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Trump's new higher education "compact" is an attack on academic freedom

Texas Faculty Association President Pat Heintzelman issued the following statement:

The Trump administration has asked nine public and private universities throughout the country, including the University of Texas, to sign a compact supporting the Trump political agenda to help ensure access to federal research funds.

This attempted bribe is another attack by President Trump on academic freedom, an important principle of the teaching and learning experience and our democracy.

The compact, according to media reports, would require these universities to freeze tuition for five years, limit the enrollment of international students and commit to strict definitions of gender. Universities also would be required to prohibit any program, action or policy that would "punish, belittle and even spark violence against conservative ideas."

The Texas Faculty Association opposes violence, and we support free speech and the free exchange of ideas, be they conservative, liberal or apolitical, if they are discussed peacefully and without university restrictions, which Trump is proposing. The First Amendment covers university faculty and students of all political beliefs, not just conservatives.

The federal funds that Trump is using to enforce his political demands are tax dollars raised from millions of Americans of all political persuasions. The funds don't belong to the president. They belong to the American people and were appropriated by Congress for higher education, not to be held hostage by an authoritarian president, who, we fear, may soon try to impose these restrictions on all universities.

We urge state and UT officials to take a stand for academic freedom and democracy and reject this attempt to strongarm higher education.