Transcript

Re-imagining Academic Freedom and Advocacy

[00:00:00] **Sabreena Delhon:** Hi, I'm Sabreena Delhon. Welcome to Group Chat, where we make sense of what's happening in our democracy with a few friends.

[00:00:11] Top American scholars are moving to Canada, while Canadian researchers are facing growing scrutiny over what they study. What does this mean for the health of our democracy? To dig into this, we partnered with the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences on a virtual event held in March. It was called From Peer Review to the Public: Reimagining Academic Freedom and Advocacy.

[00:00:38] Our panelists were Dr. Debra Thompson, Associate Professor of political science at McGill University, Dr. Eve Haque, Professor of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics at York University, and our very own Dr. Beatrice Wayne, Director of Research and Policy here at the Samara Centre. Here's our conversation.

[00:00:59] **Sabreena Delhon:** So I want to get started with how the political climate in the US is affecting us here in Canada. Debra, over the last two years specifically, we've seen a growing number of American scholars, some of them very high profile, coming to Canada. We know that the Republican administration is a significant factor here, but help us understand what else is going on.

[00:01:24] **Debra Thompson:** Ooh, where to begin? Thanks for that question, and for those of you who don't know me, part of I think the reason for giving that question to me is I used to work in, in the US for over a decade, and I've followed very closely, in my role as a contributing columnist for The Globe and Mail, the anti-DEI attacks on higher education and what not and many of them have to do with DEI, but many of them are simply just the Trump administration being really hostile to the type of knowledge that universities seek to produce. And so absolutely, you know, the Republican administration is a major driver of the exodus of American academics who are facing increased constraints, certainly in terms of their research funding, certainly in terms of the scrutiny of both state and federal level governments over their research.

[00:02:22] Folks who research anything to do with race, gender, sexuality, whether in the social sciences, humanities, or the hard sciences, have faced levels of surveillance and condemnation as you know. Not that we've never seen it before, but certainly the last time was probably in the beginning of the Cold War, I would say.

[00:02:45] And yeah, and that's a great opportunity for Canada in many ways we certainly offered and tried to recruit these folks to come to Canada. And it's in some ways really promising given that, you know, if you go back a couple decades, we used to talk about the Canadian brain drain. You know, we talked about the ways in which so many academics from Canada who were born here, trained here, benefited from our amazing system of higher education, then left to work in the US simply because there was just more opportunity for research funding, and just much larger market in terms of higher education, broadly speaking.

[00:03:28] **Sabreena Delhon:** Well, Beatrice, I want to go to you with how the Government of Canada is responding to this moment because Debra mentioned that this is a big opportunity for us. There's efforts towards recruitment. So the Government of Canada recently announced a $1.7 billion investment in the Canada Impact Research Chairs program. It's going to recruit 100 top-tier international academics, including the Canadian academics working abroad that Deb alluded to, along with their teams to Canada. One of the priority areas here is to recruit scholars that have expertise in democratic and community resilience. I would love to know, Beatrice, what was your reaction when you heard about this?

[00:04:13] **Beatrice Wayne:** I find it very interesting. I'm glad that the government is investing in research and in identifying democratic and community resilience as a priority area from investment. That's really promising. I also spent a long time in the United States before coming back to Canada. And because of that, I'm interested in the decision to focus specifically on international researchers.

[00:04:33] I'm curious as to why this opportunity is not also available to homegrown talent. And I'm also curious how exactly the mechanism that they will be putting effort into attracting these Canadian researchers that Deb mentioned that went abroad specifically because there were better funding opportunities elsewhere and how this really will grow funding instead of for necessarily specific teams and specific chairs, but funding more broadly attract to the democratic, and civic resilience sectors in Canada.

