

Answering Ten Questions in Twenty-Five Weeks:

1. Did Mount Royal University administrators do anything to address the poisonous work environment Frances Widdowson endured from 2016-2019?
2. Why was Frances Widdowson's open letter satirizing demands to combat systemic racism considered to be "harassment"?
3. Can one Tweet satirizing a "misgendering fatigue" cartoon and the LGBT+ initialism violate three Mount Royal University policies and two laws?
4. How did asking questions about "indigenous science" contribute to Frances Widdowson's firing?
5. What role did the Mount Royal Anti-Racism Coalition (@MRUAntiRacism) play in the mobbing of Frances Widdowson?
6. Was Renae Watchman's complaint against Frances Widdowson emboldened by university indigenization?
7. What is Mount Royal University's standard for a "frivolous and vexatious complaint"?
8. Did Mount Royal University "follow rigorous due process" in Frances Widdowson's case?
9. Why did Mount Royal University insist that Frances Widdowson "take responsibility" and "show remorse" for her conduct?
10. How was Frances Widdowson terrorized by Mount Royal University administrators on the evening that she was fired?

1. Did Mount Royal University do anything to address the poisonous work environment Frances Widdowson endured from 2016-2019?

From 2016-2019, Mount Royal University (MRU) allowed a number of faculty, students, and staff to poison the work environment of Dr. Frances Widdowson. Although Widdowson's Collective Agreement asserted that MRU administrators were required to act to protect employees from personal harassment, no administrator intervened to stop people from subverting Widdowson's ability to carry out her workplace goals. Over a period of four years, there were attempts to sabotage events Widdowson organized, trivialize her academic achievements, mobilize students against her, and defame her as a "racist" and "anti-indigenous" professor. David Docherty, the President of MRU at the time, even insinuated, in front of a group of student politicians, that Widdowson's participation in General Faculties Council amounted to "debating whether the earth was flat or round". Widdowson sent seven emails to administrators over this period – on June 6 and September 7, 2016, June 6 and September 1, 2017, May 3, 2018, and two emails on September 3, 2019 (one to the Provost and the other to the Dean of Arts) – alerting them to this toxic workplace. As Widdowson stated presciently in her 2019 email to Provost Lesley Brown, "I am worried that the mobilization of students against me might be a tactic used to try to force me into early retirement". No action was ever taken to address the threats to Widdowson's position at MRU. Two of the professors who instigated the vilification of Widdowson were promoted, and one was even given an award "for her unapologetic voice for social justice in the MRU community and around the world". Evidence for these circumstances is available at www.wokeacademy.info/episode-16/.



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Indigenization Has Poisoned Mount Royal University's Academic Environment



By Frances Widdowson © July 18, 2022 2 comments

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2. Why was Frances Widdowson's open letter satirizing demands to combat systemic racism considered to be "harassment"?

On July 1, 2020, Frances Widdowson posted a satirical letter on her private Facebook page. The letter was in response to the demands of the anonymous "student-led initiative" MRU [Mount Royal University] Racial Advocacy (@RacialAdvMRU), which was signed by 62 MRU faculty members. The letter stated that "Recent events on and/or involving our campus have created a chilly climate for BIPOC [black, indigenous, and people of colour] students, faculty, and staff", which included "anti-Indigenous rhetoric, and a general lack of respect for oppressed groups on campus – including faculty during lectures". (This was not specified, but the "anti-Indigenous rhetoric" could only be referring to Widdowson's research.) The letter also demanded, among other things, that substantial university resources be diverted to BIPOCs, and that mandatory anti-racism training be imposed on all faculty members. Widdowson's satirical response asserted that she could not sign the @RacialAdvMRU open letter because "Open Letters themselves are part of the white supremacist-cis-hetero-patriarchal system". Instead, Widdowson proposed an "Oppression Point System", where each faculty member would be assigned one "oppression point" for being white, male, cis, or a full professor. She then stated that those who scored high on the oppression point scale should resign to make space for BIPOC "voices and perspectives". This letter was alleged to constitute "harassment" by faculty member Renae Watchman on March 18, 2021. After being subjected to hours of questions, the letter was found to be harassing since the investigator claimed that, as "Widdowson degenerates into ridicule and demeaning of others", this would negatively impact a "marginalized individual [like Watchman]". Widdowson's satire, according to the investigator, was "hostile to [her colleagues'] approach" and many "would not want or appreciate seeing such a message with that particular approach". The investigator concluded that Widdowson should not "sarcastically undermine and mock the proponents of a viewpoint" on her private Facebook page as "[i]t is objectively likely that...this would lead to impacted coworkers feeling tension and toxicity in the workplace, which Dr. Watchman confirmed". This finding of harassment about Widdowson's satirical letter was one of the reasons she was fired from MRU.



