



Canadian Association of University Teachers
Association canadienne des professeures et professeurs d'université

December 8, 2022

BY EMAIL: james.groen@forces.gc.ca

Dr. James Groen
Academic Director
Royal Military College Saint-Jean
Saint-Jean Garrison
PO Box 100
Station Main Richelain, QC
J0J 1R0

Dear Dr. Groen,

On behalf of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), representing more than 72,000 academic and professional staff at 120 universities and colleges, I am writing to express our concern about the process for appointing an interim Dean of Studies at Royal Military College Saint-Jean. From what I understand, a search committee recommended an appointment that was subsequently rejected by you as Director of Studies with little or no rationale.

As you are aware, academic freedom and collegial governance are the foundational values of our colleges and universities. They allow our institutions to fulfil their mission of preserving, disseminating, and advancing knowledge.

The modern understanding of collegial governance in Canada was first established in the early 1960s when CAUT partnered with the forerunner of Universities Canada to establish the Duff-Berdahl Commission. The Commission's report strongly endorsed bicameral or shared governance in which institutions would operate under the general direction of a board of governors that is only minimally involved in academic planning. Academic governance bodies, comprised of a majority of academic staff who are university faculty, were seen as the central fora for debating educational policy and making educational decisions for the institution. In short, the Commission concluded that university faculty should have primary responsibility for academic matters because their judgment is needed to ensure the right academic decisions are taken. This principle has since become a widely recognized pillar of sound governance in universities and colleges.

The importance of collegial governance is today also reflected in our common understanding of academic freedom. Academic freedom includes the right of university faculty to freedom not just in teaching, research and expression, but also the freedom to participate in the governance of their institutions and to criticize the administration without reprisal whether in Senate, departmental or faculty meetings, committees, discussions with colleagues, or exchanges with administrators. To fulfill their mission of preserving, sharing, and advancing knowledge, every higher education institution must encourage open and robust debate, including on contentious institutional matters.

December 8, 2022

The importance of this "intramural academic freedom" is highlighted in the *1997 UNESCO Recommendation Concerning the Status of Higher Education Teaching Personnel*, to which Canada is a signatory: "Higher-education teaching personnel should have the right and opportunity, without discrimination of any kind, according to their abilities, to take part in the governing bodies and to criticize the functioning of higher education institutions." Similarly, the CAUT Policy Statement on Academic Freedom recognizes that one key pillar of academic freedom is the freedom of academic staff "to engage in service" and "to express one's opinion about the institution, its administration, and the system in which one works."

The key point is that academic decisions should be made by university faculty and that, short of violating legal limitations on expression – such as defamation and harassment – academic staff are free to criticize their institution and leadership, no matter how uncomfortably posed or sharply worded. When an administration ignores the recommendations of academic governance committees without reasonable grounds, or takes action against professors who engage in criticism and dissent, it violates principles of collegial governance and academic freedom.

Set against this backcloth, your decision as Director to reject the search committee's recommendation for an interim Dean is deeply troubling. It appears to violate the core principle of collegial governance and to infringe upon academic freedom. I therefore urge you and the administration to re-commit to these foundational principles by following the recommendation of the search committee in appointing the interim Dean.

Given that this matter implicates important principles of collegial governance and academic freedom, CAUT, in cooperation with the Canadian Military Colleges Faculty Association, will monitor the situation closely and, subject to any additional information you may provide, will consider appropriate actions to take.

Sincerely,



David Robinson
Executive Director

/mmp

cc: Peter McInnis, CAUT President (pmcinnis@stfx.ca)
Robin Whitaker, CAUT Vice-President (robinw@mun.ca)
Sylvain P. Leblanc, Interim President, Canadian Military Colleges Faculty Association
(leblanc@cmcfa-apcmc.ca)
Colonel Gaétan Bédard, Commandant, Royal Military College Saint-Jean
(gaetan.bedard@forces.gc.ca)
Major-General D. Craig Aitchison, Commander, Canadian Defence Academy
(craig.aitchison@forces.gc.ca)
Dr. Cecile Malardier-Jugroot, Academic Advisor to the Minister of National Defence and
Interim Principal, Royal Military College of Canada (Cecile.Malardier-Jugroot@rmc.ca)