

NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION
of SCHOLARS

16 June 2020

Dr. Gregory C. Finn
Provost and Vice-President
Brock University
1812 Sir Isaac Brock Way
St. Catharines, ON L2S 3A1

Dear Provost Finn,

I write to express my concern about your treatment of Tomáš Hudlický, Professor & Tier 1 Canada Research Chair, Department of Chemistry. Brock University has wrongly cast doubts on the professional and personal character of Professor Hudlický, and in so doing chilled academic freedom at Brock University. I urge you to clear the cloud you have put on Professor Hudlický's character and thereby to restore academic freedom as a governing principle of your university.

I write as President of the National Association of Scholars (NAS). NAS is a network of mostly U.S. scholars and citizens united by our commitment to academic freedom, disinterested scholarship, and excellence in higher education. As part of our mission, we support intellectual freedom throughout North America. We have more than thirty years of experience in advocating for the principles of intellectual freedom. (For further information, please see www.nas.org.)

Brock University's treatment of Professor Hudlický, as exemplified by your open letter of June 7,¹ is astonishing. Your letter condemns as "objectionable" what you characterize as a statement that contrasts "the promotion of equity and diversity with the promotion of academic merit." You further state that "They do not reflect the principles of inclusivity, diversity and equity included in the University's mission, vision and values as approved by our Senate and Board of Trustees." Which is little more than saying you disagree with a professor's restatement of a foundational Enlightenment ideal and the basis of much of higher education for the last millennium.

You are, of course, free to chart such a path for yourself, but to pretend that those who uphold the long-held and widely respected basis of all academic inquiry have committed an offense against Brock University is, to use no stronger word, brazen. Your statement, moreover, must alarm all

¹ Brock University Case, Society for Academic Freedom and Scholarship, <https://www.safs.ca/issuescases/case.php?case=brock-chemistry>; Gregory C. Finn, "An open letter to the Brock community," June 7, 2020, <https://www.safs.ca/issuescases/brock-chemistry/3%29%20Provost-G-Finn-Letter-to-the-Community-June-7-2020.pdf>.

members of the Brock community who have the reasonable expectation of institutional support for academic freedom, expressed by charitable good will in facilitating frank, full-ranging discussion.

Yes, we all know that *diversity, equity, and inclusion* are the watchwords of the new regime in higher education across the Western world. Professor Hudlický has violated the pretense that these are self-evidently virtues that subordinate all other considerations. I am sure you realize that this conceit is something historically recent, both in Canada and the United States. Even if you believe it to be a revelation of transcendent truth, you must be aware that many others disagree. In fact, a large number of faculty members at Brock University as elsewhere in higher education continue to believe that “academic merit” is a preeminent concern in the academy, and *diversity, equity, and inclusion* are at best secondary concerns.

Your attempt to disgrace Professor Hudlický thus seems like an attempt to make an example of an individual who unwisely said what many think but are afraid to express. By shaming him perhaps you can maintain this intimidation over others, by sending a clear signal that the university will not hire, defend, or provide any institutional support to any faculty member, staff, or student who speaks their mind when it contravenes the ideology of *diversity, equity, and inclusion*.

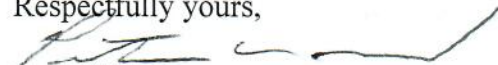
If that is your calculation, I can't say that it is wrong. But I can say that those of us at a distance see your actions for what they plainly are. You are misusing your authority to enforce a regime that you know has doubtful legitimacy.

Higher education institutions should evaluate individuals on the basis of their academic merit, with no regard for race, ethnicity, sex, or membership in any other identity group. *Diversity, equity, and inclusion* are euphemisms to which colleges and universities resort when they wish to favor people by race, ethnicity, sex, or so on. Such discrimination is antithetical to the life of the mind, which higher education must foster. The life of the mind focuses on ideas, not on race, sex, or other physical traits.

I realize that you have publicly committed yourself to a position from which you would find it difficult to withdraw. I do not know whether you truly believe in *diversity, equity, and inclusion*, or are a Nicodemite who hopes to preserve tatters of academic freedom by judiciously condemning the mob's latest victim. But what you done in this case is profoundly wrong—both for Brock University as a custodian of academic freedom and for your reputation to posterity. If you let this injustice stand, you will be remembered as the man who threw Professor Hudlický to the wolves. If you and Brock University publicly vindicate Professor Hudlický, and reaffirm that your bedrock values are academic freedom and charitable tolerance rather than enforced conformity to *diversity, equity, and inclusion*, you will be honored for making the right choice at last.

As a veteran of letters like this, I know that the usual response of a college official is, after checking with the general counsel, to send a bare acknowledgement or no answer at all. And in anticipation of that, I have adopted my own usual approach of giving a deadline. In the absence of a meaningful answer from you, this letter will be posted publicly along with other comment on July 15.

Respectfully yours,



Peter Wood

President

National Association of Scholars