



February 26, 2024

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Brampton Centre

Chandra Arya, M.P.
Nepean

Paul Chiang, M.P.
Markham-Unionville

Lena Metlege Diab, M.P.
Halifax West

Elizabeth May, M.P.
Saanich-Gulf Islands

Ken McDonald, M.P.
Avalon

Mike Morrice, M.P.
Kitchener Centre

Yasir Naqvi, M.P.
Ottawa Centre

Sonia Sidhu, M.P.
Brampton South

Tony Van Bynen, M.P.
Newmarket-Aurora

Patrick Weiler, M.P.
West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country

Salma Zahid, M.P.
Scarborough Centre

Sameer Zuberi, M.P.
Pierrefonds–Dollard

Dear Members of Parliament,

Thank you for your letter. We share your concerns around anti-Palestinian, anti-Arab discrimination, antisemitism, and Islamophobia and agree that freedom of speech must be upheld on our campuses.

The devastating conflict in the Middle East affects many of our staff, students, and faculty members who have loved ones in the region and those who are concerned about the ongoing loss of life.

The University of Manitoba (UM) is committed to eliminating all forms of racism across our university. Recent events have reminded all of us of the importance of this work, and history tells us of the dangers of allowing hatred and intolerance to grow.

It is very important to UM to maintain a respectful work and learning environment and [our policies](#) reflect that. UM strives to provide environments that support learning even through times of conflict by encouraging critical thinking and respectful dialogue. As we have stated before, we continue to remind our entire UM community that we cannot lose sight of our common humanity in this conflict, or any future conflicts.

1. How does the university address and combat Islamophobia, antisemitism, and anti-Palestinian and anti-Arab discrimination?

University administrators provide opportunities for regular meetings with Jewish, Palestinian, and Arab groups and any students, faculty, or staff concerned about discrimination on campus, either at their request or proactively, to listen to their experiences and offer resources.

Additionally, we are encouraging anyone who needs to talk or seek support to reach out to our counseling services, which are available to all UM [students](#) and [employees](#).

UM continues to encourage anyone on campus concerned for their safety, or who has reason to be concerned for the safety of others, to contact our [Security Services](#) team. Security Services implements a comprehensive safety and security plan to help ensure everyone feels and is safe on UM campuses. This includes offering comprehensive supports for any known campus events and increasing its presence at Jewish and Muslim

spaces. As required, we are removing inflammatory or racist posters, have strongly [denunciated the distribution of hateful propaganda](#) on our campuses, and have submitted materials to local authorities.

2. What positive steps have you taken, and will you take, to protect students' career prospects as they engage in debate on the Middle East conflict?

UM is committed to protecting freedom of expression for all of our community members.

Under our [Respectful Work and Learning Environment Policy](#) and other UM governing documents, we have outlined a commitment to academic freedom and freedom of thought, inquiry, and expression among UM community members. The university fosters an environment that encourages and welcomes healthy debate on our campuses. We are clear through policies and communications with staff and faculty that discrimination is not tolerated and Equity in Hiring guidelines, resources, and training is available for all departments across our campuses. Each individual has the right to participate, learn, and work in an environment that promotes equal opportunities and prohibits harassment and discriminatory practices. This applies to all students across professional studies.

More recently, our Associate Dean of Post Graduate Medical Education at UM's Rady Faculty of Health Sciences recently shared with staff, faculty, and students our support for the [Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada \(AFMC\)](#). We are aligned with its efforts to ensure there is equitable and unbiased resident matches for all applicants.

The faculty is working towards the integration of restorative justice practices, which includes proactive community building circles. This is meant to help hold space for respectfully listening to multiple perspectives. At a curricular level, it is working towards integrating content on religious discrimination (including Islamophobia and antisemitism) into the undergraduate medical education curriculum. At the same time, it is looking to hire more diverse physician mentors to better support our increasingly diverse learner community.

3. How does the university ensure that academic freedom, and freedom of speech, association and assembly, is protected when members of the university community engage in debate related to the Middle East conflict?

UM supports the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR). Our university is a place in which freedom of expression plays an important role, and a diversity of people and viewpoints are to be expected and celebrated. To that end, all members of the university community are welcome to peacefully represent their personal or religious beliefs.

As with all institutions of higher learning in a free and democratic society, UM values freedom of expression and has a clear policy on academic freedom, which is enshrined in the university's governing documents, including our [Academic Freedom and Responsibilities Policy](#) and the [Collective Agreement](#) between the university and the University of Manitoba Faculty Association (UMFA).

In Canada, and specifically in keeping with the principles set out in UM governing documents and the UMFA Collective Agreement, those persons engaged in teaching, research, and dissemination of knowledge are entitled to freedom in discussing their subjects and freedom from institutional censorship, penalties, and reprisals.