[00:05:08] I feel very strongly that it should be a priority area, but I do also feel like the historic lack of investment in strengthening Canadian democracy can't primarily be offering an international researcher a chair and a team to begin a new project studying Canadian democracy. This puts me in mind of a conversation I had with a federal public service servant in the information infrastructure area of the federal public service, and we were talking about the excitement and enthusiasm around integrating sophisticated AI processes into government information infrastructure. And he said it was a little bit like buying a really run-down house with bad plumbing and then being like, "I'm gonna put it in a pool." And I think a little bit of this is, we're trying to put a hot tub into a house that we really need to fix the plumbing first. I think we need deep investment in our democratic and community resilience.

[00:06:15] But I think that the sole answer to this cannot be the Canadian Impact Plus Chairs. I think I'd like to draw attention to the fact that the Samara Centre has joined with other CSOs who've been engaged in democracy research and advocacy for many years now. And we've called for a Canadian democracy endowment, so that would be a permanent nonpartisan arm's-length funding mechanism to support democratic infrastructure, civic capability building, and CSOs. And I think that a permanent body like this to fund and support Canadian democracy research and advocacy, I think really offers long-term investment in civic resilience that has the potential to have a really meaningful impact. So I think my reaction to this funding is maybe a "Yes, and."

[00:07:07] **Sabreena Delhon:** Indeed. Eve, I want to go to you next and, you know, pick up on the points that Beatrice mentioned about homegrown talent, and I want to ask you about what does this investment in international scholars, this excitement around recruiting high-profile American scholars mean for the culture of research in Canada? What does it mean for the production of Canadian knowledge and the success of Canadian scholars?

[00:07:38] **Eve Haque:** I think that's an excellent question, and Beatrice, I think you laid out some of the, you know, potential sticking points that we might want to be attentive to. So I think, of course, the federal government is up against the fact that education is funded or, you know, decisions around that through the province.

[00:08:00] So things like Tri-Council, you know, is a way to take funding at the federal level and direct it directly past provincial scrutiny to researchers and higher education institutions across the country. That doesn't mean, for example, that Alberta has not tried to interfere into that process, Daniel Smith wanting some kind of oversight into, you know, looking at what people are researching on and having a provincial or approval mechanism. However, I think, you know, the federal government is creating a kind of pathway here to fund institutions, but it tends to do it in this kind of very, let's just say celebrating the top kind of way. So Beatrice, your point about this is, you know, funding that will go to international scholars as opposed to funding, you know, Canadian talent that's already here and trying to do its best in systems that are increasingly underfunded in terms of public monies.

[00:09:18] So I'm in Ontario, and right now maybe a third of institutional support comes from the government, the provincial government. So to say that we have a public education system is increasingly a little mixed of a thing to say. And so I see, I wonder what other mechanisms might exist to properly publicly fund Canadian systems and institutions, post-secondary education in ways that can allow Canadian talent to flourish. And I feel like if Canadian talent is allowed

to flourish, it will naturally be an attractor for international talent. I'm not sure we need these gigantic. So we had CERCs, for example. First the CRC, and if we remember, you know, if I may add, even from the get-go, that was a big challenge to equity, and in fact it took a case to be brought, you know, by women scholars to say, "Hey, look at your distribution." It'd be interesting -

[00:10:34] **Sabreena Delhon:** Is this for Canada Research Chairs, Eve?

[00:10:36] **Eve Haque:** For the Canada Research Chairs. So what might that mean at, how has that played at the CERC level? And therefore - what have we learnt from that in terms of how that might play out at the CERC level, these re-impact research chairs? I think that's, you know, a concern that we have to keep in mind. Even as the federal government, you know, it's a laudable thing to send funding to institutions directly, how might that play out in terms of equitable distribution of funds?

[00:11:10] **Sabreena Delhon:** Yeah, and it makes me wonder how these international scholars will be received when they get here. Can any of you comment on that?

[00:11:17] **Debra Thompson:** I mean, the process for hiring these Impact Plus Chairs has happened very, very quickly, in ways where universities have had to mobilize very quickly to create committees, to seek out applicants, to get them through the search process, to then recommend these applicants up, you know, up our hierarchy to the level of the dean and then the provost. And then my understanding is that those applicants, once recommended from an institution, go to the government, and it's the federal government that kind of makes the final decision. But it's been very, very quick. Universities, for better or for worse, are not known for their expediency.

