

Attacks on Academic Freedom: Columbia University and Beyond

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Students of Human Rights and Education, Columbia University (SHRECU) is a collective formed through the Institute for the Study of Human Rights's (ISHR) Spring 2025 course on Human Rights and Education. This course is led by Professor Glenn Mitoma, Director of Undergraduate Studies at ISHR. The Institute was established in 1978 and is committed to its three core goals of providing interdisciplinary human rights education to Columbia students, fostering innovative academic research, and offering its expertise in capacity building to human rights leaders, organizations, and universities around the world. SHRECU is comprised of undergraduate students—many pursuing degrees through ISHR. Our course examined the intersection between human rights and education, exploring how education functions as a “site of and a strategy in struggles for just, equitable, and dignified communities,” and human rights serve as a “form of public pedagogy aimed at fostering particular kinds of subjects and communities.” Given the contemporary climate and our commitment to engaged human rights pedagogy, we directed our academic efforts toward advocating for the right to education, leveraging our unique positions as Columbia students and human rights scholars. Alongside our academic studies, our activities include producing this UPR submission and organizing into working groups focused on UN advocacy, campus engagement, and writing policy papers to ensure our impact extends beyond the semester and this report.

Human Rights Educators USA (HRE USA) is a national network within the United States dedicated to promoting human dignity, justice, and peace by cultivating an expansive, vibrant base of support for human rights education (HRE). As such, our suggested recommendations for the Universal Periodic Review 4th Cycle center on our network's priorities. Our review also takes into account the institutional environments influencing the dissemination and promotion of HRE policies and practices in K-12 schools and higher education. Our review prioritizes protecting academic freedom and educational accessibility without discrimination within all settings in the United States.

1. SUMMARY

1.1 The right to education, freedoms of opinion and speech, and the human rights principles of non-discrimination and due process are under increased threat in the United States of America (USA). Recent actions by the Trump Administration have targeted individual students and faculty, as well as schools and universities with repressive measures. Over the past several months, students, faculty, staff, and alumni at Columbia University have been subject to unprecedented levels of legal, political, and economic pressure from the federal government, resulting in critical human rights impacts. As a team of undergraduate students at Columbia University studying human rights and education, we describe a range of these impacts to better inform UN Members in their review of the USA's fulfillment of its human rights obligations and commitments. Our findings indicate reasons for dire concern. To address these concerns, we outline four critical recommendations for the U.S. government to enact. These include: 1) respect and protect academic freedom, based in human rights principles, across all institutions receiving federal funding; 2) protect inclusive and non-discriminatory access to education, especially low-income, disabled, international, and historically marginalized students; 3) Ensure due process rights and respect the rights to freedom of opinion and expression of international students scholars; 4) ensure that institutions of higher education retain federal funding essential to research institutions to ensuring equitable access to education for all students.

2. INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS STANDARDS

2.1 The bases of the right to education, **inclusive of non-discrimination and academic freedom**, as well as the freedom of thought and opinion and freedom of expression, are well-established principles of international human rights. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which places the right to education in the context of robust non-discrimination protections, specifies in Article 26 that education “shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.” The USA is **obliged to advance human rights** as articulated in the UDHR.

2.2 The USA is party to the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) and International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), and **legally bound to fulfill its obligations under these treaties** concerning key rights affecting the right to education.

2.3 ICCPR Article 18 articulates the right to freedom of “thought, conscience and religion,” guaranteeing the ability to participate freely in “practice and teaching.” Article 18 restricts State intervention or deterrence of one’s autonomy in practicing moral education. As provided in Article 4, **this freedom is non-derogable**, even in times of emergency. Article 19 guarantees the right to expression, including seeking, receiving, and sharing information through any medium, without restriction. Article 26 affirms the principle of equality before the law, ensuring everyone is protected from discrimination on any basis, such as race, gender, language, or social status, and are entitled to equal legal protection. These freedoms do not vanish at the schoolhouse door, and, as articulated by the Special Rapporteurs on Freedom of Opinion and Expression and the Right to Education, are a strong foundation for academic freedom as a human right.¹

2.4 ICERD sets forth comprehensive standards to eliminate racial discrimination in education by protecting equal access to schooling, prohibiting segregation, and freedom from racial and cultural prejudice. ICERD explicitly recognizes **education as a fundamental obligation**, protected from racial discrimination. Article 5 mandates that everyone, regardless of race, color, or ethnic origin, must have equal access to education and training. Additionally, Article 7 requires States to take effective measures in teaching, education, culture, and information to address and eliminate racial discrimination. ICERD states a collective responsibility to cultivate “understanding, tolerance and friendship among nations and racial or ethnic groups.”

