

# Memorandum

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR  
AND CITY COUNCIL

**FROM:** Councilmember Rosemary Kamei  
Councilmember David Cohen

**SUBJECT:** Request to Add Resolution  
on Higher Education to the  
City Council Meeting  
Agenda of March 24, 2026

**DATE:** March 12, 2026

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Approved

Date: 3/12/2026

*Rosemary Kamei David Cohen*

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**COUNCIL DISTRICT:** Citywide

## RECOMMENDATION

1. Consider a Draft Resolution of the City Council of the City of San José Declaring its Commitment to Opposing the Coercion of Colleges and Universities;
2. Add the Draft Resolution of the City Council of the City of San José to the City Council Agenda for its regular meeting of March 24, 2026;
3. Authorize the City Attorney's Office to make such formatting and non-substantive changes and additions to the said Draft Resolution as it deems appropriate or necessary.

## BACKGROUND

Recent attempts by the current Federal Administration to commandeer institutions of higher education in the prosecution of its political agenda have resulted in tangible harms to our community and economic welfare. Local universities such as San José State University (SJSU), Santa Clara University, and Stanford University have suffered damage through reductions in federal grant fund availability and through explicitly targeted actions, which seek to coerce university leadership into adopting the political viewpoint of the Federal Administration.

The importance of protecting academic communities from government overreach sits deep in historic traditions. Our modern concepts of academic freedom trace their roots down through time from the Enlightenment through the Renaissance to at least as far back as classical Greece.<sup>1</sup>

The modern university system has relentlessly defended these principles throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, including via domestic efforts and policies of the American Association of University Professors and the Association of American Colleges.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, these principles are so fundamental to American higher education that the Supreme Court has recognized the importance of such autonomy and protections from political coercion for communities of scholarship, opining that “any strait jacket upon the intellectual leaders in our colleges and universities would imperil the future of our Nation” and that, “[s]cholarship cannot flourish in an atmosphere of suspicion and distrust.”<sup>3</sup>

Governmental overreach and coercive actions exert tangible effects on the stability of universities and the livelihoods of workers beyond instructors in classrooms. Stanford University, for instance, reported that recent reductions in available federal funding resulted in laying off over 360 employees directly traceable to Federal Administration policies.<sup>4</sup> These cuts came on the heels of the Federal Administration’s successful effort to force Columbia University, among others, to shift its policies on free speech and expression by cutting unrelated funding and the commencement of investigative legal actions.<sup>5</sup> While other local universities and colleges were not subject to the same magnitude of funding losses, schools in the California State University system and in local community college districts felt immediate impacts when the Federal Administration terminated approximately \$350 million in support for these institutions *because they work to uplift minority communities*.<sup>6</sup>

The Federal Administration, through the U.S. Department of Education, has also explicitly targeted SJSU. Notably, the Department accused SJSU of violating Title IX and the Department has further demanded that SJSU take actions and make comments reflecting the Administration’s

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<sup>1</sup> Ralph F. Fuchs, Academic Freedom—Its Basic Philosophy, Function, and History, 28 LAW & CONTEMP. PROBS. 431 (1963), <https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/lcp/vol28/iss3/2/>.

<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> *Sweezy v. New Hampshire*, 354 U.S. 234, 250 (1957) (Warren, C.J.) (explaining why the the political prosecution of a Professor by the State’s Attorney General was unjust and emphasizing the constitutional protections relevant to academic freedom).

<sup>4</sup> *Stanford University Lays Off Over 360 Employees, Citing Trump Policies*, Reuters (Aug. 5, 2023), <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/stanford-university-lays-off-over-360-employees-citing-trump-policies-2025-08-06/>. (discussing Stanford University in the context of higher education institutions across the nation which lost significant portions of funds as a result of targeted action by the Federal Administration).

<sup>5</sup> Id.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Dep’t of Educ., *U.S. Department of Education Ends Funding to Racially Discriminatory Discretionary Grant Programs at Minority-Serving Institutions* (Sept. 10, 2025), <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-ends-funding-racially-discriminatory-discretionary-grant-programs-minority-serving-institutions>. (explaining how the loss of access to Hispanic-Serving Institution (HIS) funding affected Colleges and Universities across California because of the high large Hispanic population of the state and correlated representation in its public education institutions).

political viewpoint. These include the issuance of public statements, delivery of personalized private correspondence, and revision of athletic records and titles. SJSU remains subject to demands from the Federal Administration that it adopt specific ideological positions and revise its contracting policies in line with the Federal Administration's desires.<sup>7</sup>

This sort of forced speech contravenes fundamental constitutional rights and ancient traditions of academic freedom. The actions and demands targeted at SJSU are not unique<sup>8</sup> and are part of a broader, coordinated assault on institutions of higher education that seeks to coerce universities and colleges into submission to a particular political ideology. While those threats remain, the intellectual, cultural, and economic value and production of such institutions is limited.

Universities and colleges such as SJSU contribute enormously to the cultural and economic integrity of San José and the wider Bay Area.<sup>9</sup> It is imperative that these institutions can operate and contribute to our community without undue political influence.