[00:12:04] You know, they're, they're not their expediency. They're not. They're not known for moving quickly. It's a ship built for stability, not maneuverability. And there's just been a lot of questions left about how exactly we are to fit these Impact Plus chairs into the business of universities. Many of them, at least at McGill, have been folks doing kind of interdisciplinary work, which is great, you know, really on one hand. And on the other hand, interdisciplinary work, especially at my institution, actually is quite challenging. It's quite challenging at an institutional level when people's appointments are housed in one department, and therefore their service or tenure or promotion opportunities are in that one department, but they're expected to contribute to a broader intellectual community.

[00:12:53] That raises a lot of labor concerns, frankly. And so for us, inside universities, and I can't obviously speak for others, there's just, like a lot of questions about what will happen. And to, you know, cosign on Beatrice and Eve's points, we're also facing incredible funding constraints.Incredible funding constraints. You know, like if the federal government were to ask me where to spend money, I probably wouldn't be…my answer probably wouldn't be to give us these research chairs. It would be something like to reduce class sizes or so I could have more TA support so I'm not spending so much time with the hundreds of students that are now in my classroom with very minimal support from either our admin staff, which are being culled, you know, so frequently or centralized in a way that is putting their labor onto faculty or to our grad students who have, you know, so many financial struggles of their own. Anyway, so this is all to say that the process has been very quick, a little bit mysterious, and you know, we'll see what comes of it.

[00:14:06] **Sabreena Delhon:** Well, I want to dig into the politics of academia a little bit more here, and I'm gonna give some context for our viewers. So the tri-agency or tri-council is the umbrella term used for the three federal government granting agencies that support research in Canada with public funds. Recently, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Science and Research adopted a motion requesting Tri-Agency data about research. This was a request that asked for applicant demographic data as well as responses to equity, diversity and inclusion questionnaires. The academic community had a very strong reaction to this prompting discussion about merit and academic freedom.Eve, could you please unpack this a little for us?

[00:14:54] **Eve Haque:** Well, I mean, that, in some ways, came out of nowhere. This idea…first of all, you know, I'll talk about the agency that I'm most familiar with, which is SSHRC. Who receives funding? This is information that is publicly available already. But the idea that there would be, you know, there would be a kind of EDI-looking oversight here, like is our money being spent, you know, wisely because it's funding this kind of research? Who decides what that research, if that research matters or what is the worth of that research? Already, expert panels make those decisions. So the idea that there would be this level of reporting and scrutiny is something that is worrisome, and I think it's actually representative of what we're seeing going on in the US, which has become a driving force for good academics to look for opportunities abroad and to leave the US, or to feel under threat in the US.

[00:16:10] So is that something we want imported here? I found it very interesting that, for example, Steven Pinker was one of the people who testified to this research council, someone who has not been in Canada for a long, long time, and someone I would say has kind of expanded beyond the borders in terms of publications of their field, linguistics or psycholinguistics, and is now kind of opining on arenas that are not necessarily within their realm. That's fine. People find new interests, and academics do often move into the public intellectual realm. But why would they then be invited to testify to the Canadian context and in some ways contra to what Canadian expertise has decided? I think that's the worrisome piece here. Are we importing a kind of arm's length, non-expert review of Canadian researchers in a way that is beginning to mirror what might be happening, what is happening in the US, and what might that then mean for how we move forward in, you know, our research agendas that are good for Canada, for democracy, for equity, and so on?

[00:17:40] **Sabreena Delhon:** Beatrice, I want to build on that by asking you about the accountability to the public here. Most Canadians probably don't know that their taxes fund the bulk of research that is conducted in Canada. So, you know, with an example like this, this parliamentary request for aggregated data in this way, which has since been amended and they said disaggregated is okay, but how should we balance academic freedom with accountability to the public that pays for it?