2.5 The U.S. signed but did not ratify several relevant international treaties that **affirm key human rights principles**, including the right to education. These include the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). ICESCR Article 13 outlines rights associated with education, including that higher education shall be made **equally accessible to all**, recognizing that true human rights include access to economic security and opportunity.

2.6 CEDAW recognizes the role of education in **combating gender discrimination**, requiring states to ensure equal access to opportunities for women and girls in all circumstances to eliminate gender stereotypes (Arts. 10, 14, 16). Articles 5 and 10 specify the revision of school curricula and textbooks.

2.7 The CRC guarantees the **child’s right to freedom of expression and information** (Article 13), and to have access, based on non-discrimination, to an education that supports their human rights and provides them with the tools necessary to promote human rights broadly (Arts. 28, 29).

2.8 CRPD Article 5 ensures that **disabled persons receive equal protection under the law**, including education. Article 7 ensures that disabled children enjoy all human rights and fundamental freedoms equal to other children. Articles 9 and 24 recognize the right of persons with disabilities to education without discrimination and based on equal opportunity and mandate accessibility in education, including **physical access to schools, digital access, and accessible teaching materials**. Article 30 highlights the importance of access to cultural and recreational activities, which are critical for a holistic learning experience.

2.9 During the 3rd cycle of the UPR, the USA accepted multiple recommendations from the Report of the Working Group in full support to **foster equitable access to quality education free from any forms of discrimination**. Included in these are specific actions from various countries. Greece asks the U.S. to “foster more **comprehensive education and training** for state and local agencies and officials on human rights.”² Belgium asks the U.S. to “**prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity** in... education,”³ and both France and Malta call for the **strengthening of anti-violence and anti-discrimination** measures protecting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons.

2.10 Moreover, the USA also accepted, in part, the recommendation from Botswana asking for the promotion of “wider and equitable access to quality education at all levels,”⁴ but accepted in part to acknowledge the limitations of the U.S. federal authority over individual state policies. Also see

recommendations 26.114 (Switzerland), 26.250 (Japan), and 26.309 (Malaysia).

2.11 Between the 36th session of the UPR and the 46th session of the Human Rights Council, where the outcome of the review was adopted, **President Biden assumed office**, shifting the acceptance and implementation of recommendations. On January 20, 2021, President Biden issued **Executive Order 13988**, ‘Preventing and Combating Discrimination based on Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation,’ directly responding to Belgium, France, and Malta’s concerns.⁵ This marked an important step in the implementation of recommendations. **The Trump Administration has rescinded this** and other previous executive orders designed to protect human rights.⁶

2.12 Finally, the U.S. Constitution implicitly aligns with the standard of academic freedom through its First Amendment. **Freedom of expression is a foundational right articulated in the Constitution and a cornerstone of U.S. democracy.** Restriction of this expression, including the restriction of peaceful assembly and the forcible imposition of political or ideological bias within academia, not only opposes several human rights standards but **violates the supreme law of the land.**

3. CURRENT THREATS TO THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

3.1 The actions of the federal government and Columbia University have created **an environment that restricts its international and non-citizen students** from speaking freely without any fear of retaliation because of their political stances. These students are aware of the risk imposed by challenging the Trump administration's opinions, leading many of them to stay quiet because of the impossibility of fighting for their rights in the case they are attacked. This poses serious threats to their First Amendment rights and to their overall safety as residents in this country.

3.2 Experts and school authorities have recommended students of diverse immigration statuses do not portray themselves as politically active on social media and in their campus lives as a precautionary measure.^{7 8} Testimonies have shown that the current deportations of Columbia University students have caused fear amongst those with different migratory statuses. A statement from a student reads, “**What scares me the most is that I would be fast asleep at home and I would hear a bang on my door and I’d be taken away in the middle of the night by ICE and nobody will ever know what happened to me [...]**”. Non-citizen students feel unable to freely speak their minds and have reported several instances in which their education and safety has been compromised because of the possibility of ICE officials looking for them. Another student’s experience is told as “**The [student] has been attending classes over Zoom or skipping them altogether: he feels he “could be next” on ICE’s list, without having any knowledge of what he has done wrong.**”^{9 10}

