

5th November, 2019

Dear Professor Mercer,

Thank-you for your letter, sent on behalf of the Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship, dated 22nd October, 2019. I appreciate the advocacy in which the Society engages, and acknowledge that one of your Board of Directors is a colleague of mine at Mount Royal University. I apologise for the delay in responding.

It was anticipated that the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences would deliver a Spring 2020 field school, in collaboration with another post-secondary institution. However, no course had been scheduled, no information sessions had been held, no application deadlines had passed, and no contractual obligations had been established with any faculty members; there was an expression of interest from one student. It is with these caveats that the commitment to the field school was cancelled.

Our Collective Agreement establishes collegial processes for the assignment of workload and, by extension, for the creation of the Department's timetable. These processes are vested in full-time faculty who work collaboratively to determine the needs of the Department. Resource management (including course deferment, cancellation, and termination) is overseen by the Department Chair and the Dean; like all institutions, such management takes place within the framework provided by policies, procedures, and collective agreements. Sessional instructors at Mount Royal are contracted to "provide instructional services in a manner determined in consultation with the appropriate faculty within the policies, guidelines, and responsibilities detailed for instructors at Mount Royal University." In addition, senior leadership at Mount Royal (Provost & Vice-President, Academic, Dr. Lesley Brown) confirmed that, in keeping with best practices, sessional faculty shall not lead field schools. That a commitment in principle to a field school outside of this practice was made represents an error for which I am responsible; this commitment was brought to light in September 2019.

I am fully aware of the op-ed referenced in your letter, and I have commented on it publicly. As part of this commentary, I have made no mention of academic freedom. Academic freedom is embodied in the Collective Agreement between the Mount Royal University Faculty Association and the Board of Governors of Mount Royal University. Our Collective Agreement outlines, clearly, grievance provisions.

Please feel free to post this letter, and your original letter, to the Society's website, recognizing that confidential matters are not within the purview of my response. I hope that you enjoyed your visit to Mount Royal University last week, and that you found the conversation on freedom of expression an enriching one.

All good wishes,



Jonathan M. Withey
Dean, Faculty of Science & Technology

cc. M. Hecht; B. Sevick; MRU President; MRU Provost & Vice-President, Academic.