

Columbia University surrenders to Trump in \$220 million settlement

Our reporter
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In a major capitulation to the Trump administration's attack on democratic rights and academic freedom, Columbia University announced Wednesday that it has agreed to pay more than \$220 million and implement broad changes to its admissions policies and academic programs, along with a crackdown on student protests.

The deal, finalized on Wednesday, marks a new stage in the campaign by the Trump administration to bring America's leading academic institutions to heel under the banner of fighting "antisemitism." In reality, the White House has sought to suppress political opposition on campuses to both the genocide in Gaza and the Trump administration's broader program of war, dictatorship and social reaction.

The agreement with Columbia will set a precedent for intensified political control and the imposition of a regime of censorship across the country.

Under the terms of the deal, Columbia will pay \$200 million to the federal government over three years, and an additional \$21 million to resolve completely fraudulent claims brought by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) regarding alleged discrimination against Jewish faculty and staff. In exchange, the Trump administration has agreed to restore over \$400 million in frozen federal research funding, reinstating Columbia's eligibility for billions in future federal grants.

Columbia paved the way for the deal by suspending nearly 80 students on Monday afternoon for their participation in the "Basel Al-Araj Popular University" protest in May, which began when students occupied Columbia's Butler Library and ended with mass arrests by the New York Police Department (NYPD). This is the largest number of students Columbia has ever disciplined for a single protest.

The agreement builds directly upon a set of measures

Columbia implemented in March, following the federal freeze on funding. Those earlier measures included a ban on masks at protests, a restructuring of the student disciplinary process under the provost's office, and a university-led review of Middle East programming, including the Center for Palestine Studies.

The new agreement codifies and expands these measures into legally binding conditions for funding. Among the most anti-democratic elements of the deal is Columbia's commitment to increased cooperation with law enforcement, including the NYPD, to enforce new rules on campus protests. The university has also agreed to implement stricter disciplinary policies and create a new administrative office to monitor "antisemitism," that is, crackdown on opposition to the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

The deal also mandates curriculum reforms and faculty hiring reviews in Middle East-related fields, pledging to promote "intellectual diversity," that is, censor opposition to Israel. Columbia will reduce its financial dependence on international students—currently comprising about 40 percent of enrollment—and provide the Department of Homeland Security with new data related to international student activity. The university also agreed to notify federal authorities if international students are arrested, a provision which is aimed at cracking down on political expression and protest.

In a message to the Columbia community, Acting President Claire Shipman said the university's bowing to Trump has been portrayed publicly "as a test of principle—a binary fight between courage and capitulation. But like most things in life, the reality is far more complex." She added in a Wednesday message, "We established our nonnegotiable academic and institutional boundaries clearly, and we chose to

talk and to listen.”

Immigration attorney Eric Lee remarked on X that Shipman’s “justification for capitulating to Trump sounds like Pétain and the Vichy government justifying their collaboration with Hitler.”

Shipman is so reviled by Columbia students and faculty that she was booed off the stage during commencement in May. She has long had the highest-level connections in the corporate media and the Democratic Party. She was married for more than 25 years to Jay Carney, once *Time* magazine’s bureau chief in Moscow, later communications director for Vice President Joe Biden and press secretary for President Barack Obama. Shipman herself was a longtime television correspondent, working for CNN, NBC and ABC. She joined the board of trustees at Columbia in 2013 and became chair in 2023.

Surrendering to the dictatorial mandates of Trump and the fascist Republicans is thus not just an individual decision by Shipman, but expresses the general mood in the Democratic Party establishment and among corporate media executives. Shipman has close ties to Zionist groups, hosting a panel discussion and interviewing visiting politicians at the 2018 conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the main Israeli lobby in Washington.

In a comment to the *New York Times*, Columbia literature professor Joseph R. Slaughter said the settlement “normalizes political interference in teaching, research and the pursuit of truth.” He added, “It leaves the university exposed to the shifting whims of this federal administration and sets a dangerous precedent for higher education across the US.”

In recent months, Columbia has been at the center of nationwide protests against the Israeli genocide in Gaza. As one faculty member told the *Times*, “The purpose of this is to have an effect on political speech on campus.”

The Columbia agreement is a blueprint for further executive crackdowns on universities. Federal officials have suggested similar settlements may be pursued against Harvard and other schools. The White House has praised the agreement as a “major victory for students and parents across the country,” while Secretary of Education Linda McMahon said it would “signal a cultural shift in higher education.”

Columbia’s capitulation comes amid a broader political offensive by the Trump administration to criminalize campus protests, suppress dissent, and assert authoritarian control over education. Combined with federal efforts to dismantle the Department of Education and fire tens of thousands of public workers, the Columbia settlement is a key milestone in this campaign.



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