3.3 Since January 20, 2025, President Trump has issued **multiple executive orders that threaten the right to education** in the United States. Executive Order 14242, "Improving Education Outcomes by Empowering Parents, States, and Communities," aims to close the Department of Education (ED) and return authority to the states.¹¹ Closing this department will disproportionately impact vulnerable individuals, including students with disabilities, since ED is responsible for implementing and ensuring compliance with the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)¹². ED’s Office of Civil Rights has issued a letter **declaring all Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programming unlawful** and threatening to withhold Title I funding from schools that do not remove DEI

programs. Since Title I funding supports schools with a large number of low-income students, this forces educational institutions to choose between essential resources and racial equity, ultimately **depriving many marginalized students of access to a fair and inclusive education**.¹³ These new rules apply to primary, secondary, and higher educational institutions. Columbia University has also removed DEI policies from its pages due to the executive order banning these policies.¹⁴ ED oversees the Free Application for Federal Student Aid and is responsible for the federal student grant, aid, and loan programs, access to higher education will become significantly more challenging for low-income students.

3.5 ED sent letters to 60 institutions of higher education warning them of potential action, such as federal funding cuts under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act if they don't work to address "antisemitism" on their campuses.¹⁵ Alongside, the Trump administration voiced their commitment to removing "hostile aliens from college campuses." These policies **targeted pro-Palestine international students, scholars, and faculty**. Over the past few weeks, nearly a dozen students were detained by federal agents.¹⁶ These actions violate these students' right to education, as well as academic freedom and the rights to freedom of belief, expression, and due process for non-citizens.

3.6 Under the guise of combating antisemitism, the Trump Administration moved to **cancel \$400 million in federal funding to Columbia University**¹⁷, and issued a series of demands undermining institutional autonomy, including placing the Department of Middle East, South Asian, and African Studies under academic receivership, banning masks, and cooperating with federal law enforcement, for its alleged failure to address antisemitism on campus, as well as its demands. The response of Columbia University has set a dangerous precedent as this threatens freedom of speech and academic independence, disproportionately harming marginalized communities and restricting their right to education.

Immigration Enforcement as Protest Suppression

3.7 On January 29, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order 14188, expanding federal authority over non-citizen students involved in political activity deemed contrary to U.S. foreign policy interests. The order directed the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the State Department, and Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to **conduct enhanced screenings of international students** and to **revoke visas or initiate deportation proceedings** against those suspected of activism that pose a threat to national security.

3.8 Former student **Mahmoud Khalil** graduated from Columbia's School of International and Public Affairs in 2024. On March 8, 2025, Khalil was detained outside home by ICE agents acting under State Department orders to revoke Khalil's student visa despite Khalil's permanent residential status as a green card holder. His arrest is the first-known deportation effort by the Trump Administration based on a students' participation in protests protected under international and US law.

3.9 In March 2025, **Yunseo Chung**, a 21-year-old junior at Columbia University and a legal permanent resident since she was seven, filed a lawsuit against President Donald Trump to challenge the administration's attempts to revoke her residency status. Chung participated in pro-Palestinian protests on campus, and her involvement led to her arrest during a sit-in at Barnard College on March 5, 2025. Since her arrest, ICE officials have sought to detain her, visiting several residences, calling for help from federal

prosecutors, and searching Ms. Chung's university housing on March 13.

3.10 In this lawsuit, Chung's legal team argued that the government's actions violated her **First Amendment rights to free speech**. They contended that the administration was issuing unfounded threats of deportation despite Chung's permanent resident status to suppress speech. Investigation by the university in Chung's previous protest activities revealed that Chung did not violate any school policies, further providing evidence that the government's efforts to detain and deport her were politically motivated under the new administration.¹⁸

Demand Letter Violates University Independence

3.11 On March 10, the Trump Administration sent a letter to Columbia University that entailed a list of demands regarding university security, curriculum, and safety as a condition for reinstatement of \$400 million in federal funding previously impounded on March 7.¹⁹ The letter alleges that the university has failed to combat antisemitism on campus.

