and other means.
- Supporting candidates who share SAFS's goals for positions on university governing bodies.

- Writing to university administrations where we feel that academic freedom or the merit principle have been compromised.
- Writing to government agencies or, where appropriate, to politicians, in cases where we feel that SAFS's principles are in jeopardy.
- Supporting individuals with advice, moral support, or material aid in those cases where there has been a clear abuse of academic freedom and/or the merit principle.
- Distributing pertinent information to the media.

Why now?

The stimulus to form SAFS Brock came from recent efforts by the Brock administration to stifle dissent and reasoned debate where free and open discussion is called for. In a scholarly pre-publication, a chemistry professor commented on the actual and potentially adverse effects of certain forms of preferential hiring on his discipline. The comments were immediately met with vigorous public condemnation of the faculty member on the official Brock University website. Subsequently, another member of the administration branded the remarks “racist” and “misogynist” in an online Women’s and Gender Studies journal. Apart from these threats to academic freedom, a recent agreement between Brock University and the Brock University Faculty Association to engage in race-based hiring of faculty and librarians has posed a grave threat to traditional academic measures of excellence.

It is the view of the co-convenors of SAFS Brock that the first of these actions violated a faculty member’s academic freedom and curtailed the freedom of all members of the Brock community to advance reasoned arguments on contentious topics. As for the second, while it is indeed racist and misogynist to assert that minority group members or women should not be hired when they are the academically best-qualified candidates, to say that they should not be hired when this is *not* the case is just the opposite. It is a corollary of the merit principle, which applies equally to all, and affirms that the most qualified individual ought always to be hired. This principle, which is intended to exclude *all* (including *reverse*) discrimination, rests on the more fundamental principle of equality of opportunity (*formal* equality of individuals, or procedural justice); the recent identity-based hiring agreement between Brock and the Faculty Association is based on the competing principle of equality of outcomes (*substantive* equality of groups as a matter of distributive social justice). While increasingly enshrined in institutional and government policy at various levels, the latter principle should not be considered sacrosanct or placed beyond the pale of reasoned argument and debate using personal attacks, real or implied threats of sanctions, or censorship.

To become a member of our community join the [Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship \(www.safs.ca\)](http://www.safs.ca) of which SAFS Brock is a freestanding local chapter.

Executive Committee

John Bonnett, Department of History

Murray Miles, Department of Philosophy

Ron Thomson, Department of Applied Linguistics

for further information, please contact one of the above: safs@brocku.ca

Follow us on Twitter [Brock SAFS \(@SAFSBrock\)](https://twitter.com/SAFSBrock) / [Twitter](https://twitter.com/SAFSBrock) and Facebook [\(9\) SAFS Brock | Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/SAFSBrock)