

Resolution Opposing the Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education and Any Settlement of OCR or DOJ Investigations That Compromises Institutional Autonomy

WHEREAS, the “Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education” offers colleges and universities preferential consideration for federal funding in exchange for significant concessions in academic freedom, institutional integrity, and autonomous governance, thereby subordinating core academic values to federal oversight; and

WHEREAS, the Compact’s promise of “excellence” masks a fundamental shift of authority from university faculty and governing boards to federal agencies, effectively transforming voluntary compliance into a binding regime of external supervision that undermines institutional independence; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Justice’s “standstill” agreement with the University of Virginia, together with similar Office for Civil Rights (OCR) settlements at Columbia, Brown, and UCLA, demonstrate the dangers of such arrangements: negotiated in secrecy, without faculty consultation, they impose years of federal monitoring and mandatory reporting that chill free inquiry, constrain legitimate academic debate, and erode shared governance; and

WHEREAS, these agreements, while claiming to preserve academic freedom, in fact invite the federal government to sit in judgment of university speech, curricula, and research, creating a precedent in which administrative convenience takes precedence over the faculty’s constitutional and professional responsibility to govern the academic enterprise; and

WHEREAS, the Compact and similar settlements blur the constitutional distinction between voluntary funding conditions and compelled oversight, transforming what were once collaborative relationships between universities and the federal government into supervisory arrangements inconsistent with both the Higher Education Act and the principles of institutional autonomy; and

WHEREAS, genuine “excellence” in higher education arises not from compliance with government-imposed standards but from the faculty’s independent pursuit of truth, the open exchange of ideas, and the self-governance essential to intellectual innovation and democratic society; therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, that the George Mason University Faculty Senate calls upon the President of George Mason University and the Board of Visitors to decline to sign the “Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education” or any similar agreement that conditions federal funding on the surrender of institutional autonomy or faculty governance; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate urges the administration not to enter into any settlement with the Department of Justice or the Office for Civil Rights that mirrors the University of Virginia’s “standstill” agreement or other such arrangements that place the university under continuing federal supervision; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the George Mason University Faculty Senate affirms

that any substantial compact, agreement, or memorandum of understanding with governmental or private entities that would materially affect the university's curriculum, research priorities, academic standards, financial obligations, institutional mission, or data governance must be subject to transparent deliberation and meaningful faculty consultation through GMU's established shared governance processes before execution; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate affirms that any negotiation or execution of substantial agreements affecting curriculum development, research priorities, faculty governance, or the allocation of university resources requires a properly appointed and duly confirmed Board of Visitors for George Mason University, as recognized by the Virginia General Assembly, operating through transparent processes and in accordance with GMU's established shared governance model; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate affirms its commitment to the core principles of academic freedom, shared governance, and institutional independence as essential to both the mission of George Mason University and the preservation of higher education as a public good.

Adopted by the Faculty Senate

George Mason University, December 3, 2025

Solon Simmons President, Faculty Senate