

Statement of the Executive Committee on Trump's "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education"

updated 17 October 2025

We learned with alarm that the Trump administration has asked Washington University in St. Louis to sign a "[Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education](#)." The leaders of WashU must refuse this invitation.

The Compact threatens the very mission of our university. It strips faculty of the authority to make decisions about hiring, admissions, grades, and discipline. We make those decisions according to shared governance procedures essential to the independence and academic freedom of the University, and we will not cede that role, because doing so would also cede Washington University's self-determination. Anything other than servile obedience to the administration's political priorities would, under this Compact, result in a loss of access to student loans, grant programs, federal contracts, funding for research, approval of visas, and tax exemption.

The alleged offer is pure [political interference in higher education](#), and it blatantly opposes the mission of the University in many ways. The compact characterizes efforts to improve diversity as discriminatory, a continuation of other efforts to undermine the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#). It makes other demands about admission, like requiring the use of standardized tests and limiting the admission of international students, that directly flout the shared governance rights of faculty. It redefines sex and gender according to rigid binary divisions incompatible with science and our value of human respect; forcing members of the University to accept these definitions in their work and medical practice would violate our academic freedom as well as standards of care. Finally, it instructs universities to ensure a "vibrant marketplace of ideas on campus." Given recent government actions to suppress the expression of ideas with which it disagrees, such as arresting, detaining, and deporting noncitizen students and faculty members for Constitutionally protected speech, we can only interpret this as a thinly veiled attempt to restrict academic freedom to those who agree with the current government, defeating the very purpose of academic freedom and of higher education as a whole.

The loss of federal funding would indeed threaten our ability to perform our education and research work, but Compact signers get no protection against that. The examples of Penn, Columbia, and other major universities that have endured further threats from the Trump administration after meeting its original demands clearly demonstrate that the blackmailer simply returns for more. This pattern continues at Wash U. Despite conspicuous efforts by our administration to tout its institutional neutrality, our apparent rewards so far have been lawsuits challenging our diversity programs, canceled federal grants, and a higher endowment tax.

We must stand with those who resist. History shows that authoritarians thrive when faced with a fractured and self-interested populace; they fall back when opposed by a unified voice. Every school that signs Trump's compact will encourage the worst impulses of leadership at other institutions. Yet every school that publicly stands in opposition makes it easier for the next one to do so. MIT, USC, Brown, Penn, and UVA have already rejected the Compact, and legislatures

in Virginia and California have urged targeted universities in their states to do the same. The examples of MIT, Princeton, and Harvard demonstrate that institutions can and should push back vigorously. Solidarity is the way forward for the American academy.

We join the National AAUP, the AAUP chapters of the targeted universities, and a growing number of universities not yet targeted in opposing Trump's Compact. WashU must do the same to protect our institutional autonomy, preserve our reputation as a leading research university, and uphold principles of academic freedom and freedom of expression on our campuses – principles articulated mere months ago by Chancellor Andrew D. Martin of WashU and Chancellor Daniel Diermeier of Vanderbilt (which is among the targeted universities) in a joint public statement: "[Universities Must Reject Creeping Politicization](#)." We join the [Vanderbilt chapter of the AAUP](#) in urging our chancellors to defend their stated values by rejecting Trump's overt effort to politicize higher education in his image.

[We acknowledge with gratitude the work of the Penn chapter of the AAUP, who have given permission to other chapters to reuse and adapt [their statement](#).]