[00:18:14] **Beatrice Wayne:** So I think at first, as a baseline, it's useful to establish the value of academic freedom for the public. So having a space where open inquiry is encouraged and supported is really crucial for advancing our understanding in all fields. So academic freedom provides a space for intellectual diversity, which is really necessary to grow fields of research. And I would clarify here that in public discourse, when we talk about intellectual diversity, there's always an assumption that it's synonymous specifically with diversity of ideological viewpoints. But I think it's crucially important that we talk about - we're talking about diversity of methods, of data sources, of normative frameworks.

[00:18:53] Those are really important, and those are facilitated when we have academic freedom. And I also think it's funny sometimes when you hear the accusation of sort of an academic monoculture, a lack of diversity. I always think I would like that person to sit with me in a department meeting and tell me if they think that a lack of disagreement was really a problem in academia. I think the lack of disagreement is not something that I've personally experienced in the departments that I've been a part of. But the point is that this space for inquiry and this intellectual friction that exists produces new understandings, insights, and discoveries that can and should tangibly improve Canadian society whether that is a cure for disease found through an NSERC funding or a SSHRC-funded sociology project that connects food instability with housing instability and encourages us to interrogate the connection between those two things. And it's certainly not that every single research project has to have a direct and tangible output that shapes public policy, but they should go towards building our great repository of knowledge of how our world works and help us envision how to build a better one.

[00:20:16] But I think that the crucial and often missing part of making that connection, the public good of academic freedom, is the availability and accessibility of this knowledge to the Canadian public. So this is something, knowledge mobilization and public engagement is often treated by institutions as a nice to have rather than a need to have. And there aren't a lot of institutional structures at many universities that actually support this sort of work that reward professors and reward staff for meaningfully engaging in it. I think this mindset is shifting a little bit, but I still think it's rare for public-facing work to, say, really help build a tenure file.

[00:21:03] And I think it's important for higher education institutions to embed public engagement more fully into the structure of operations and into programs. This would require investment and outreach and I would say collaborating closely and respectfully with community organizations to do this work. And I think we need to also think about structural barriers that exist that prevent public engagement with research, including a lack of access to it. So, the fact that many, many Canadians don't have access to university libraries where they would be able to access a lot of research. This is something that I think a lot of scholars don't think about, but is actually a really meaningful barrier to the Canadian public engaging with their work.

[00:21:54] **Sabreena Delhon:** And civil society organizations don't have access to that either unless they're able to secure it through a partnership.

[00:22:01] **Beatrice Wayne:** Yes.

[00:22:01] **Sabreena Delhon:** Deb, Beatrice has painted a picture that's about broadening inquiry and knowledge and that's very counter to the climate across a lot of campuses right now. So a number of universities have had to close programs and departments recently because of a lack of funding. At the University of Calgary, they'll be shutting down their Classics and Religion department later this year. Here in Ontario there's going to be a $750 million investment in post-secondary STEM programs. What does it mean for our democracy when focus starts to narrow in this way?

[00:22:39] **Debra Thompson:** Oh, gosh. That's such a great question, and I have, you know, I feel like the influx of AI into the world of higher ed has really demonstrated to me at least, the importance of a liberal arts education. And it is ironic in many ways that those folks who criticize higher ed for being useless or navel-gazing all of a sudden in the era of AI, you know, those AI have come for their jobs too. This is to say. I don't know. I think Beatrice is absolutely right that there are so many structural constraints to professors making their research more open to the public from the ways in which that simply doesn't count for the ways in which we are evaluated as professors. SSHRC certainly has an emphasis on knowledge mobilization, written into our grant applications, and that's quite important, but it's still just like, really, really difficult to form the kind of partnerships that would benefit our research, our outreach, our ability to engage beyond, you know, the ivory tower. And those changes are, I think, cultural. I think universities have not done a particularly good job at being transparent about what it is we do and how it is that we do it, even to students who are in our classrooms. Like, I sometimes wonder if they have any idea what it is that professors do besides teach them.

[00:24:37] And of course they don't, because we haven't done a very good job at explaining it to them. And so, I feel like democracy, universities certainly have a really, really important role to play in democracy. We are frequently seen as the venue through which we create citizens. We are stewards of knowledge and data.

