



Daniel R. Page

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Dr. Jeff Keshen, President and Vice-Chancellor
President's Office, Administration-Humanities Building 514
University of Regina
3737 Wascana Parkway
Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada S4S 0A2

September 14, 2024

Dear President Keshen,

My name is Dr. Daniel Page. I am former faculty member of The University of Regina (U of R), and a recent donor to the school.¹ As a professor, I conduct research in theoretical computer science and also study academic freedom/standards issues in Canadian STEM (especially Computer Science). My letter concerns the latter in the broader context, as it came to my attention that U of R is refusing to proceed with two scheduled academic lectures by Dr. Frances Widdowson, hosted/sponsored by The Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS). Furthermore, I am concerned with the present state of academic freedom and freedom of expression, as recognized by U of R.

Formed in 1992, SAFS is a non-profit, non-partisan organization with goals including² maintaining in institutions of higher learning in Canada:

- Freedom in teaching, research, and scholarship;
- Maintaining standards of excellence in academic decisions involving faculty and students.
- promoting reasoned debate on issues of academic freedom and scholarship.

I have been an active member of SAFS since 2018, and believe it has been a valuable resource and asset in defending/understanding academic freedom and other academic rights in Canada. For example, SAFS has intervened in and studied potential violations of academic rights/standards at public universities across Canada, including at U of R.³

On September 12, 2024, the Associate Vice-President (Student Affairs) sent a letter to the President of SAFS informing him that Dr. Frances Widdowson's talks could not proceed because the U of R had an "obligation to ensure a safe work and learning environment and a duty of care to ensure that individuals on its premises will be reasonably safe." Dr. Francis Widdowson, an academic and SAFS board member, with a PhD in Political Science and two peer-reviewed books on Indigenous Policy, was going to be delivering two public lectures on October 3, 2024:

1. *Indigenization and Academic Freedom: Lessons from the Frances Widdowson Case.*
2. *The Grave Error at Kamloops: Should it be Described as a "Hoax"?*

¹<https://www.uregina.ca/alumni-and-friends/giving/donor-impact/2023-honour-rolls.html>

²<https://safs.ca/about-us/>

³e.g. <https://safs.ca/university-of-regina-computer-science-lecturer-receives-letter-of-expectation-for-criticizing-his-university/>

It was claimed that a security risk analysis was conducted, where no evidence was given to the SAFS President. Instead, the rationale provided was:

“Dr. Widdowson’s presence at other post-secondary institutions has resulted in large and emotional protests, which have been well publicized. The University has determined that Dr. Widdowson’s presence on campus will create a significant safety risk for students, faculty, visitors, and Dr. Widdowson herself.”

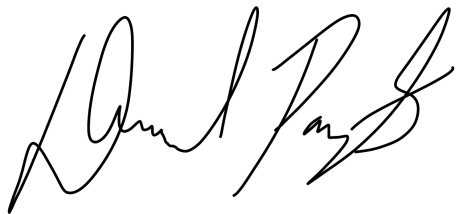
As with any academic speaker coming to campus, ensuring Dr. Widdowson is able to speak on these important academic matters on campus fulfills an important public function. Dr. Widdowson successfully gave a presentation at The University of Alberta in January 2024, and the university allowed her presentation to proceed despite such concerns. As a public university similar to The University of Alberta, U of R has an obligation to uphold at least the same academic principles.

Threats of protests or the belief of them to occur is an inappropriate reason for a university to not proceed with a public academic lecture. It curtails the freedom of expression rights of both the speaker and those who wish to listen, and it is fundamentally anti-academic as it disregards the concept of academic freedom and the open exchange of ideas more broadly. I believe this furthers the fostering of a weak academic culture at U of R, and may create an environment where faculty and students will not be supported when discussing ideas, including controversial issues.

I have seen at least a dozen of Dr. Widdowson’s talks, and, in all events in which I have participated, she has spoken professionally and handled challenging interactions with composure. Should there be a belief as given in the justification, it may instead illustrate the lack of confidence in the leadership to foster a culture that respects academics and how competent academics discuss novel ideas.

U of R has an opportunity to demonstrate its duty of care to its foremost responsibility and function as a public university, upholding the academic values. By allowing these public academic lectures to occur, it will provide an example of how to protect the open and honest exchange of ideas, and take a step toward improving its respect for core academic principles.

Have a beautiful day!



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John D. Smith, BA, MA, Associate Vice-President (Student Affairs), University of Regina

Robert Thomas, President, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS)

Frances Widdowson, PhD, Board of Director, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship (SAFS)