3.12.1 There are 9 primary demands made in the letter:

1. **Demand:** The Trump administration specifically wishes for the university to target and implement "multi-year suspension(s)" on the students who participated in the Hamilton Hall sit-in last Spring.
 - a. **Problem:** This vague wording of "meaningful discipline" is detrimental because it lacks guidance on enforcement and regulation.
2. **Demand:** The Trump administration wishes to consolidate all disciplinary power to the Office of the President. This means abolishing the University Judicial Board (UJB), which is an independent board within the university.
 - a. **Problem:** By placing all power into the Office of the President, disciplinary action becomes less fair and more politically motivated based on the administration's interests.
3. **Demand:** Requires the university to implement "permanent, comprehensive time, place, and manner rules" to prevent protests from interfering with other aspects of student life, including activities and classes.
 - a. **Problem:** The aim of this clause is to develop further rules and regulations to persecute students who may be protesting at any given moment. The utilization of "time, place, and manner rules" indicates the Trump administration's desire to halt all protests, not necessarily provide space and time for appropriate protests.
4. **Demand:** The university must implement a mask ban to prevent students from concealing their identity or "intimidat[ing] others." There is an exception for religious and health reasons, but no means of implementation for this. Those who wear masks must wear their student ID on the outside of the clothing, according to the policy of Columbia Irving Medical Center.
 - a. **Problem:** A mask ban with no guidance on exceptions is not only harmful to student health and safety, but also places unsafe expectations on students because of continuous doxxing threats that spread on and off campus. While the policy appears to include a health exception, students report that even if they are sick they have been asked by public safety or security guards to take off their mask when entering campus.

5. **Demand:** Any student groups and individuals providing support to groups engaged in violations of University policy “must be held accountable through formal investigation, disciplinary proceedings, and expulsion as appropriate.”
 - a. **Problem:** As mentioned previously, the abolition of the UJB makes these proceedings less fair because of a lack of an independent body.
6. **Demand:** “Formalize, adopt, and promulgate a definition of antisemitism” - Specifically aims for the University to implement Executive Order 13899, which uses IHRA definition. The following definition is used, “Antisemitism is a certain perception of Jews, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jews. Rhetorical and physical manifestations of antisemitism are directed toward Jewish or non-Jewish individuals and/or their property, toward Jewish community institutions and religious facilities”
 - a. **Problem:** This definition of “antisemitism” is vague, and fails to make the necessary distinction between antisemitism and antizionism. Many current protests are antizionist, not necessarily antisemitic, which makes this demand troubling.
7. **Demand:** “Empower internal law enforcement” - Provides the Columbia security full law enforcement authority, including in work and study environments.
 - a. **Problem:** It does not provide a basis for what they are allowed to act on, other than that they are allowed to “arrest and [remove] agitators who foster unsafe or hostile environments.”
8. **Demand:** “MESAAS Department – Academic Receivership” - Places the Middle East, South Asian, and African Studies department under academic receivership for at least five years.
 - a. **Problem:** This places an unnecessary and unfair burden on the MESAAS department, which posed no threat to student life or academics thus far.
9. **Demand:** “Deliver a plan for comprehensive admissions reform” - Aims to create a plan/strategy for reforming undergraduate admissions, international student admissions, and graduate admissions practices to more closely align with federal law and policy.
 - a. **Problem:** This specifically targets the previously mentioned Trump administration changes in immigration. Ultimately, this demand disproportionately affects international students, limiting their access to education.

Escalation of Security Measures

3.13 Columbia **banned masks** on campus and altered their commitments page with the following:

- All individuals who engage in protests or demonstrations, including those who wear face masks or face coverings, must, when asked, present their University identification to the satisfaction of a University Delegate or Public Safety officer. Individuals who fail to comply with these policies will be subject to discipline, escorted off campus, and detention for trespass where appropriate.
- Given the risk of disruption from non-affiliates, public safety determined that face masks or face coverings are not allowed on our campuses for concealing policies or state, municipal or federal laws. Face masks or face coverings are allowed for religious or medical reasons.²⁰

While the policy appears to include a health exception, students report that even if they are sick they have been asked by public safety to take off their mask when entering campus. This mask ban compromises the safety of protestors who are subject to doxxing and health of ill and disabled people.

3.14 In response to this demand, Columbia hired **36 special officers** appointed by the NYPD that can remove and arrest students from campus. Federal law enforcement, including ICE officers, also operate on and around campus. This represents a dramatic increase in the securitization of the university environment, with a significant effect on students, faculty, and other campus visitors.²¹

3.15 On April 1, 2025, the University updated its website and confirmed the presence of the new officers appointed to work under the police commissioner's orders. Under state law, they have the authority to use physical or deadly force to make arrests or prevent escapes.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Academic Freedom: Enact comprehensive federal legislation that codifies protections for academic freedom across all institutions receiving federal funding; establish clear reporting mechanisms for violations of academic freedom with substantive and material remedies for those impacted; and create an independent Academic Freedom Commission to monitor compliance, collect data on violations, and issue annual reports. Such legislations should:

A. Strengthen Free Speech Protections in Academic Environments:

- a. Ensure federally-funded institutions adopt policies explicitly stating that faculty and student expression is protected, even when unpopular. Policies should emphasize that the appropriate response to objectionable speech is counter-speech in lieu of censorship
- b. Prohibit overly broad speech codes that are easily manipulated to discourage academic discourse and dissent
- c. Require institutions to establish faculty-led committees to review potential free speech violations that operate independently from administration and have authority to reverse improper sanctions and recommend policy improvements;
- d. Mandate transparency in university donor agreements to prevent improper influence on curriculum. *All* agreements exceeding designated financial thresholds should be publicly disclosed and reviewed for provisions that may compromise academic independence.
- e. Implement federal protections for faculty and students against retaliation for public commentary or protest that extends to social media expression and public advocacy

B. Safeguard Due Process in Academic Disciplinary Proceedings:

- a. Establish federal standards for clear procedural guidelines that include detailed notice of allegations, the right to review evidence, opportunity for meaningful cross-examination, and prohibition against double jeopardy for both employment and student-related disciplinary proceedings
- b. Mandate decisions to come with written explanations with specific factual findings and reasoning that explain how evidence was weighed and why particular conclusions were reached
- c. Establish procedures that allow for appeal and review of procedural errors at federally funded institutions
- d. Prohibit pressure campaigns to silence or remove faculty members at federally funded institutions
- e. Establish independent federal offices with authority to investigate violations of academic freedom and due process

- C. Protect Academic Freedom in Research and Teaching:
 - a. Develop federal protections preventing external political pressure from determining research priorities at funded institutions
 - b. Implement federal guidelines to protect diverse theoretical approaches within all academic disciplines
 - c. Establish federal safeguards against ideological interference within the peer review processes
 - d. Prohibit administrative censorship of academic publications and invited speakers at institutions receiving federal funding

4.2 Inclusive and Non-Discriminatory Access to Education: The U.S. federal government must take immediate action to protect inclusive and non-discriminatory access to education. This includes reversing harmful federal actions, maintaining key education funding programs, and ensuring that students of all backgrounds—especially low-income, disabled, international, and historically marginalized students—can access a safe and equitable learning environment. Immediate action should be taken to:

- A. Reverse Executive Actions That Limit Equity and Inclusion in Education
 - a. Withdraw executive orders and agency policies that ban or limit Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs in schools and universities.
 - b. Restore federal support for race- and gender-conscious admissions policies, in line with human rights commitments under ICERD and CEDAW.
 - c. Prevent federal agencies from using funding threats to pressure schools into removing DEI programs.
 - d. Protect colleges and universities from being punished for supporting inclusive policies, curriculum, and student services.
- B. Strengthen Civil Rights Oversight in Education
 - a. Restore full authority to the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights to investigate discrimination based on race, gender, disability, or immigration status.
 - b. Ensure that funding programs like Title I and IDEA are fully protected and equitably distributed to schools serving low-income and disabled students.
 - c. Provide training for school officials on civil rights protections, based on international human rights frameworks like ICERD and the CRPD.
 - d. Reinstate clear Title IX protections for LGBTQ+ students to help ensure schools are safe and inclusive for all.
- C. Protect Access to Education for Vulnerable Students
 - a. Preserve and expand Pell Grants, Title I funding, and other aid programs so that students from under-resourced communities can stay in school and succeed.
 - b. Prevent any dismantling of the Department of Education, which plays a key role in making sure all students—especially those with the most need—get fair treatment and access to resources.
 - c. Require the use of funding formulas that address local inequalities, so schools in less wealthy areas are not left behind.
 - d. Publish yearly reports showing how federal education funding is reaching different groups, including by race, income, gender, and disability.

- D. Commit to International Human Rights Standards on Education
 - a. Ratify key treaties like the ICESCR, CEDAW, and CRPD to show a clear commitment to equitable and accessible education.
 - b. Create a federal plan to improve access to education for students with disabilities and other underserved groups, with clear goals and timelines.
 - c. Set up a task force within the Department of Education to track progress on meeting international education standards and support human rights education in schools and colleges.
- E. Defend Academic Integrity and Student's Right to Learn
 - a. Prohibit federal interference in how universities design their curricula, especially efforts that target specific departments or fields like ethnic or regional studies.
 - b. Pass federal legislation that protects the right of higher education institutions to teach inclusive and diverse material without being punished.
 - c. Create an independent review board made up of educators, students, and advocates to report each year on issues related to censorship, funding threats, and equity in education.