[00:25:02] And there's a kind of contribution to, as Beatrice put it, like the public good that's the public sphere, the public good, the marketplace of ideas, as it were. That's really, really important. But those are lofty, lofty, abstract ideas, and it's hard in an era of, you know, neoliberal-type governance where, you know, it has to be almost like a one-to-one input/output demonstrating statistical efficiency and effectiveness. It's really hard to operationalize ideas like democracy in those kinds of terms. And that's a challenge whether or not we as academics or as folks invested in higher education, whether or not we want to continue to participate in the neoliberalization of higher education. Certainly it's, you know, neoliberalization has happened for decades now. Whether we can fight back against those more…I don't know what the exact right word is. Like, those limiting, those narrow ideas of impact, in a way that can reimagine, reemphasize higher education as these spaces of debate and dialogue and where the impact of what we do here may not be immediately apparent, in fact, and it may not be apparent for decades. But that is kind of in the nature of the institutions themselves.

[00:26:39] **Sabreena Delhon:** Beatrice, Deb mentioned AI as a factor here. Our work has shown that as disinformation surges, public trust in institutions declines. What's the responsibility of academia right now to produce knowledge that strengthens our democracy?

[00:26:59] **Beatrice Wayne:** So I think the responsibility of academia as knowledge-building institutions in a democracy is not necessarily to narrow fields of inquiry to answer sort of specific functional questions, but as part of scholarly production to work on articulating the connection and relevance of your work to the public and then doing the work to make sure it reaches the public. So that can mean a lot of different things. That can mean shaping your research output so it's accessible to an audience outside your immediate family. It can mean creating open source archives out of your research as part of your process that anyone can access. It can mean engaging with journalists, engaging with policymakers.

[00:27:40] It can mean creating public exhibits or curations based on your work. But all of those things require institutional support and encouragement and resources. And I think that's what we really need to think and focus on. And interestingly, I think when we talk about importing international researchers from elsewhere, particularly the United States, one thing that the U.S. has done very well is create institutions to support faculty in teaching civic engagement in their classrooms, in creating the scholars. There's a scholarly network in the U.S. that specifically works on connecting the research that scholars do to policymakers, to journalists, to interested people who can report on it. There are lots of ways in which we could take some examples of the way that the institutions have encouraged academia to civically connect to community organizations. I also think it's interesting to build off Deb's point that research in the disinformation space is very clear now that one of the best ways to combat disinformation is pre-bunking. So that is arming Canadians ahead of time with the information and critical thinking skills that they need to be sophisticated evaluators of the new information that they encounter. And I think academia has to play a really critical role in pre-bunking, in training their students in critical thinking skills, but also getting their research out to the public.

[00:29:19] So investing in pedagogy that connects your work and your discipline to civic engagement. I think those are really crucial things that academia can do. And I also think purely in terms of self-interest for the academy, this is a project that institutions should engage in because the public appetite for funding research is dependent on the public trusting that research and understanding the connection between academic rigor, inquiry, and public good. So being engaged with the community helps build trust in higher education, and that can ensure that we continue to have access to the funding needed to advance really great, strong research in Canada.

[00:30:04] **Debra Thompson:** Sabreena, could I just jump in for a second if it's okay? Just to add to what Beatrice said in the era of AI, there is at least a tendency in my discipline and others, like a lot, many of my colleagues have moved to midterm exams, like handwritten midterm exams, because the students are using ChatGPT and other LLMs so frequently and the models are so good now it's, it's really hard for us to evaluate whether this is student's work or whether this is ChatGPT. And in one of my classes, I decided that I was going to teach students how to write, and my students are writing a long research paper, and I've scaffolded it so that, hopefully that will help avoid some of the AI output. But my goodness, it has become so apparent to me that students…there's just such a disconnect between, I think, my generation as an elder millennial and students of Gen Z. They are using AI in ways that I had not anticipated. And they're using it as a thinking tool, which is not necessarily bad, but they are incapable or with great difficulty can they tell the difference between like good research or bad research and, or misinformation and fact.