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When Satire Becomes "Harassment" at Mount Royal University



By Frances Widdowson · August 15, 2022 · [one comment](#)

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3. Can one Tweet satirizing a “misgendering fatigue” cartoon and the LGBTQ+ initialism violate three Mount Royal University policies and two laws?

On February 1, 2021, Frances Widdowson was found, by an outside investigator hired by Mount Royal University (MRU), to have engaged in harassment and discrimination because of one Tweet. This Tweet was in response to some comments made by Jonathan Kay, a *National Post* columnist and editor of *Quillette*. Kay was discussing an email forwarded to him by a member of the Mount Royal Faculty Association (MRFA) that invited union committee members to attend an “Organizational Review Session” on “white supremacy culture” in the union. This led Jonathan Kay to post a three Tweet thread mocking the email, where Kay mentioned, among other things, that the MRFA executive board member giving the session was a “they/them” who facilitated pronouns workshops. Kay also provided a link to the MRFA executive board member’s Prezi presentation on the internet, which contained a cartoon describing “misgendering fatigue”. This cartoon featured a person lying on the floor who claimed to be “mentally exhaust[ed]” because of all the misgendering that they had endured. The cartoon character explained that “Every time I’m misgendered, it feels like someone is adding a brick to my backpack”, and that they would eventually collapse because they were weighed down by all of these metaphorical misgendering “bricks”. This, according to the cartoon character, amounted to “slowly being crushed by the seemingly unending burden of the gender binary”. When Kay was criticized for mentioning that the MRFA executive board member was a “they/them”, Widdowson’s satirical character “Frances McGrath (NOT Frances Widdowson)” tweeted that Kay was right to mention the pronouns because “this colleague has hinted that they are suffering from MISGENDERING FATIGUE”. The Frances McGrath character then asserted that Kay’s Tweet was “just amplifying a silenced TGBQ2SLMNOP voice! #LetTheSubalternSpeak [flexed arm emoji] [heart emoji]”. In spite of this Tweet being made on Widdowson’s private Twitter account, and that the comment was not uttered in the workplace, it was found to be in violation of MRU’s Code of Conduct and harassment and human rights policies. It was also determined to constitute discrimination under the *Alberta Human Rights Act* and harassment under Alberta’s *Occupational Health and Safety Act*. Even though Widdowson asserted that she was satirizing the exaggeration found in the concept of “misgendering fatigue” and the confusing nature of the letters in the constantly expanding LGBTQ initialism, the investigator stated that Widdowson had harassed and discriminated against the MRFA executive board member because she had “mocked the Complainant’s identity” in the workplace.

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The Perils of Challenging Trans Activism at Mount Royal University



By Frances Widdowson · September 1, 2022 · 2 comments · 94 shares

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4. How did asking questions about “indigenous science” contribute to Frances Widdowson’s firing?

As Frances Widdowson became embroiled in various controversies at Mount Royal University (MRU), she received an important piece of advice from a colleague. This was that, whenever she stated something publicly, she should make sure that she had a recording of it. Although Widdowson thought that such advice was a little alarmist, she did buy a recording device on September 25, 2019 on the way to a lecture by Dr. Gregory Cajete. In this lecture, Widdowson asked Cajete how “indigenous star knowledge” should be incorporated into the curriculum. As it was pre-telescope, would the knowledge be incorporated into the astronomy curriculum, Widdowson asked, or was he just talking about studying how indigenous people viewed the stars in an anthropology course? This question was alleged to be “harassment” by an indigenous studies professor who claimed that Widdowson said that “Indigenous science is not science at all” and that this was “disrespectful” and “racist and discriminatory”. As Widdowson had recorded the question, however, she was able to show what she really said. The matter did not end there, however. In an Arts Faculty Council (AFC) meeting, Widdowson asked, in response to a question by another colleague about how to make MRU “safe” for indigenous scholars, whether saying that indigenous science was not science would be considered to make MRU “unsafe” (as this had been claimed to be “racist and discriminatory” by an indigenous scholar in an investigation). This resulted in another indigenous academic saying that he was “insulted” by this question and that making such a claim was “laughable”. When Widdowson put two words in the chat - “Insulted? Laughable?” - she was attacked by seven other faculty members. Widdowson’s question at this meeting then became one of the allegations in another harassment investigation. And even though the investigation cleared Widdowson of harassment in this instance, the hostile reaction to the question that she asked was one of the reasons given for why she was fired. President Tim Rahilly stated that Widdowson’s “conduct at a meeting in the spring of 2021 was so disruptive that it was a significant contributing factor” to the “development of new procedures” and the “disabling of the chat function” at the AFC meeting.