For the foregoing reasons, I urge my colleagues to the adopt the recommendation above and submit the attached Resolution for Council consideration at the March 24, 2026, City Council meeting.

**For questions, please contact Antonio Kobe Lopez, District 1 at [kobe.lopez@sanjoseca.gov](mailto:kobe.lopez@sanjoseca.gov)**

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<sup>7</sup> U.S. Dep't of Educ., *U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights Finds San José State University Violated Title IX* (Jan. 28, 2026), <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-educations-office-civil-rights-finds-san-jose-state-university-violated-title-ix> (announcing specific demands made to San José State University including compelled pronouncements and administrative actions).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Dep't of Educ., *U.S. Department of Education Issues Denial of Access Letter to Harvard University for Its Continued Failure to Provide Admissions Data*, (Sept. 19, 2025), <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-issues-denial-of-access-letter-harvard-university-its-continued-failure-provide-admissions-data>. (describing federal pressure on Harvard University to provide admissions data and the potential funding consequences of noncompliance). Higher education institutions such as Harvard University and Columbia University have been subject to continued pressure to submit to demands and adjust their policies and ideological positions, losing access to funding and facing legal attacks as a result of their refusal to acquiesce.

<sup>9</sup> *Collegiate Consulting Study Finds SJSU Athletics Generates \$225 Million Annual Economic Impact*, San José State Spartans (September 5, 2025), <https://sjsuspartans.com/news/2025/09/5/collegiate-consulting-study-finds-san-jose-state-university-athletics-generates-dollar225-million-annual-economic-impact>. (estimating the economic impact of the SJSU athletics program at \$225.6 million of on-campus and regional activity). Cal. State Univ., *Moving California Forward: The Economic Power of the CSU*, <https://www.calstate.edu/impact> (last visited Mar. 3, 2026). (reporting an overall impact of the CSU system on the state of California as well as per-campus regional impacts wherein SJSU is state to generate approximately \$124.4 million in regional tax revenue while producing graduates that work in leading companies across the Silicon Valley such as Apple, Nvidia, Adobe, Google, and Kaiser Permanente).

Exhibit A:

Draft Resolution of the City Council of the City of San José Declaring its Commitment to  
Opposing the Coercion of Colleges and Universities

## RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF SAN JOSÉ

### DECLARING THE CITY'S COMMITMENT TO OPPOSING THE COERCION OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

WHEREAS, the Federal Administration has sought to coerce the management of institutions of higher education through vigorous and well-organized assaults on long-standing American values; and

WHEREAS, the economic and cultural vibrancy of the City of San José and the wider Santa Clara County are closely linked to regional higher education institutions, including San José State University, Santa Clara University, Stanford University, and other private and public university and college campuses and systems across the Bay Area; and

WHEREAS, the work and discoveries of universities within this network have given rise to globally significant advancements that have launched and contributed greatly to entire industries and fields of study; and

WHEREAS, the federal attack on universities and colleges undermines job creation, innovation, the economy, and lifesaving discoveries by causing political considerations, rather than scientific or academic merit, to drive decisions on whether to fund research projects; and

WHEREAS, the ideals and protections of Academic Freedom draw from long-standing philosophies around communities of scholarship and have been recognized in the Supreme court of the United States; and

WHEREAS, ideologically-motivated political pressure has no legitimate role in university admissions, hiring, or employment nor in the development or the content of university and college curriculum; and

WHEREAS, research grants must be awarded on the basis of scientific and professional merit and funding withdrawn only for just cause under law and consistent with due process; and

WHEREAS, diverse backgrounds and experiences enrich and strengthen academic environments by revealing new horizons and cultivating new discoveries and peaceful relations among individuals with different viewpoints; and

WHEREAS, the City of San José has, over decades, been home to global leaders across private, public, academic, and artistic fields; and

WHEREAS, these leaders were often immigrants drawn by universities and colleges, who found, in City of San José and the wider Santa Clara County, an environment where human genius and diversity of perspective are celebrated and nurtured; and

WHEREAS, free speech, peaceful protest, and privacy are to be respected, and diverse viewpoints must be permitted to be peacefully shared in the public spaces of colleges and universities; and

WHEREAS, accusations made against universities and colleges, followed abruptly by discontinued grants, requirements for curriculum changes or demands for settlement funds to enable the continued conduct of routine and lawful activities, when made without due process or basis in fact or law, are incompatible with the principle of equal justice under the law; and

WHEREAS, universities targeted with these demands include, among others, San José State University, the University of California, Brown University, Columbia University, Cornell University, Dartmouth College, Duke University, Emory University, George Washington University, Harvard University, Johns Hopkins University, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, New York University, Northwestern University, Princeton University, University of Arizona, University of Michigan, University of Minnesota, and the University of Pennsylvania, and the demands made of these universities are incompatible with the principles of equal justice under the law, notwithstanding any agreement to settle the allegations against them

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the City of San José recognizes the contributions to cultural diversity, economic vibrancy, and public welfare by those who study within, teach, administer, and otherwise support the colleges and universities of the United States of America; and be it further

RESOLVED that the City of San José declares its commitment to opposing the coercion of colleges and universities to force any political agenda upon an institution of higher education.