[00:31:39] It's really concerning, and it has in some ways demonstrated to me the necessity of continuing to assign research papers in the social sciences and humanities. But it is also so much work. You know, coming back to, like structural constraints, I am so behind on all my other work because teaching students how to do things, like the hard way, how to do things the right way has taken up basically all of my time this semester. So again, like this it's so important to do the public outreach, to get our research out, to train our students how to think and how to write and how to be good citizens, and the constraints on doing that are, are so real and so limiting.

[00:32:34] **Sabreena Delhon:** Eve, did you wanna jump in too?

[00:32:38] **Eve Haque:** Yes. I wanted to just come back, you know, related to this idea of constraints, the myriad constraints that are upon us as academics, faculty, trying to do all the work that we're supposed to do. Technology is invited in, all kinds of other constraints that we're constantly trying to keep up. But I want to talk about the fact that

before we can even mobilize our research to share it with the public, we have to really contend with the question of being able to do the research, and the constraints include things like the increased restraints on academic freedom. So I just wanted to say a few things about that. I mean, the ideal in the university was that you can just do your research. Sometimes it's just blue sky research. You're just trying to find things. You don't know where it will land, what the direct implications of that research, you know, is going to be in the next year.

[00:33:42] You know, that it might be 10 years, or someone will use your research to find something that then can be translated into something that will be intelligible, useful in the larger public sphere. But in order to do that, we need a kind of scenario where there's a trust in us as experts in the field to determine what that research should be and how that research should be carried out by providing appropriate resources. That could be funding, space, time. Time is a huge resource, as Debra was pointing out. But in a way, technology has really accelerated this idea that we're living in a world now of this marketplace of ideas. All ideas are equal. And, you know, as researchers, as faculty, we know that's not true.

[00:34:41] In fact, what we spend a lot of our time doing is distinguishing between various ideas and realizing and deciding actually these ideas carry more weight because the research has shown us that this is, you know, more crucial or this is a priority or this makes sense. But in a world where everything has become marketplace of ideas, YouTube university, and let me tell you, there's great stuff on YouTube, that's not to denigrate YouTube at all, but rather how do we decide what is you know, more valuable or has more rigor than some other sets of ideas? And I think that it goes back to something, again, Debra and Beatrice were talking about, which is how do we then work with our students and the learners to develop those critical skills both in the classroom and beyond the classroom? And that requires us to do... so I want to just emphasize, you know, academic freedom of course applies to research, but also applies to our teaching. And so that, you know, that means that we should have the say in how we conduct our classrooms. But with increased concerns about representativeness of all political ideas, ideologies, perspectives, these are the kinds of things that are increasingly being shut down, or faculty themselves are self-censoring.

[00:36:20] So we see that data very clearly in the US, but that, you know, those tendencies are also here in Canada. That's a very porous kind of border and those ideas, you know, those concerns, let's say, travel, and that's because, you know, we have politicians who pick up on these tendencies. So for example, in Quebec, all of a sudden there's a bill on academic freedom because of an incident.One of the sparking incidents was something that happened at University of Ottawa, which is in a completely different province.

[00:36:55] In Ontario, all of a sudden the provincial government decided there should be a free speech policy that applies to campuses. This happened in Alberta as well. Academic freedom is not the same as free expression or free speech and, you know, in the concerns around free expression may be the idea of the marketplace of ideas, hearing all perspectives is something that can be argued more legitimately. However, when it comes to academic freedom, that is not the case. And I think we should, in our education of the public, we need to begin by educating the public on what our role is and what our research requires, and not - and academic freedom is part of it - but also part of academic freedom is good resourcing and good support.

