

President Trump Signs Broad Executive Order to Promote Free Speech on College Campuses

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`su_note note_color="#efela7" text_color="#000000" radius="5"]`Trump signed an executive order advising colleges to respect students' First Amendment right to free expression under the threat of losing \$35 billion in federal funding. The order was issued in response to colleges and universities that have banned presentations by conservative speakers using the excuse of protecting student safety. In addition, some campuses have imposed speech codes and free speech 'zones'. It is unclear how the new grant restrictions will be enforced, prompting concern from critics that research grants could be stripped from schools that oppose the views and goals of the federal government and the grant-giving agencies, and that research will be micromanaged.`[/su_note]`

President delivers on promise to punish colleges that don't show they guarantee free speech on campus, and includes language on outcomes data and risk sharing. But it's unclear what force it will carry.

President Trump on Thursday delivered on his promise of an executive order that would hold colleges that receive federal research funding accountable for protecting free speech.

However, his bombastic rhetoric in a White House East Room ceremony wasn't matched by the modest language of the order.

"If a college or university does not allow you to speak, we will not give them money. It's that simple," he said Thursday.

But the **executive order** essentially directs federal agencies to ensure colleges are following requirements already in place. And it doesn't spell out how enforcement of the order would work.

It directs 12 federal grant-making agencies to coordinate with the Office of Management and Budget to certify that colleges receiving federal research funds comply with existing federal law and regulations involving free academic inquiry. While the administration expects public institutions to uphold the First Amendment, the order says, private colleges are expected to comply with their “stated institutional policies” on freedom of speech. The free-speech directive doesn’t apply to federal student aid programs.

The document also directs the Education Department to publish program-level data in the College Scorecard on measures of student outcomes, including earnings, student debt, default rates and loan repayment rates.

And it requires the department to submit policy recommendations to the White House by January 2020 on risk-sharing proposals for colleges that participate in the federal student loan program.

The executive order puts extra force behind several policies the White House **has backed** previously. For example, earlier this week the administration released a report on priorities for reauthorization of the Higher Education Act that included program-level data and a new accountability system for colleges.

President Trump has weighed in repeatedly on alleged suppression of free speech on campuses, especially speech by conservative students. Most recently, he **announced plans** for an executive order addressing the issue at the Conservative Political Action Conference, an annual gathering of activists and elected officials.

“Free inquiry is an essential feature of this nation’s democracy, and it promotes learning, scientific discovery and economic prosperity,” the order reads. “We must encourage institutions to appropriately account for this bedrock principle in their administration of student life and to avoid creating environments that stifle competing perspectives, thereby potentially impeding beneficial research and undermining learning.”

The executive order **had been in the works** long before the president’s comments at the conservative event.

But it’s not clear what kind of teeth the order has beyond new certification requirements for institutions. A senior administration official told reporters on Thursday that federal agencies will enforce it the same way they enforce existing federal grant conditions, which colleges already are required to follow. The official didn’t address details about how the order would be implemented.

Agencies covered by the order include the Departments of Education,

Defense, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce, Labor, Health and Human Services, Transportation, and Energy, as well as the Environmental Protection Agency, National Science Foundation and NASA.

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