

## Media Release

### CAFA's Statement on Freedom of Expression

*For Immediate release – February 15, 2023*

(Edmonton) CAFA supports the responsible use of academic freedom of all academic workers and the charter rights of freedom of expression for all citizens of Alberta.

“CAFA is concerned with the apparent hypocrisy of the Government of Alberta around the issue of freedom of expression,” said Dr. Jon Doan, CAFA’s president and Associate Professor in the Department of Kinesiology & Physical Education at the University of Lethbridge. “Freedom of speech doesn’t seem to be a concern when the provincial government silences university administrators and public health leaders, or when they impose restrictions on the labour movement through Bill 32.”

CAFA believes there has been a pattern of the Government of Alberta using legislation to silence their critics: whether it was the onerous restrictions on third party advertising laws, or changes to union dues collection that limits what speech the unions can pay for. This inconsistent position on freedom of expression extends into the UCP’s own policies around campuses, where one institution, Burman University, is exempt from mandatory free speech policies and the future requirements to provide annual reports.

“Once again, the party elected in part on a promise to reduce red tape turns around and binds us tightly to their ideological perspective,” said Dr. Doan. “After four years of funding cuts, red tape report cards do nothing but direct more dollars away from student experience, teaching, and research.”

“The red tape report card will be an unnecessary waste of money, that will do nothing but take resources away from the classroom as universities are required to waste time telling the government they are doing what they always have done. As researchers and teachers, the academic staff in Alberta’s universities are already accountable for their speech: they face peer-review for publication, lengthy probation periods before tenure reviews, regular departmental and program reviews, and more. All this new report card will do is redirect some administrators from their daily duties to write additional reports for the government.”

“Institutional autonomy is what generates valuable academic freedom,” said Dr. Doan. “The UCP Government’s plan to impose a new freedom of speech report card system is a clear over-reach into the institutional autonomy of our post-secondary system. Institutional autonomy is a bedrock concept that our universities are built upon—that government meddling in the pedagogy and research of an institution slows down innovation and creation of new knowledge, while also running the chilling risk of redirecting it all together.”