

Defending the Integrity of Higher Education Against Authoritarian Assaults

Whereas the Office of the State Comptroller calls New York’s colleges and universities “anchors for our communities by employing tens of thousands of people, conducting world-class research and development, attracting new residents, training the workforce and bringing vibrancy to neighborhoods”; warns that federal actions on student aid, international student enrollment, and research funding threaten our higher education institutions; and observes that New York’s competitiveness is put at risk by “recently enacted federal law, upcoming budget appropriations budget appropriations for federal fiscal year 2026, and Executive action”;¹

Whereas the Trump regime has placed extortionate conditions on universities to access federal funding for research and other critical academic initiatives, including a coercive “invitation” to nine prominent universities to accept a “Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education,” tantamount to an oath of loyalty to the MAGA agenda, in exchange for favorable access to federal funding;

Whereas the effort to extract concessions from high-profile universities is just one component of a broad effort to defund and discredit all institutions of higher education unless they relinquish their traditional independence and authority over curriculum, pedagogy, hiring, and other core academic functions;

Whereas the vital role of faculty and staff in shared governance has been dangerously targeted as an antiquated feature of higher education requiring reform by external actors when institutions refuse to conform to political or financial expediency;²

Whereas academic freedom, the lifeblood of higher education, means that faculty must be evaluated by their disciplinary peers, not by elected officials or self-appointed monitors, and that all instructional staff possess a collective right to pursue truth in their research, teaching, and curricular development, whether or not it adheres to the priorities of any politician;

Whereas the courts have found that the Trump regime has unlawfully withheld and placed overly restrictive conditions on grant funding from federal agencies including the NSF, NIH, NEH, NEA, and Department of Education;

Whereas the courts have found that the Trump regime has weaponized Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, a provision already expanded during prior administrations, and used it as a pretext to repress freedom of speech and academic freedom, with particular risks to protected speech for Palestinian rights;³

41 *Whereas* college and university classrooms are spaces of learning in which students
42 should be challenged intellectually and ethically while being supported as learners, and
43 campuses have been and should remain spaces of contestation over the salient issues
44 of our times, including the exercise of freedom of speech and assembly, fundamental
45 features of a democracy;

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47 *Whereas* the Trump regime's attack on international students and workers and
48 politicization of the H-1B visa program restricts students' right to learn, diminishes the
49 quality of education for all, and puts at particular risk U.S. graduate and professional
50 programs that are the envy of the world;

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52 *Whereas* the immigrant families of many of our students and members have been
53 subjected to vicious, unrelenting assaults by ICE and other branches of the U.S.
54 Department of Homeland Security, including the arrest of more than 2,600 children
55 nationwide in the first 10 months of 2025 alone, the aim of which is to instill fear, tear
56 the social fabric, and pit the residents of our communities against each other;⁴

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58 *Whereas* the signature budgetary accomplishment of the 119th U.S. Congress, the One
59 Big Beautiful Bill Act, delivered tax relief to super-wealthy individuals and the most
60 profitable corporations at the expense of working people, such that states like New York
61 must direct funding that could otherwise support education toward Medicaid, SNAP, and
62 other social safety net programs now slashed by the federal government, resulting in
63 large projected state budget deficits;

64
65 *Whereas* resistance to the Trump regime's campaign to defund and discredit higher
66 education has been waged effectively through litigation and organizing among faculty,
67 staff, and students, an anti-authoritarian opposition that academic unions must lead;⁵
68 therefore, be it

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70 ***Resolved*** that the PSC will

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- 72 ● Support legislation to expand academic freedom and require just cause to
 - 73 terminate academic workers;
 - 74 ● Support legislation including the New York for All Act (S2235/A3506), the Access
 - 75 to Representation Act (S141/A270), and the New York City Trust Act (Int 214) to
 - 76 protect communities and prohibit state and local resources from being used to
 - 77 carry out the cruel, inhumane federal deportation agenda;
 - 78 ● Demand that the CUNY administration refuse to accommodate or cooperate with
 - 79 unlawful attempts by the federal government to access information about the
 - 80 immigration status of students and workers;

- Demand that the CUNY administration increase full-time staffing at each college to meet the needs of non-citizen and immigrant students and workers;
- Redouble our effort to organize members, collaborate with other unions and AAUP chapters, and coordinate with our state and national affiliates to defeat authoritarianism.

Resolved that the PSC calls on NYSUT and the AFT to

- Support litigation to maintain the integrity of the US Department of Education;⁶
- Commit resources to NYSUT and AFT locals engaged in defending higher education in New York State and across the nation;
- Develop and prioritize robust campaigns to protect the rights of higher education workers and defend our public colleges and universities.

– Submitted by the PSC Executive Council, December 18, 2025

¹ <https://www.osc.ny.gov/reports/budget/fed-funding-ny/federal-impact-higher-education>

² <https://www.aaup.org/reports-publications/aaup-policies-reports/topical-reports/defense-independent-and-representative>

³ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/sep/11/campus-investigations-professors-gaza-antisemitism>

https://www.aaup.org/sites/default/files/2025-11/Discriminating-Against-Dissent_0.pdf

⁴ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/12/07/nyregion/queens-migrant-boy-detained-rally.html>

⁵ <https://www.aft.org/news/universities-roundly-reject-trumps-loyalty-oath>

⁶ https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/2025/11.2025-Changes_at_the_Department_of_Education.pdf