

TO: All MUNFA Members

FROM: The MUNFA Executive Committee

DATE: October 28, 2021

SUBJECT: Your Academic Freedom Rights

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The impacts that COVID-19 has had on post-secondary education in Canada combined with recent [comments to the media by Memorial University President](#) Dr. Vianne Timmons regarding the removal of posters on campus and [the continued erosion of collegial governance](#) at Memorial University, underscore how important it is that all Academic Staff Members (ASMs) understand, and be confident in, their Academic Freedom rights and obligations.

President Timmons's comments to media on September 16<sup>th</sup> suggest a willingness on the part of Memorial's senior administration to censor criticism or protest directed towards the University President and other members of the senior administration in their role as public representatives of the University, and indicate that individuals who engage in such actions may be threatened with the Respectful Workplace Policy. The MUNFA Executive has [asked Dr. Timmons](#) to clarify her comments on this matter to both CBC and the University community. In particular, we have requested that she explicitly endorse Academic Freedom as a core principle of the University and commit to uphold the democratic principle of free expression among members of the University community.

The Canadian Association of University Teachers' (CAUT) [Policy Statement on Academic Freedom](#) states:

*[Post-secondary] institutions serve the common good of society, through searching for, and disseminating knowledge, and understanding and through fostering independent thinking and expression in academic staff and students. These ends cannot be achieved without academic freedom. All academic staff members have the right to academic freedom.*

[Article 2](#) of the MUN/MUNFA Collective Agreement (CA) reiterates the importance of Academic Freedom for the pursuit of the University's purposes and enshrines the Academic Freedom rights of all ASMs. It also makes clear that the defence of Academic Freedom is an obligation for all members of the University community.

According to the CA, as agreed to by the Parties, Academic Freedom includes the right of ASMs "to teach, to learn, to carry out research, to publish, to comment, to criticize, to acquire and disseminate knowledge, to create, and to perform; all of these without deference to prescribed doctrine." Furthermore, as stated in Clause 2.04: "Academic freedom includes the right to discuss and criticize policies and actions of the University and the Association and protects against the imposition of any penalty by either Party for exercising that right."

The MUN/MUNFA Collective Agreement provides strong protections for Academic Freedom. ASMs should feel confident about exercising and defending their rights. Whether it be academic administrators imposing changes to an ASM's teaching methodologies, the private sector or government attempting to direct research or academic programming, a lack of meaningful consultation within an Academic Unit, or any other attempt to limit Academic Freedom, we encourage ASMs to speak up. The best defense of Academic Freedom is its exercise.

If you believe that there has been a violation of Academic Freedom, or have questions about your rights, MUNFA is here to support you.