4.3 Protect International and Non-Citizen Students: The federal government should immediately implement clear measures to ensure due process rights and protect the abuse of rights of international students from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Department of Homeland Security (DHS) enforcement mechanisms in line with international human rights standards such as those outlined in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR). The USA should:

- A. Implement strict standards for ICE and DHS access to campuses
 - a. Establish clear federal guidelines that require ICE and DHS officials to give the school and students prior notice before entering the Campus and individuals' homes. Ensure that no ICE or DHS interventions are initiated solely based on a student's right to free speech and political expression.
 - b. ICE and DHS officials should not be permitted to enter student accommodations or educational institutions unannounced without prior notification, permission from the occupant, or a valid warrant signed by a judge with the occupant's name as outlined under the U.S Constitution.
 - c. Implement policies that ensure that all affected students are immediately notified upon notification of ICE or DHS interventions to an educational institution.
 - d. Students should be given ample time, support, resources, and a detailed explanation of the reasons for intervention.
- B. Increased Due Process Protections
 - a. Ensure students are not detained or deported before they have access to due process and legal support, as outlined under the U.S. Constitution and Immigration and Nationality Act.
 - b. Ensure International students have the opportunity to appeal charges before immigration actions are implemented.
- C. Accountability and Increased International Supervision
 - a. Implement international or external mechanisms that review ICE and DHS enforcement actions regarding international students and immigration rights.

- b. These structures should publicly review and report findings of international human rights abuses and hold officials accountable for violations, particularly when actions are based on discrimination, nationality, political expression, and free speech.
- D. Academic Support
 - a. Implement policies that develop institutional support within universities involving legal support and mental health services to ensure that students have extensive protections and resources within their institutions when facing immigration risks.
 - b. Ensure that each academic institution holds a lecture or course to educate international students on their rights and how to approach ICE and DHS officials to protect their individual rights.

4.4 Protecting Federal Funding for Education: The federal government must ensure that institutions of higher education retain essential federal funding to function as research institutions and to provide students with equitable access to education. Federal funding must not be used as a tool to impose political agendas on academic institutions, and toward that end should:

- A. Protect and Expand Federal Student Aid
 - a. Preserve and expand federal student aid programs, including Pell Grants and Title IV funding, to ensure continued access to higher education for marginalized and low-income students.
 - b. Expand Pell Grant eligibility to include undocumented students, DACA recipients, and individuals with Temporary Protected Status (TPS).
 - c. Make federal aid tax-exempt and require automatic inflation adjustments to preserve its real value over time.
 - d. Enshrine protections to guarantee that students retain their financial aid for the full duration of their academic program.
 - e. Prohibit reductions or revocations of aid in response to a student's lawful exercise of free expression, including protest, political speech, or other protected forms of advocacy.
- B. Safeguard the Integrity of Federal Research Funding
 - a. Establish independent, academic-led committees to oversee all decisions related to the awarding, withholding, or termination of federal research grants.
 - i. Ensure that the oversight and management of federal research funding is led by individuals with relevant academic expertise, rather than partisan political appointees or government officials without subject-matter knowledge. Require that all audits of federally funded research be conducted solely by said independent academic-led committees.
 - b. Bar the restriction or withdrawal of federal research funding based on the subject matter of research, including projects related to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) or initiatives that expand access to education for historically marginalized communities.
- C. Prevent the Coercive Use of Federal Funding to Control Institutions
 - a. Extend statutory due process protections to all forms of federal higher education funding. Institutions must receive formal notice of allegations, findings of legal noncompliance, and a reasonable period for remediation prior to any funding action.
 - b. Prohibit the federal government from using threats of funding withdrawal to intimidate institutions into aligning with specific political ideologies.

- c. Require that any conditions attached to federal education funding be limited to ensuring legal compliance. Enforcement of such conditions must adhere to due process standards.

ENDNOTES

¹ A/75/261; A/HRC56/58

² A/HRC/46/15, paragraph 26.101

³ A/HRC/46/15, paragraph 26.146

⁴ A/HRC/46/15, paragraph 26.313

⁵ Ibid., paragraph 6.

⁶ Exec. Order No. 14168, 90 Fed. Reg. 8615, January 30, 2025, <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2025-02090>

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¹² Brookings. “FAQs: The US Department of Education and the Trump Administration.” Accessed April 3, 2025. <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/faqs-the-us-department-of-education-and-the-trump-administration/>

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¹⁵ U.S. Department of Education. (2025, March 10). “U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights sends letters to 60 universities under investigation for antisemitic discrimination and harassment.” Accessed April 3, 2025

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