

October 20, 2025

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon:

Thank you for your October 1 letter introducing the proposed *Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education* and for the process call on October 17.

Your letter, and the initiative it launches, identifies the need to redefine higher education's relationship with the American public. Our nation is at an inflection point that requires us to take necessary actions to ensure that American higher education excellence is preserved, and indeed strengthened, for our rising generation of students and citizens.

We at the University of Arizona, with strong concurrence and support from the Arizona Board of Regents, our governing body, share your vision of continuing to strengthen our higher education system for the betterment of the country – a vision rooted in a merit-based pursuit of excellence that directly or indirectly benefits all Americans.

In my year as President of the University of Arizona we have made substantial advances across several subjects addressed through your initiative.

We reduced administrative spending by 22 percent, froze tuition for in-state students, established institutional research priorities that align with national and economic security needs, revised our enrollment strategy to expand partnerships with community colleges and access to all qualified domestic students, and affirmed the expectation of a campus culture rooted in civil discourse and willingness to engage all points of view. And we did this with the engagement and cooperation of our campus community.

My prior experiences at Purdue University and the University of Vermont reflect a commitment to freezing tuition for extended periods and diversifying funding through robust corporate partnerships.



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We have much common ground with the ideas your administration is advancing on changes that would benefit American higher education and our nation at large.

At the same time, a federal research funding system based on anything other than merit would weaken the world's preeminent engine for innovation, advancement of technology, and solutions to many of our nation's most profound challenges. We seek no special treatment and believe in our ability to compete for federally funded research strictly on merit.

As a demonstration of our commitment to collaboration with the federal government, I have included below the *University of Arizona's Statement of Principles*. These principles are not just an expression of philosophy; they are a commitment to strengthen or continue reforms that benefit our students, advance our shared national interests, and protect the taxpayers.

Our principles affirm that our university community remains rooted in the pursuit of excellence with clear standards, transparency, and accountability.

We welcome the opportunity to engage other universities, higher education associations, members of Congress, and your administration to advance and implement our principles in alignment with the national interest.

I look forward to further discussion and a continued partnership with the federal government, which has helped to produce the strongest and most competitive higher education system in the world.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Suresh Garimella". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Suresh" and last name "Garimella" clearly distinguishable.

Suresh Garimella

cc: May Mailman
Vincent Haley

University of Arizona's Statement of Principles

The decades-long partnership between universities and the federal government has been a defining factor in making American higher education the undisputed world leader. No other nation has been able to replicate this proud and successful model. The university/federal government partnership has yielded immeasurable scientific discoveries, advances in technology, extraordinary medical treatments, strengthening of our national security, growth in local economies, and career opportunities and economic prosperity for tens of millions of college graduates.

The University of Arizona benefits from its relationship with the federal government, including through financial aid for students, and funding for research and discoveries in science, health, engineering, and other disciplines. The federal government benefits from these discoveries, the resulting economic impact, and our contributions to ensuring that the United States retains its position as the most scientifically advanced country in the world.

The University of Arizona steadfastly believes in a merit-based pursuit of excellence in fulfilling its mission of education, research and engagement, with a vibrant marketplace of ideas and perspectives and equal treatment of all.

These principles demonstrate an ongoing commitment to pursue common-sense reforms that advance the national interest, protect the core tenets of American higher education, and ensure continued and consistent federal investment in the University.

As the most comprehensive research university in the Southwest and a flagship, land-grant institution, the University has committed to three strategic imperatives¹: success for every student, research that shapes the future, and engagement with our communities to create opportunity. The University honors its responsibility and privilege to educate all its students with integrity.

The following principles are reflective of the University's approach to fulfilling its mission and are informed by feedback from a wide range of stakeholders.

Student Learning and Fair Admissions

The University shall continue to hold success for every student as its North Star – prioritizing the enrollment of students who are academically prepared, and focusing on affordability, retention and progression, experiential learning, research experiences, internships, and job placement.

¹ [Delivering on our Promise](#), Strategic Imperatives of the University of Arizona

University grades should always reflect demonstrated competency (breadth and depth) in a subject matter and not be inflated or deflated for non-academic reasons.

The University continues to provide instruction, experiential learning, and research opportunities in areas critical to the nation's economic competitiveness, health, and security.

As a land-grant institution, the University provides educational pathways for all students. The University explicitly prohibits discrimination in admissions based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, and genetic information.

