

# The Compact for Control: Trump's Blueprint to Capture Higher Education

By Don Sutherland

Donald Trump's bid to seize control of American higher education has advanced with the release of a proposed "[Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education](#)."

The Compact lays out the conditions under which universities may continue to receive federal benefits, making compliance technically optional but practically unavoidable unless institutions forgo federal support entirely. In effect, it is a pilot project for conditioning all federal funding on adherence to the Trump Administration's ideological terms. Enforcement power would rest squarely with the Administration, which could cut off funds whenever it deemed compliance insufficient, placing universities under perpetual political supervision.

The Compact mandates admissions decisions based solely on published, objective criteria, explicitly banning consideration of race, sex, nationality, religion, political views, sexual orientation, or gender identity, with only narrow exceptions for religious or single-sex institutions. Standardized test scores would be required of all applicants, and universities would be obligated to publish admissions data broken down by race, national origin, and sex. This provision, while presented as transparency, could undermine the missions of Hispanic-Serving and Minority-Serving Institutions by casting their enrollment patterns as suspect.

Although cloaked in the language of neutrality and academic freedom, the Compact advances a distinctly conservative agenda. It uniquely shields "conservative ideas" from institutional scrutiny, while insisting on biological definitions of sex, restrictions on gender identity recognition, and single-sex policies for athletics and facilities. Limits on foreign students, ideological screening for "hostility to the United States," and mandated civics instruction point to a nationalist agenda previously unseen in federal higher education policy. Together, these measures establish an asymmetrical governance framework that privileges conservative priorities under the guise of neutrality.

The parallels with Hungary's higher-education transformation are unmistakable. There, governance structures were re-engineered to entrench ideological control and marginalize independent voices. Likewise, the Compact authorizes revisions to university governance, the potential abolition of academic units deemed hostile, and centralized compliance mechanisms including viewpoint audits, speech policing, and even the "lawful use of force" to manage dissent. What emerged in Hungary, a higher-education sector constrained, compliant, and politically domesticated, serves as a cautionary precedent for the United States.

By weaponizing federal funding as a tool of political coercion, the Trump Administration threatens every public university, research laboratory, and student in the country. If implemented, this patronage model would shrink America's intellectual horizon, stifle dissent, and tie higher education to partisan demands.

Whether universities will accept or reject the Compact remains uncertain. Each institution that submits to the Compact will make it easier for the Administration to expand its scope, until adherence is no longer optional but universal.