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When Questions Become Harassment



By Frances Widdowson · October 21, 2022 · 8 comments

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5. What Role did the Mount Royal Anti-Racism Coalition (@MRUAntiRacism) Play in the Mobbing of Frances Widdowson?

In numerous cases of university professor mobbings, anonymous accounts have played a role because a lack of transparency allows students and professors to defame a target with impunity. Frances Widdowson's firing was no different. Her mobbing had its origins in September 2019, when an anonymous group called the Indigenous and People of Color Support Network printed posters announcing "WE BELONG HERE RACISM DOES NOT". These posters were distributed at General Faculties Council to denounce an OpEd about ethnic diversity and social trust written by the MRU instructor Mark Hecht, and the uproar surrounding it was related to the cancellation of his field school. Emboldened, the Mount Royal Anti-Racism Coalition emerged a few months later, and, according to the MRU indigenous studies professor Renae Watchman, it had "about 70 people in it, mostly academics at MRU". Watchman claimed that it was formed to oppose (the unsubstantiated) "mounting racism and rhetoric" and "unspoken climate of anti-Indigenous racism" at the institution. In June 2020, the Mount Royal Anti-Racism Coalition's anonymous Twitter account (@MRUAntiRacism) began to target Frances Widdowson. It posted false and damaging materials implying that Widdowson was a purveyor of hate speech and discrimination, engaged in the dissemination of "anti-Indigenous propaganda", and was a "racist prof". It also amplified materials accusing Widdowson of "ridiculing" and "harassing" students, even though she was just defending herself against attacks from anonymous accounts. Widdowson was then labelled a "residential school denialist", which was an attempt to equate her research with holocaust denial. Finally, @MRUAntiRacism amplified and encouraged another anonymous Twitter account – the alleged "student-led initiative" MRU Racial Advocacy (@RacialAdvMRU) – to defame Widdowson and mobilize students against her. In spite of the fact that an investigator found that "the choice of name [@MRUAntiRacism]...arguably gives the impression that the account is somehow associated with MRU", nothing was done about this. @MRUAntiRacism continues to use anonymity to try to destroy Widdowson's reputation, and the "MRU" in its handle gives the appearance that it has institutional backing.

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Anonymity: The Cowardly Enabler of Cancellation



By Frances Widdowson · November 3, 2022 · one comment · 162 shares

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6. Was Renae Watchman's complaint against Frances Widdowson emboldened by university indigenization?

On March 18, 2021, Mount Royal University (MRU) indigenous studies professor Renae Watchman filed a harassment complaint against Frances Widdowson. Although this occurred one week after Widdowson filed a complaint against Watchman, MRU did not provide Widdowson with Watchman's complaint until two and a half months later. The delay in providing the complaint seemed to be linked to the finding that Watchman had engaged in "Ostracism for amplifying the call to silence Dr. Widdowson by threatening her Publishers". The complaint from Watchman appeared to be frivolous, and possibly vexatious; its 25 pages (seven pages of "examples" and 18 pages of attachments) detailed allegations such as Widdowson failing to capitalize "indigenous", using the acronym "DIE" to refer to Diversity, Inclusion and Equity initiatives, and not recognizing Watchman's presence during her first two years at MRU ("to ignore someone", alleged Watchman, "is to make them invisible"). The attachments that Watchman included did not even involve Widdowson's treatment of Watchman, and instead pertained to Watchman's endorsement of criticism of Widdowson and Widdowson's comment that allegations about "racism" and "white supremacy" at MRU should be openly discussed and debated. Watchman also included a number of criticisms that Widdowson had made about Indigenization, as well as a satirical letter poking fun at attempts to bring in mandatory anti-racism training at MRU. While Watchman's complaint can be seen as the culmination of years of animosity towards Widdowson, it also has roots in MRU's Indigenization initiative. MRU's Indigenous Strategic Plan states that "Mount Royal University" is intent on "cultivat[ing] respectful and welcoming environments that prevail over a legacy of colonization", "foster[ing] respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge-production", and "promot[ing] culturally responsible and respectful curricula". With this policy, one can see why Watchman believed that she should be able to use the complaints process to stop Widdowson from criticizing Indigenization. An investigator hired by MRU to examine the complaint, in fact, noted that Watchman continuously expressed frustration that "academic freedom can even notionally be relied upon" by Widdowson to criticize indigenization and indigenous policy, and he characterized Watchman's "mindset as resenting Dr. Widdowson's ongoing existence as an employed academic at MRU, or at least her ability to speak against Indigenization at all".