The University considers the academic record, rigor of coursework, experiences, leadership, service, and contributions to the learning environment of prospective students.

The University publishes admissions criteria and processes on its website and commits to applying them consistently.

Equal Treatment and Nondiscrimination

Hiring at the University is focused on the quality and merits of candidates who are best prepared to educate and support the success of our students, engage in research and scholarship that helps shape the future of the nation, and embrace their role in serving the community.

The University complies with the requirements of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act and other federal and state employment discrimination laws, which state that factors such as sex, ethnicity, race, national origin, disability, color, or religion shall not be considered in any decision related to the employment of any employee at any level, except as otherwise provided by Title VII or other federal employment discrimination statutes.

The University maintains an environment free from discrimination and publishes a nondiscrimination and anti-harassment policy² on every official university website.

The University provides access to safe campus facilities for all students, employees, and visitors that protects their privacy. For intercollegiate athletics, the University follows sport-specific eligibility standards established by respective governing bodies.

The University will periodically conduct anonymous campus surveys on free expression and viewpoint diversity and publish the results.

The University does not consider diversity statements in the employment process.

² [Nondiscrimination and Anti-Harassment Policy](#)

Freedom of Expression and Civil Discourse

The University assures academic freedom and fosters engagement in civil debate. The University does not allow disruptions, intimidation, or vandalism that stifles speech, instruction, or participation in campus life. The University enforces clearly published content- and viewpoint-neutral time, place, and manner rules.

The University maintains its commitment to academic freedom, which undergirds the right of faculty to teach free from unreasonable or arbitrary restrictions, to conduct research, and to address matters of institutional policy and governance. The University shall not restrict academic freedom in scholarship and teaching or individual speech by students and employees acting in their personal capacities.

The University has adopted the Chicago Principles on Freedom of Expression and holds a Green rating in the College Free Speech Rankings published by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.

University programs such as the Center for the Philosophy of Freedom and the Discourse Series exemplify this commitment by fostering rigorous inquiry, respectful debate, and exposure to diverse viewpoints, which are values that strengthen the marketplace of ideas central to the University's mission.

The University maintains and publishes disciplinary guidelines for students or employees who disrupt speech, instruction, or access to campus, and holds accountable those who are found to infringe on protected speech or engage in ideological litmus tests.

The University refrains from taking positions on political and social issues that do not directly affect campus operations, safety, compliance, or the teaching and research mission. This expectation applies to official institutional statements by the University and its leadership. When statements are deemed necessary, they will be concise and mission-centered.

University policies recognize that academic freedom is not absolute, and the University will ensure policies are in place that prohibit discriminatory, threatening, harassing, or other behaviors that infringe on the rights of members of the University community and visitors to the campus. The University commits to enforcing such policies.

Financial Responsibility and Affordability

The University will continue to curb unnecessary administrative costs, pursue efficiencies and streamline or sunset programs that fail to serve students or the state.

All decisions regarding tuition must be approved by the Arizona Board of Regents. The University did not raise tuition for 2025-26 for in-state students and will continue to limit tuition increases for Arizona students to the greatest extent possible.

As one of the nation's top five universities for service members, the University shall accept Joint Service Transcript credits toward general education for veterans attending the University.

Academic program outcome disclosures will align with Financial Value Transparency and Gainful Employment requirements.

Foreign Engagements, International Enrollment, and Research Security

The University values the rich contributions of international faculty, staff, and students who provide numerous intellectual and cultural contributions. The University also recognizes potential risks with certain foreign engagements and research security concerns and will continue to comply with applicable and lawful obligations and requirements of the federal government.

The University shall continue to prioritize admission of all qualified Arizona students³ and tribal nations, as it has throughout its history.

The University complies with the Student Visa Exchange Program reporting obligations and lawful government requests consistent with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act and other privacy laws.

The University will maintain a robust research security program that protects the intellectual property and other assets crucial to our economic competitiveness and national security.

The University maintains a comprehensive compliance program regarding Office of Foreign Assets Control regulations, Export Administration Regulations and International Traffic in Arms Regulations, Section 117 foreign gift/contract reporting, and applicable anti-boycott rules. The University screens for high-risk engagements and provides requisite training.

Success for every student is the North Star at the University of Arizona. The University is committed to creating a learning environment where all students thrive, staff and faculty support independent thinking, and the community is served through workforce and economic development.

³ The current percentage of international student visa holders at the University of Arizona is less than 4 percent of the total undergraduate enrollment.