[00:37:50] **Sabreena Delhon:** Right. So it's been interesting to hear you all, you know, give your different insights and, and paint this picture of a system that has become very closed and opaque because culturally it was a way to protect what you were doing and make sure it was valued and viewed as something really important.Now there are political pressures, pressures from technology that are making avenues to justify the importance and significance of this work really challenging. So my last question for all of you before we go to the audience is around what this all means for the citizen. So academic freedom, the production of knowledge, these terms can sound lofty, that was a word you used today Deb, even impractical in a moment when people are really worried about Canada's sovereignty and prosperity. Help us understand in one minute each why this matters for our democracy.

[00:38:45] **Debra Thompson:** I nominate Beatrice.

[00:38:47] **Beatrice Wayne:** I think that whether or not the research question is something that is extremely tangible and specific and immediately relevant to Canadian sovereignty or democracy, we need to have a strong, robust, rich base of knowledge to build policy off of. This is necessary for us to have any sort of good policy, and we need to have a really broad and rich and diverse base of ideas to build this policy from. It matters, otherwise we're just throwing things at the wall and seeing if they stick, and this is not a moment in which we wanna be doing this. We want to be drawing on the best research, the best evidence-based research we have to strengthen our democracy, to create real policy that helps communities make them healthier, stronger, and safer. And that's where the sort of long but important work of building research through institutions and access to academic freedom matters. So I think that the takeaway I would give in my one minute.

[00:39:54] **Sabreena Delhon:** Deb, how about you?

[00:39:55] **Debra Thompson:** I agree. I mean, I think…I was just trying to think if there's any other institution, if we can call higher ed an institution, that has not just the potential scope and impact, but is so privileged in our ability to take in young people at this, like, formative stage in their lives. To teach them and help mold them into the people they're going to become, and then to have impact on communities, on the formation of knowledge, on evidence-based public policy. Like, it's such a privilege really to be able to access this institution in terms of its, like, potential scope and impact. And I feel like we should treat it as that, as that privilege, and really have, like, if we're to use the Impact Plus Chair language, like democracy and community resilience at the centre of what universities do. I feel like that's been lost somewhere along the way. This is, like the mission, the duty, the obligation, like the privilege of higher education to, to participate in the public sphere in that way. And that, I think, like reifying that mission and keeping that in our line of sight at all times is really quite important.

[00:41:29] **Sabreena Delhon:** Eve?

[00:41:30] **Eve Haque:** I absolutely agree with Debra and Beatrice, but I wouldn't want the university to be at the mercy of public will. I would want us to believe in the university as a site for, you know, ideas to emerge, and for some kind of… I would love the public to believe in us. I don't want when the government shifts one direction or another for us to be in this kind of yo-yo situation. And we saw this a decade ago when all of a sudden, you know, a new government got elected, and all of a sudden the hammer came down on tri-council funding in particular areas, right? So what I want to see is a belief in what good the university can contribute, and that that doesn't necessarily need to be a series of patentable ideas.

[00:42:30] And when I look at the priorities for the CIRCs, so many of them are tech, at least three of them have the word tech in them, and these are really important things, like defense tech. And when I'm talking to my colleagues who are abroad thinking, and you know, we're thinking, can we bring them here? And in the social sites and humanities, and only a fifth of the monies that have been allocated go to, you know, community, democratic and community resilience. So already we're, you know, we're seeing a constraint in terms of understanding, okay, what might be the priorities for the university being determined top-down.

[00:43:08] I think we can also have those conversations amongst us as faculty thinking about what is it that the public will is? At the same time we can say, "Given our expertise, we also think that these are the things that will lead to what people are looking for." And that we don't have to say all ideas are equal, but rather expert-driven parsing of ideas is what we can lead in, and that, you know, institutions, funders, the government needs to believe in us and, and allow us to do that.

[00:43:47] **Sabreena Delhon:** And CIRC here is Canada Impact Plus Research Chairs, so the program that we were talking about today. Let's shift to audience questions. We've just got a little bit of time here. So Jean Mark in Montreal wants to know, “Does academic freedom extend to advocacy areas outside of your research?” Any of you can jump in on this one.