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The Perils of University Indigenization



By Frances Widdowson November 21, 2022 10 comments 720 shares



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7. What is Mount Royal University's standard for a "frivolous and vexatious complaint"?

When Frances Widdowson was fired from Mount Royal University (MRU), the President's termination letter stated that one of the "reasons" for her firing was "Bringing forward a complaint that was deemed frivolous, vexatious or malicious and not in good faith". The President also stated that an "example" for why Widdowson's "relationship with Mount Royal University has become irreparably damaged" was that she had indicated that she would "continue to lodge complaints whether or not they are frivolous or vexatious". But there were three reasons why Widdowson could not have anticipated that her complaint(s) would be viewed thusly. First, the complaint deemed to be "frivolous, vexatious or malicious" that Widdowson filed seemed, on its face, to be much less controversial than the one that was filed against her by Renae Watchman a number of months earlier. Watchman had complained that Widdowson had not capitalized "I" in the word indigenous and referred to Diversity, Inclusion and Equity initiatives with the acronym DIE, and MRU had deemed this complaint to be legitimate and worthy of an external investigation. Watchman also had filed her complaint one week after she had been notified that Widdowson had filed a complaint against her, making it appear to be retaliatory in nature. Second, Widdowson had been previously found, in another investigation, to have violated three MRU policies and two provincial laws for one Tweet satirizing a cartoon about "misgendering fatigue", as well as her poking fun at the continually expanding letters of the LGBTQ initialism. As Widdowson was disciplined for this one Tweet, this seemed to be MRU's standard for findings of harassment, and what Widdowson was complaining about was much more significant than this (i.e. it did not seem to be "frivolous, vexatious or malicious" by this standard). Third, MRU delayed providing Widdowson the legal reasoning from another investigation about how complaints were deemed to be "frivolous, vexatious or malicious". This three and a half month delay meant that Widdowson was unable to access the guidance that she needed from MRU to make an informed decision about whether her complaint(s) could potentially be viewed as "frivolous, vexatious or malicious".

8. Did Mount Royal University "follow rigorous due process" in Frances Widdowson's case?

In a statement that it released to the media, Mount Royal University (MRU) not only implied that Frances Widdowson was fired because she engaged in "harassment and discrimination". It also hinted that these findings were justified because, at MRU, "decisions are always made following rigorous due process". This "rigorous due process", however, was anything but. In the first two investigations to which she was subjected, for example, Widdowson never even received the dated and signed complaints. When she demanded them as an important element of natural justice, Widdowson was told by MRU that "the release of the document of complaint could result in issues around procedural fairness for the complainant", and that Widdowson must participate in the investigations or be disciplined. Such an assertion ignored that a Respondent's ability to receive a complaint is a major requirement of due process, because it ensures that the accused can respond to the case being made against them. And although Widdowson was told by one of the investigators that she had been provided with all of the details that existed in the complaint, Widdowson found out after the investigation, from a freedom of information request, that important information had been withheld. One of the complaints, for example, was filed a few days after Widdowson had demanded transparency and accountability for a workshop alleging the existence of "white supremacy culture" in the Mount Royal Faculty Association. The Complainant, who was a board member for the faculty association, had facilitated this workshop, thus raising the possibility that the complaint was retaliatory in nature. Widdowson was also told that she could not be investigated using the procedures attached to MRU's Human Rights Policy, which contained natural justice protections, because this was "not an issue in [Widdowson's] case". Widdowson discovered, however, from a freedom of information request, that MRU had explicitly directed the investigator to "examine the Allegations in the context of...the *Human Rights Policy*...". Furthermore, as Widdowson had to receive the investigation reports through freedom of information requests, all contained significant redactions. What was withheld often pertained to the legal reasoning used by the investigators to determine if employees should be disciplined. It was only after Widdowson had been fired and embarked upon the arbitration process that she was able to see all the documents that had been used as the basis for discipline. This means that Widdowson has had to wait over two years to have a complete understanding of the allegations made against her.

