

# New Executive Orders Impacting Higher Education: Accreditation Reform, Enhanced Transparency on Foreign Influence, and Strengthened Support for HBCUs

April 24, 2025

On Wednesday, April 23, 2025, President Donald Trump signed a series of executive orders impacting higher education. These orders focus on reforming accreditation processes, increasing transparency around foreign influence, and strengthening support for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).

The executive order titled “[Reforming Accreditation to Strengthen Higher Education](#)” directs the Secretary of Education (“Secretary”) to “hold [accreditors] accountable, including through denial, monitoring, suspension, or termination of accreditation recognition [if they] ... violate Federal law, including by requiring institutions seeking accreditation to engage in unlawful discrimination in accreditation-related activity under the guise of ‘diversity, equity, and inclusion’ initiatives.” It further instructs the Attorney General and the Secretary to investigate and take action against accreditors that maintain such requirements. As highlighted in the Order’s accompanying [Fact Sheet](#), the Secretary is also directed to: (i) resume recognition of new accreditors, (ii) require institutions to use data to improve results, without reference to race, ethnicity, or sex, (iii) ensure that academic programs deliver real value, and (iv) prioritize intellectual diversity among faculty “to advance academic freedom, intellectual inquiry, and student learning.”

In a separate directive, President Trump issued an order titled “[Transparency Regarding Foreign Influence at American Universities](#)” which directs the Secretary to more robustly enforce Section 117 of the Higher Education Act of 1965, 20 U.S.C. § 1011f requiring higher education institutions to report substantial foreign gifts and contracts. By statute, an institution is required to file a disclosure report with the Secretary whenever it “receives a gift from or enters into a contract with a foreign source, the value of which is \$250,000 or more, considered alone or in combination with all other gifts from or contracts with that foreign source within a calendar year...” 20 U.S.C. § 1011f(a). The Secretary is instructed to ensure that institutions “specifically disclose details about foreign funding, including the true source and purpose of the funds,” and, in coordination with the Attorney General, to hold institutions accountable through audits, investigations, and enforcement actions. According to the Order, institutions that fail to comply with these requirements may risk the loss of certain federal grant funds.

Finally, President Trump issued the executive order titled “[White House Initiative to Promote Excellence and Innovation at Historically Black Colleges and Universities](#),” which is aimed at strengthening HBCUs’ “capacity to deliver high-quality education to a growing number of students.” The initiative emphasizes expanding private sector partnerships, ensuring equal access to federal programs, supporting institutional development, and enhancing workforce preparation. It also calls for the continued implementation of the HBCU PARTNERS Act (Public Law 116-270), with the goal of promoting academic excellence, improving institutional affordability, boosting student retention and degree attainment, and building a pipeline of students interested in attending HBCUs. The initiative further directs collaboration with federal and state agencies to increase support for research, infrastructure modernization, and institutional growth. The Order also revokes President Biden’s Executive Order 14041, which had centered the HBCU initiative on advancing educational equity and disbands an Environmental Protection Agency advisory council focused on engagement with HBCUs and Minority Serving Institutions.

Should you have any questions about the impact of these orders or recent executive actions on your institution’s policies and practices, please contact Jennifer McLaughlin ([jmclaughlin@cullenllp.com](mailto:jmclaughlin@cullenllp.com)), Dina Vespia ([dvespia@cullenllp.com](mailto:dvespia@cullenllp.com)), Nicole Donatich ([ndonatich@cullenllp.com](mailto:ndonatich@cullenllp.com)), or Jordan Milite ([jmilite@cullenllp.com](mailto:jmilite@cullenllp.com)).

This advisory provides a brief overview of the most significant changes in the law and does not constitute legal advice. Nothing herein creates an attorney-client relationship between the sender and recipient.

[Sign up for Cullen and Dykman’s Higher Education Email Alerts](#)

## Practices

- Higher Education

## Industries

- Higher Education

## Attorneys

- Jennifer A. McLaughlin
- Dina L. Vespia
- Nicole A. Donatich
- Jordan Milite