

## Confusing Collegiality with Congeniality

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Last month, CAUT published its Academic Freedom and Tenure Committee's report on the case involving Dr. David Noble and Simon Fraser University. I believe the facts speak for themselves. It is not my intention to review the report. But, there is an interesting point arising from events in the case that must be addressed - namely the role of collegiality in today's university and its relationship to academic freedom.

Following release of the Noble report, the SFU administration issued a statement that, in part, said it rejected the report because the report subscribes to a view of academic freedom that is divorced from an employment relationship - a view that is inconsistent with SFU's own statement on academic freedom. The press release also claimed the right to investigate or inquire into a candidate's "style of interaction and collegiality" and, by implication, the right to refuse to hire some or to fire others because a university does not approve of a person's "style of interaction" or "collegiality."

This is a view of collegiality that might be appealing to some faculty looking at the prospect of hiring a colleague who might be "difficult" to deal with or who might not be the most "polite" person in the world.

What do we mean by collegiality? Most dictionaries define collegiality as the sharing of power and authority equally between colleagues, with the origin of the word traced back to 1887 to describe the collective sharing of power between bishops in the Roman Catholic Church. It also means belonging to a college or university. Collegial does not mean "good behaviour," "politeness" or "niceness." But these days, collegial, when used by some in the academic community, has become a code word to identify "problem" people or "troublemakers" and, as stated in the SFU press release, justification for not hiring someone.

The Harry Crowe case is a seminal event in the history of CAUT. In 1958, Crowe was a professor at the United College in Winnipeg. In a private letter, Crowe, who was the past secretary of the faculty association, remarked critically on faculty members fund raising for a board that had told the association that administration was none of the association's business. He also had some interesting things to say about "preachers" and the "corrosive force of religion." The college principal intercepted the private letter and initiated dismissal proceedings against Crowe.

Crowe had a reputation as a "troublemaker." In defending his actions, the principal claimed Crowe was expelled as a student for "immorality." In essence, Crowe was branded as uncollegial (ironically, Crowe was arguing for collegiality in its true form of power sharing). At the prospect of being fired, Crowe wrote, "... I am sure that the causes of job security and of academic freedom are the same ..." (A more complete recounting of the Crowe case can be found in Michiel Horn's *Academic Freedom in Canada* and in Kenneth McNaught's *Conscience and History*.)

In 1958, CAUT had few policy statements or guidelines on how to deal with faculty colleagues who might not be the nicest of people. Today, this subject is found in CAUT's discussion paper *What is Fair: A Guide for Peer Review Committees*. In discussing the type of evidence that can be used for tenure, renewal and promotion, *What is Fair* states: "Furthermore, the decision must not be made because the candidate has a difficult personality. The university is not a club; it is

dedicated to excellence. The history of universities suggests that its most brilliant members can sometimes be difficult, different from their colleagues, and unlikely to win a popularity contest. The university is a community of scholars and it is to be expected that the scholars will hold firm views and wish to follow their convictions. Tension, personality conflicts and arguments may be inevitable by-products."

In other words, faculty are not to be evaluated on their "style of interaction and collegiality" as SFU would do as part of hiring a senior faculty member and in determining if they would be a good representative of the university.

Academic freedom exists to allow faculty to develop and express strong views as part of their teaching and research. It is the right to investigate, speculate and comment without reference to prescribed doctrine. It is the right to criticize the university, the faculty association and society at large. It is the right to be free of institutional censorship. It is the right not to suffer any penalties for exercising legal rights as citizens, including the right to freedom of expression. These are views held by SFU as stated in the framework agreement between the university and Simon Fraser University Faculty Association.

If faculty are to be free to move from one university to another, how can they be free to exercise the rights of academic freedom at one university knowing the expression of those rights in the form of controversial opinions, research or teaching may lead to loss of employment opportunities at another university? Academic freedom does not reside in any one university; it resides in all - or it resides in none.