The Woke Academy's Rejection of the Rule of Law



By Frances Widdowson © December 12, 2022 6 comments 464 Shares [f](#) [t](#) [e](#) [s](#)

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9. Why did Mount Royal University insist that Frances Widdowson “accept responsibility” and “show remorse” for her conduct?

On December 13, 2021, Frances Widdowson attended her final disciplinary meeting with the acting provost at Mount Royal University (MRU). In this meeting, the acting provost asked Widdowson whether she “accepted responsibility” or “showed remorse” for her conduct, implying that not doing so would make her employment relationship unviable at MRU. In response to the acting provost’s queries, Widdowson stated that she could not accept responsibility for her actions because Section 25.4.1 of the Collective Agreement stated that “An Employee may not be disciplined for violation of a rule, regulation or instruction unless that rule, regulation or instruction has been promulgated, and communicated to the Employee, by the appropriate authority...”. MRU had never let it be known that it intended to regulate private social media activities as a workplace issue, and Widdowson could not have known that her actions violated MRU policies. Widdowson pointed out that when she eventually did receive instruction from the acting provost, in May 2021, she had complied with her directive not to orient her social media posts towards members of the MRU community. This, however, did not matter because a later investigation found that even satirizing the viewpoints held by MRU community members on social media was determined to create a toxic work environment. Widdowson also told the acting provost that it was not possible to show remorse for her actions because she was just defending herself from a mobbing that was underway. Widdowson, in fact, had been alerting administration about how numerous MRU faculty members had been ostracizing her and trivializing her academic accomplishments on social media for years, and nothing was ever done about it. As Widdowson had been given the impression that MRU would not regulate private social media accounts, this forced Widdowson to defend herself from an indigenous scholar activist who tried to mobilize an anonymous “student led” group against her. Although Widdowson provided the acting provost with detailed evidence of the campaign that had been waged against her, MRU’s termination letter one week later included the following two “examples” of why Widdowson could no longer be employed at the university: “You have indicated that you will not take responsibility for your conduct” and “You have indicated that you have no remorse for your conduct.”

10. How was Frances Widdowson terrorized by Mount Royal University administrators on the evening that she was fired?

On the evening of December 20, 2021, Frances Widdowson was invigilating an exam in Room B101. After all the students had left, Widdowson gathered up the exams and began to walk back to her office. As she moved down the hallway, she heard a voice behind her saying “Dr. Widdowson, Dr. Widdowson”. Widdowson assumed that it was a student, but it turned out to be the vice-provost and associate vice-president, academic. The vice-provost motioned towards a classroom across the hall and said “could you just step in here a minute?” Because Widdowson had been at a virtual hiring committee talk with the vice-provost that morning, she assumed that he wanted to discuss the candidate that was being interviewed. When Widdowson stepped into the room, however, she saw two human resources representatives sitting at a table waiting for her. Since Widdowson had been in a disciplinary meeting a week before, she knew that there was only one reason why human resources would be ambushing her like this after hours – she was about to be fired. As Widdowson was aware that her Collective Agreement gave her the right to have a union representative present at any disciplinary meeting, she told the administrators that the meeting could not take place without representation and proceeded to try to leave the room. At this point, the vice-provost positioned himself between Widdowson and the door, effectively blocking her exit, and tried to push an envelope into her hand. This led Widdowson to become panicked and to yell at the vice-provost that he was forcibly confining her. Widdowson pushed past the vice-provost and ran back to her office and tried to contact the union, only to find that her computer had been locked down. After she called one of her colleagues and asked her to notify the union, Widdowson tried to leave her office only to find the vice-provost outside attempting, once again, to force an envelope into her hand. The vice-provost was accompanied by a crowd of administrators, as well as two security guards who stood at either end of the hall. As Widdowson thought that she was going to be blocked from leaving and have her exams forcibly taken from her, she became terrified and called 9-1-1. After calling the police, Widdowson yelled at the administrators to stand back and not to touch her. She then fled the building and locked herself in her car while she waited for the police to arrive.