

U.S. NEWS

Columbia Nears Acquiescing to Trump

President withholds \$400 million from school until it makes changes he wants

Columbia University is getting close to yielding to President Trump's demands in negotiations to restore \$400 million in federal funding, according to people close to the discussions.

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The Trump administration has extended Columbia's deadline until Friday to agree to nine far-reaching demands. The government earlier this month canceled the grants and contracts over allegations of antisemitism on the New York City campus but gave the university a review period.

The demands include banning masks, empowering campus police and putting the school's department of Middle East, South Asian and African Studies under "academic receivership," which means it would no longer be controlled by the faculty.

Columbia's acquiescence would represent a significant moment in the growing battle between Trump and elite universities. Trump campaigned on reining in what he sees as leftist ideologues on college campuses, and has moved aggressively to investigate allegations of campus antisemitism, with Columbia as his main focus. Some faculty, however,



The university faces a new deadline of Friday to decide whether to agree to the demands.

view the moves as federal overreach that violate cherished notions of academic freedom.

Discussions on the board of trustees are fluid—with sticking points—and could turn in a different direction before Friday.

A senior university official described the direct conversations with federal regulators as continuing and productive, and said the school wasn't ready to publicly talk about negotiations. The official said any decisions the school makes would uphold both Columbia's values and legal obligations.

"We are working around the clock to secure the future of this extraordinary University," Columbia's interim president, Katrina Armstrong, said in a letter to the Columbia commu-

nity Wednesday. The last two years "have both highlighted real cracks in our existing structures and have created new problems that this campus community needs to address," she said, calling antisemitism, harassment and discrimination unacceptable.

Agreement to the demands doesn't guarantee the federal funds will return. In a letter last week, the Trump administration said meeting its nine requests was a "precondition for formal negotiations." The letter said there are other "immediate and long-term structural reforms" the government believes Columbia needs to make.

Trustees have been huddled for days. Progress has been one step forward, two steps back,

with some board members deeply concerned the university is trading away its moral authority and academic independence for federal funds. Others have argued the school has limited options because it relies on federal money.

The leadership is also concerned about the optics of the Trump administration dictating policy at Columbia.

A key sticking point has been the status of the Middle East, South Asian and African Studies department. The Trump administration requested it be put into receivership for five years, which means someone from outside the department would be brought in to make decisions for the faculty.

When a school puts a de-

partment into receivership, it typically appoints a chair from another department. Normally, a school only does this when departments are so dysfunctional the university has lost faith they can course correct on their own.

The idea that Trump would force such a move is unpalatable to many faculty. The school is negotiating with the administration to call the receivership something more agreeable and present it as a win-win, according to people familiar with the school's thinking.

The challenge for the school's leadership is to move everyone—faculty, students, trustees—to acceptance before Friday's deadline.

Officials worry about backlash from faculty and possible protests when students return from spring break next week.

Joseph Howley, a classics professor at Columbia, said the notion that the White House could determine control of an academic department at Columbia was deeply distressing. He anticipated faculty would let their anger be known.

"It is really a red line for the independence of universities, for academic freedom, for shared governance," he said.

Across campus, fatalists are describing Columbia as being damned if they do, and damned if they don't. They predict layoffs if the school rejects Trump's terms, and resignations if it accepts.

"Universities are not too big to fail, but I think we're too important to let die," said James Applegate, a professor of astronomy.

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