

Trump's “Compact” with universities demands ideological submission in exchange for funding

Landon Gourov
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On Wednesday, October 1, Education Department Secretary Linda McMahon and the White House sent a letter to nine universities across the United States demanding that they comply with the Trump administration's guidelines for education.

The nine universities targeted include Brown University, the University of Pennsylvania, Dartmouth College, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Vanderbilt University, the University of Arizona, the University of Southern California, the University of Virginia and the University of Texas at Austin.

This is the latest attack by the Trump administration on higher education in an American version of the Nazi policy of *Gleichschaltung*, that is, the synchronization of culture, education and more into the arms of the state as a propaganda tool.

The letter, titled the “Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education,” states that the universities should advance the “national interests and priorities of the U.S. government.” In addition, the compact makes clear that universities which refuse to adhere to the demands set by the Trump administration will lose all federal funding, and universities that accede to the demands are required to strictly adhere to them.

Some of the demands include prohibiting faculty from speaking about political and social issues; prohibiting transgender women from participating in women’s sports; cutting tuition for students in “hard science programs” which serve military research; and participating in financial programs to “prevent university services from being used to facilitate money laundering and the financing of terrorist activities.”

In a further attempt to crack down on those protesting the genocide of Palestinians by the state of Israel, the compact demands that universities prohibit “incitement to

violence, including calls for murder or genocide or support for entities designated by the U.S. government as terrorist organizations.”

The implication is that universities must violently crack down on any opposition to the corporate and financial oligarchy. Therefore, the Trump administration permits universities to “[use] lawful force if necessary to prevent these violations and [allow] swift, serious, and consistent sanctions for those who commit them.”

Seeking to transform universities into cooperating surveillance arms of the state, the compact also demands that “Universities shall share all known information about foreign students” to the Department of Homeland Security and the State Department.

This section of the letter, titled “foreign entanglements,” takes up more space than any other sections at two full pages. It asserts that allowing significant populations of foreign students risks “saturating the campus with noxious values such as anti-Semitism and other anti-American values, creating serious national security risks.” This section of the compact concludes with the demand that students who are in the United States on a visa cannot make up more than 15 percent of a university’s undergraduate student population.

Furthermore, universities are demanded to “reduce administrative costs as far as reasonably possible and streamline or eliminate academic programs that fail to serve students.” The end-goal of this demand is the firing of thousands of university staff in order to save money as well as eliminate classes deemed “unnecessary” or which do not promote “American and Western values.”

One section of the compact hypocritically demands a “vibrant marketplace of ideas on campus,” by which the Trump administration means allowing the flourishing of

the far-right on university campuses. To this end, it calls for “abolishing institutional units that purposefully punish, belittle, and even spark violence against conservative ideas.”

Although the compact was sent to nine universities, the Trump administration has made it clear that they wish to see the guidelines implemented by colleges and universities across the country. Senior White House Policy Strategist May Mailman was quoted in the *New York Times* as saying “we hope all universities ultimately are able to have a conversation with us.”

Since the compact was sent, only two of the nine universities have made a decision on the matter. Just one day after the letter was sent, the University of Texas System Board of Regents Chair Kevin Eltife told the *Texas Tribune* that the University of Texas at Austin was honored to be chosen by the Trump administration for the education compact. Eltife further added that “We enthusiastically look forward to engaging with university officials and reviewing the compact immediately.”

So far, only MIT has rejected the education compact. In an open letter to Education Secretary Linda McMahon sent on Friday, October 10, MIT President Sally Kornbluth rejected adhering to the compact. However, Kornbluth pleaded that she and McMahon have “priorities we share for American higher education,” and that MIT meets or exceeds the demands made in the compact.

The response by faculty and students at the targeted universities, however, has been explosive. Faculty at the University of Virginia voted 97 percent in favor of a resolution opposing the demand. A petition at the University of Pennsylvania addressed to UPenn President James Jameson has been signed by over 1,600 students, faculty and staff.

A petition signed by over 500 professors and staff at Dartmouth stated that “[w]hen the state demands that a university shutter departments and programs that do not conform with its political ideology, dictates what kind of research faculty must perform, and insists that standards of knowledge arrived at through decades of scientific and humanistic research be replaced with false and politically-motivated definitions...we will no longer have a university.”

Vanderbilt University’s chapter of the American Association of University Professors published a statement which stated that “[w]e cannot sincerely ask our students to ‘dare to grow’ in the environment of fear and mistrust that this Compact would produce in our community.”

Since taking office, the Trump administration has targeted universities across the country such as Harvard, Columbia, University of California, Los Angeles and George Mason University among others, looming the threat of cuts to the schools’ funding, or worse, if they refuse to comply.

Just one day before the compact was sent, Trump and “Secretary of War” Pete Hegseth assembled hundreds of generals and admirals to establish plans for a presidential dictatorship and a rollout of the military onto American cities to eliminate political opposition. Since then, Trump has utilized the government shutdown to order military occupations of Portland, Oregon and Chicago, Illinois with more cities on the horizon for military occupation. The Trump administration is preparing to invoke the Insurrection Act and calling for the systematic and physical liquidation of left-wing organizations.

The effort to establish a presidential dictatorship has been met with total-indifference by the media and political establishment. The Democratic Party and the various pseudo-left organizations that operate in and around it have maintained complete silence on the drive to dictatorship and the attacks on education. What they fear is not the ruling class’s drive towards dictatorship, but the mass movement of the working class which threatens the foundation of capitalist rule.

The working class is the decisive revolutionary force in society, carrying immense economic, political and social power. To this end, youth and students must turn and connect their struggles to the working class.

The fight against dictatorship and attacks on democratic rights requires the independent mobilization of the working class under a socialist program. The Socialist Equality Party and its youth section, the International Youth and Students for Social Equality, call for the formation of rank-and-file committees in every workplace, school and neighborhood as the new organizations of struggle against war, genocide, dictatorship, fascism and social counterrevolution.



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