



UNDER THREAT FROM TRUMP, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY AGREES TO POLICY CHANGES - ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Student protesters gather inside their encampment on the Columbia University campus, April 29, 2024, in New York.

Columbia University agreed Friday to put its Middle East studies department under new supervision and overhaul its rules for protests and student discipline, acquiescing to an extraordinary ultimatum by the Trump administration to implement those and other changes or risk losing billions of dollars in federal funding.

As part of the sweeping reforms, the university will also adopt a new definition of antisemitism and expand “intellectual diversity” by staffing up its Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies, according to a [letter](#) published Friday by the interim president, Katrina Armstrong.

The announcement drew immediate condemnation from some faculty and free speech groups, who accused the university of caving to President Donald Trump's largely unprecedented intrusion upon the school's academic freedom.

“Columbia's capitulation endangers academic freedom and campus expression nationwide,” Donna Lieberman, the executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, said in a statement.

Earlier this month, the Trump administration [pulled \\$400 million](#) in research grants and other funding over the university's handling of protests against Israel's military campaign in Gaza. As a precondition to restoring those funds — along with billions more in future grants — federal officials last week demanded the university immediately enact nine separate reforms to its academic and security policies.

In her response Friday, Armstrong indicated Columbia would implement nearly all of them. As ordered, it will hire new public safety personnel and empower them to make arrests on campus, bar students from protesting in academic buildings and revamp its long-standing process for student discipline.

Students will no longer be permitted to wear face masks on campus “for the purposes of concealing one's identity.” An exception would be made for people wearing them for health or religious reasons.

The university will also appoint a new senior provost to review the leadership and curriculum of several international studies departments

to “ensure the educational offerings are comprehensive and balanced.”

The appointment appeared to be a concession to the Trump administration's most contentious demand: that the university place its Middle Eastern, South Asian and African Studies Department under “academic receivership for a minimum of five years.”

The Trump administration has repeatedly accused Columbia University of letting antisemitism go unchecked at protests against Israel that began at the university last spring and quickly spread to other campuses — a characterization disputed by those involved in the demonstrations.

In her letter, Armstrong said the university had worked hard to “address the legitimate concerns raised both from within and without our Columbia community, including by our regulators, with respect to the discrimination, harassment, and antisemitic acts our Jewish community has faced.”

“The way Columbia and Columbians have been portrayed is hard to reckon with,” she added. “We have challenges, yes, but they do not define us.”

The Trump administration has ratcheted up its attacks on Columbia in recent weeks, thrusting the campus into crisis and sparking fears of additional reprisals at colleges across the country.

On March 8, federal immigration officials arrested [Mahmoud Khalil](#), a prominent Palestinian activist and legal permanent resident in his university-owned apartment building -- the “first of many” attempted deportations, according to Trump.

Justice Department leaders say they are also investigating whether Columbia [hid students](#) sought by the U.S. over their roles in the demonstrations.

While Trump has made Columbia the most visible target of his crackdown on higher education, he has put other universities on notice that they will face cuts if they do not embrace his agenda.

His administration has announced [investigations into 52 universities](#) for their diversity, equity and inclusion programs. And it has suspended approximately [\\$175 million in federal funding](#) for the University of Pennsylvania over a transgender swimmer who last competed for the school in 2022.

On Friday, free speech groups warned Columbia’s response to Trump's threat would reverberate far beyond the Manhattan campus.

“Shaking under government pressure, Columbia crumbled,” said Tyler Coward, the lead counsel for government affairs at the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. “If Columbia — with its immense resources and influence — can’t stand up to government demands that threaten free speech, what are other colleges to do?”