UM follows a robust and rigorous process to review matters of [academic and non-academic misconduct](#) and adheres to several policies and procedures including our [Respectful Workplace and Learning Environment Policy](#) and [Violent and Threatening Behaviour Policy](#).

UM is committed to providing an environment where every member of the UM community can listen, learn, engage, and reflect on a variety of topics—heavy conflicts or complicated issues—without fear of discrimination or censorship.

At the same time, we also recognize there is a place [where freedom of expression ends and hate speech begins](#). Expression that advocates violence is not protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms; nor is expression that runs contrary to the spirit of the Charter, such as hate speech. Hate speech will not be tolerated on UM campuses and would be a violation of our [Respectful Work and Learning Environment Policy](#). It is also a breach of the [Manitoba Human Rights Code](#) and we would engage authorities to investigate as [Hate Speech under the Canadian Criminal Code](#).

4. What measures is your university taking to support students and faculty who are uncomfortable, upset or offended by the robust debate and critical analysis at the heart of the quest for knowledge?

There are a number of supports available to [students, staff, and faculty](#), including our [Office of Human Rights and Conflict Management](#), which offers ways to file formal and informal complaints about harassment, discrimination, sexual violence, or conflict.

Our [Office of Equity Transformation](#) and [Office of Anti-Racism \(Bannatyne Campus\)](#) offer conversation series, anti-racism and social justice toolkits, and resources to help foster respectful dialogue and critical analysis of difficult topics and conversations.

We understand some people will be uncomfortable with debate around certain topics, but universities have extensive experience and history of fostering critical thinking. They must and should remain an environment for robust dialogue around a variety of topics.

We continue to encourage members of our community who need to talk or to seek support to reach out to our counselling services, which are available to all UM students and staff; to connect with our Spiritual Care and Multi-Faith Centre, which includes in its team a Muslim Spiritual Care Provider; or to connect with one of UM's Elders-In-Residence.

As mentioned, UM implements a comprehensive safety and security plan to help ensure everyone feels and is safe on our campuses. Security Services offers comprehensive supports for any known campus events and has increased its presence at Jewish and Muslim spaces.

5. What is your university doing to ensure academic freedom and freedom of expression are not compromised during this deeply polarized time, when disinformation is commonplace, and donors and alumni are seeking to intervene?

Please note, the response to question five is best understood when reviewed alongside the response to question three.

We understand that some people, including donors and alumni, may have strong views on many topics and could be critical of how UM handles a particular situation or conflict.

For this reason, UM has robust [policies and procedures](#) in place to give us a strong foundation on which to make decisions for our community. We ensure we are not unduly influenced by upholding the principles we have agreed to within our policies.

6. Will you commit to engage with relevant student groups and faculty/staff unions to foster an open dialogue and gain insights into the realities of racism and discrimination and how to structurally address it?

Yes. UM is committed to engaging with all student groups, faculty, and staff unions to foster an open dialogue around racism and discrimination, both institutionally and systemically.

The university is confident in the effectiveness of our current policies to respond to racism and discrimination in all their forms, as well as to preserve students' right to freedom of expression on campus. We are committed to regular review and will pursue improvements as required. Currently, our anti-racism task force and [Office of Equity Transformation](#) are looking at all policies to ensure everyone in the UM community is protected and feels welcomed, represented, and safe on all our campuses.

7. What efforts is the university undertaking to promote peaceful solutions, constructive dialogue and conflict-resolution as it relates to the Middle East conflict within the Campus community.

We are pleased that UM's [Office of Equity Transformation](#) is offering the Listening, Learning, Leading series for staff, students, and faculty. We know UM, as an institution, can do more to foster meaningful relationships to encourage respectful dialogue around difficult topics. As a university, UM must model what it means to move into complexity.

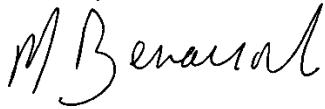
The [series](#) is intended for our internal community and is meant to make room for complexity without demands for resolution, and to create a forum where compassion and humanity enliven debate within our community. One of the first in the series was a facilitated session with our students focused on online hate and racism, which included conversations regarding Islamophobia and antisemitism impacting communities.

The series recognizes diversity within communities and does not expect any individual to speak for an entire community. Registration is required for these events—all panelists, participants, and audience members will agree to the Community Accountability Guidelines at the time of registration. To ensure a safe space for dialogue, recording of events by attendees is not permitted.

All events in this series will follow community accountability guidelines, with speakers and audience members agreeing to:

- Listen for insight
- Appreciate complexity
- Engage with respect the viewpoint of each of the speaker(s)
- Question for understanding, rather than to confront or challenge
- Value dialogue
- Debate ideas not the person
- Hold human dignity for all

Sincerely,



Michael Benarroch, Ph.D.
President and Vice-Chancellor

cc: Chad Gaffield, OC PhD FRSC, CEO, U15 Canada
Philip Landon, Interim President and CEO, Universities Canada