[00:44:08] **Debra Thompson:** Technically I think it does. You know, technically I think it does. Certainly, our ability to comment in the public sphere as faculty we do have the academic freedom to comment on issues in the public sphere. Whether or not we choose to is, I think, is a different story. And one of the things that academia prepares us for very well is,knowing how little it is we actually know. And so, you know, I consider my... you know, I'm a political scientist by training. I am not a political scientist of all politics, you know? So I know, for me, my research area is, like, quite, quite narrow. And so when I am asked to comment on things that are outside of my wheelhouse, my general tendency is to refer to people who are in fact experts in that research area. So while technically I think our academic freedom would extend to our ability to comment, you know, individuals, I believe, theoretically should restrain from commenting on areas where they do not have that expertise that comes with being an academic.

[00:45:29] **Sabreena Delhon:** I'm gonna squeeze in one more here. Vivian from Ottawa - and this is about looking ahead for the next generation - "What might emerging scholars consider when entering today's higher education job market?"

[00:45:43] **Debra Thompson:** Vivian in Ottawa, send me an email. I have an entire PowerPoint deck that can help you.

[00:45:49] **Sabreena Delhon:** Beatrice, how about, how about you go for this one?

[00:45:55] **Beatrice Wayne:** I, as somebody who was in academia and then has explored research outside of academia, I think that keeping a sort of expansive idea of what type of research you wanna do and how you can still be engaged in, rigorous research in spaces affiliated with but not necessarily directly within higher education institutions, it is a challenging job market, I know. So I encourage being imaginative about how you can engage in the sort of research and advocacy that you care about. I would also say, keep in mind that there are lots of outputs and forms that your research can take, and think about really closely about the audience you wanna reach when shaping how you envision your project developing because I've seen lots and lots of young emerging scholars, you know, take big swings and do really creative things with their research. And if maybe your institution doesn't fully support it, there are lots of spaces that will really appreciate the way you worked, to mobilize the knowledge you have gathered and to engage the public. So I think this is a time to be bold and creative.

[00:47:16] **Sabreena Delhon:** Eve, any last words from you?

[00:47:18] **Eve Haque:** I think the question around advocacy outside your research area has come up a couple of times in the questions, from folks. And I just wanna say, you know, academic freedom does cover, you know, I'm thinking more about the CAUT definition of academic freedom, extramural speech. So extramural speech is the speech that we give in public, you know, outside of our institutions, and it's useful. And it ties to the things that Beatrce in particular, you were talking about talking to the media and other organizations and community groups. The concern is around, you know, what might this mean if it's outside your research area? And parsing that, what is outside your research area, can become contentious. And in Canada, we've seen that, and we have figures that in fact have, you know, decided to speak about areas that are outside their research area. And it has had huge implications for Indigenous communities, for trans communities, and so on and so forth.

[00:48:25] So I wanna just end by saying academic freedom is a freedom that is specific to faculties within the institutions so that we can do our research in order to enhance the public good, whether it's directly or in the future or indirectly. However, it also comes with responsibility. And so in order to ensure that we can practice academic freedom both intramurally, extramurally,you know, in an ongoing way, we have to have some kind of acknowledgement to the fact that we have to do this in a responsible way.

[00:49:06] **Sabreena Delhon:** Very good. Okay, Beatrice, fine. I'll let you talk quickly.

[00:49:11] **Beatrice Wayne:** I would just jump on that to say that I think the advantage of having more academics coming out to speak publicly and engaging publicly will create less space, less of a vacuum for a few public intellectuals to take up

all the space and to speak in areas that is not their area of expertise. So that's another reason why I encourage you to engage with the public.

[00:49:36] **Sabreena Delhon:** Thanks to Debra Thompson, Eve Haque, Beatrice Wayne, and the Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences. Group Chat is produced by the Samara Centre for Democracy, Canada's leading nonpartisan charity dedicated to strengthening and protecting our democracy. Visit samaracentre.ca to learn more about our work and to support it with a donation. And please follow, rate, and review to help spread the word about this show. Special thanks to the Flanagan Foundation and the Rideau Hall Foundation for their support.