

21 June 2019

Mr. Michael Korenberg
Chair, Board of Governors
The University of British Columbia
6328 Memorial Road
Vancouver BC V6T 1Z2

SENT VIA EMAIL

Dear Mr. Korenberg:

As you know, the UBC Faculty Association represents around 3400 UBC employees including those employees core to its teaching and research missions—the faculty and librarians. We are concerned about the impact upon our members of the Jenn Smith event scheduled to be held on campus on 23 June. We urge you to investigate this matter and to overturn the decision to hold the event.

Any event in which diversity in sexual identity or gender expression is rejected espouses views contrary to the substantive commitment to equity and inclusion UBC has undertaken. In the FA's view, equity and inclusion are not only central ethical values of the academy but also are necessary for the best functioning of the academic community in its teaching and research functions. Thus, based on previous activities of Jenn Smith, there is a strong prima facie case that not only certain individuals in the UBC academic community but indeed the UBC academic community as a whole may be harmed by this event.

Because the 23 June speaker is not a member of the UBC community and has not been invited to speak by anyone in that community, no issue of academic freedom is raised by this event. The only issue is freedom of speech. On this matter, UBC Policy 107 on booking space on campus is clear. Section 2.1 of the Policy states:

Balancing Commitments. UBC respects the right to freedom of expression and will not discriminate in a manner prohibited by the British Columbia Human Rights Code. UBC reserves the right to ensure that any use of Bookable Space does not compromise UBC's or the UBC community's activities, as well as the safety and security of persons and facilities.

In allowing this event to go forward, UBC has made the determination that the right of Jenn Smith to speak on campus does not compromise the UBC community's activities and outweighs potential of harm to the safety and security of UBC persons. This judgment, given the nature of Smith's previous events, seems fundamentally opposed to the principle of the responsible use of free expression embedded in the UBC Respectful Environment Statement:

Freedom of expression ... must be exercised responsibly, in ways that recognize and respect the dignity of others.... A respectful environment is a climate in which the human dignity of each individual is valued, and the diverse perspectives, ideas and experiences of all members of the community are able to flourish.

Irresponsible, disrespectful, and discriminatory speech, including by non-UBC persons who have booked space on campus, harms the core academic activities of the UBC community.

Policy 107 is a Board of Governors policy. In allowing this event despite section 2.1 of the policy and in not explaining the reasons why it ranks Jenn Smith's right to speech above expectable harms to UBC persons and its community, UBC is making at best a controversial and at worst a terribly flawed decision. This decision is in direct contradiction of the UBC Respectful Environment Statement:

The University of British Columbia envisions a climate in which students, faculty and staff are provided with the best possible conditions for learning, researching and working, including an environment that is dedicated to excellence, equity and mutual respect.

As Chair of the Board with duties of care, knowledge, compliance, and disclosure, you have an interest in seeing that Board policies are properly applied and that the values that animate this University are properly upheld. We urge you to look into how Policy 107 was applied in this case and to reverse the decision if in your judgment the Policy was incorrectly applied.

The UBC Faculty Association is charged with acting in the interest of our members. In that capacity, we urge you to investigate this matter and to cancel this event.

Sincerely,



Bronwen Sprout
President
On behalf of the Executive Committee

C. Professor Santa J. Ono, President and Vice Chancellor
Dr. Andrew Szeri, Provost and Vice President Academic, UBC Vancouver
Barbara Meens Thistle, Vice President, Human Resources, UBC