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Project 2025 and Its Potential Impact on Higher Education

Project 2025 dedicates an entire chapter on its plans for “conservative” education, with 44 of the 922 pages of its *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise* outlining extreme changes to K-12 and higher education. Lindsey Burke of the Heritage Foundation’s education policy department is listed as the chapter’s author. The radical changes it proposes would reverse decades of civil rights protections and widen the access gap, making college education more inequitable and unaffordable. This extremist policy proposal is being used as a blueprint for undermining higher education’s role as a bulwark of democracy. If enacted, Project 2025 will erode academic freedom and institutional autonomy by an overreach of governmental intrusion into program and curriculum; eradicate diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging initiatives while permitting attacks on civil rights for all current protected classes; and diminish academic workers’ rights and union protections. A few of Project 2025’s proposed plans for higher education are highlighted below.

1. Ban public employee labor unions (pages 599-605):

- Allow loopholes for employers to eliminate public employee unions in the middle of a contract.
- Allow states to ban labor unions.
- Allow the elimination of overtime protections and ignoring the federal minimum wage.
- Allow employers to retaliate against union organizers.
- See the AFL-CIO’s website for in-depth insight into Project 2025’s plan for labor unions, at www.betterinaunion.org/project-2025.

2. Eliminate the Department of Education (pages 327, 360-361):

- Eliminate several offices housed in the department or move them to another government agency.
- Transfer the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education to the Department of Labor and the Tribally Controlled Postsecondary Career and Technical Institutions Program to the Bureau of Indian Education.
- Eliminate or move the Office of Postsecondary Education to the Department of Labor.
- Reduce and block grant funding to historically Black colleges and universities and tribal colleges and universities.
- Eliminate GEAR UP and 21st Century Community Learning Centers grant programs.

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PRESIDENT

Fedrick C. Ingram
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Evelyn DeJesus
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

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- Move the National Center for Education Statistics to the Census Bureau.
3. Impose federal oversight of higher education accreditation bodies and processes (pages 351-352):
 - Urge Congress to prohibit accreditors from requiring institutional DEI policy to be a condition of accreditation.
 - Eliminate the connection between financial aid eligibility and accreditation.
 - Establish new accreditors that are loyal to the administration.
 4. Transfer federal student loans to the Treasury Department and eliminate student loan forgiveness programs (pages 327, 337-340, 353-355):
 - Eliminate income-driven payment programs for borrowers with lower incomes, including the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.
 - Eliminate PLUS loans for parents and students.
 - Remove guardrails that protect students against predatory schools and loans that result in excessive student loan debt.
 5. Eliminate DEI and affirmative action and reverse federal civil rights protections for underrepresented and LGBTQIA+ students, and halt Title IX investigations (pages 330-334, 352-357):
 - Move the Office for Civil Rights to the Department of Justice, preferring civil rights enforcement to be done through litigation in the federal courts.
 - Under the DOJ, the Civil Rights Division would “prosecute all state and local governments, institutions of higher education, corporations, and any other private employers” that have DEI or affirmative action programs.
 - Rescind the Biden administration’s Title IX regulations with protections for LGBTQIA+ students, especially those identifying as nonbinary.
 - Eliminate federal funding for international education (Title VI of the Higher Education Act of 1965) and create barriers to recruiting and retaining international students and faculty.
 - Prohibit accreditation agencies from using what the authors view as their “gatekeeper” role under Title VI to encourage DEI in higher education, as it is tied to a university’s accreditation regarding access and equity.
 - Programs under Title VI include foreign language and international studies and the Fulbright-Hays Program, which all receive federal funding.
 - Eliminate the lowest qualifying wage levels for H-1B workers, restricting and changing the H-1B visa process for international students and faculty, which could drastically reduce the international student and faculty populations, both of which are largely in STEM-related fields (National Science Foundation, 2024).

- Allocate a 40 percent funding increase to international business programs that require institutions, faculty, and fellows to certify how their programs' goals benefit American interests.
6. Impose changes to scientific organizations that would affect research and innovation, threatening global competitiveness (pages 133-136, 462):
- Require “any research conducted with taxpayer dollars serves the national interest in a concrete way aligned with conservative principles” (page 686).
 - Eliminate federal workers across agencies, including career scientists at the National Institutes of Health, the Environmental Protection Agency and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.
 - Require oversight of federal funding for scientific research, including reducing funding for climate-based research.
7. Devalue higher education credentials and student rights (page 357-358):
- Call for a presidential executive order eliminating bachelor’s degrees as a requirement for a federal job unless “the requirements of the job specifically demand it.”

Sources

Bethany Smith et al., “Graduate Enrollment in Science, Engineering, and Health Continues to Increase among Foreign Nationals, while Postdoctoral Appointment Trends Vary across Fields” (National Science Foundation, 2024), <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf24320>.

Lindsey M. Burke, “Department of Education,” in *Mandate for Leadership: The Conservative Promise*, ed. Paul Dans and Steven Groves (The Heritage Foundation/Project 2025, 2023), 319-362, <https://www.insidehighered.com/sites/default/files/2024-07/Project%202025%20Education%20Department.pdf>.