



CAL POLY

April 28, 2025

Dear President Armstrong,

The Trump Administration's demands of universities including Columbia and Harvard Universities and its punitive withdrawal of federal funding are attacks on the principles of academic freedom and freedom of speech at all universities and colleges. They directly impact the ability of faculty to do their job – including faculty here at Cal Poly. We urge you to: (1) speak out publicly in support of Harvard University; (2) sign the Call for Constructive Engagement that has been signed by over 500 of your colleagues, including ten from the CSU system; and (3) because there is strength in numbers, reach out to the presidents of all other CSUs with the same objective – solidarity with those universities and a commitment to defend our academic freedom.

Cal Poly is in a unique position to do this. Actions taken by the Trump Administration have affected our ability not only to conduct research and serve the community, but also to fulfill our primary mission: to educate undergraduates. We have already seen negative impacts at Cal Poly from the termination or pause of federally funded programs.

A public display of support will achieve three goals. First, now more than ever it is important for all of us in higher education to show unity in *not* giving in to the federal administration's efforts to limit what we teach and how we teach it. Second, it will be a vital step towards building a coalition to unite the CSUs, if and when the federal administration decides to 'come for' us, or for any of our peer institutions within the CSU. Third, it will send a vitally important message to Cal Poly faculty at this moment in history that you have our backs, just as this letter shows we have yours.

Some have argued for 'institutional neutrality,' that universities should not wade into political debates over policy issues. This is not a matter of public policy: this is a matter of protecting our ability to do our jobs, free of government interference and censorship. Others may raise the concern that a public statement that draws attention to us will have financial consequences, as it has for our colleagues at Columbia and Harvard. But those potential financial consequences must be weighed against consequences of quiet, 'anticipatory obedience' that we are already beginning to see, that have already limited our ability to support our students, and that compromise our work as educators. Moreover, as has been seen with Columbia University, partial capitulation provides no guarantee of safety.

We cannot predict how far the current federal administration will go to curtail our academic freedom. We can however say that we never imagined, as faculty in the United States of America, that we would ever see this level of censorship and intrusion into university governance. Non-action on the part of Cal Poly administration sends a message that Cal Poly will readily sacrifice our academic freedom in the face of government pressure, especially given that so many other universities are now coalescing to stand up to government attacks on higher education. We do not want to look back at this point in history and regret not having done what we could to protect our role as educators.