



SAINT AUGUSTINE'S
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Board of Trustees

Dr. David Barker
Assistant Secretary for Postsecondary Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Dr. Barker,

On behalf of Saint Augustine's University, we write to express our desire to participate in and help shape the **Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education**. As one of the nation's oldest Historically Black Colleges and Universities, with a 158-year legacy of expanding educational opportunity and transforming lives, we support the Compact's broad goal of strengthening academic excellence, accountability, and transparency across American higher education.

Saint Augustine's University is committed to academic rigor, student success, and institutional integrity. Our historic mission—grounded in the founding purpose of HBCUs to provide access, equity, and opportunity for Black students and other underrepresented populations—has guided generations of leaders, innovators, and public servants educated on our campus. We see alignment between this mission and the Compact's aspirations for excellence and accountability.

At the same time, we must respectfully and candidly acknowledge that **several provisions of the current Compact draft are not compatible with the statutory mission and federal mandate under which HBCUs operate**. Because our mission is not ornamental but foundational, **we cannot implement requirements that would directly conflict with our identity as a Historically Black University or undermine our ability to serve the populations for whom we were created**.

For example, the Compact's current restrictions on the use of race, ethnicity, or related indicators in admissions or financial support—while well intentioned—conflict with Title III of the Higher Education Act and with the explicit purpose of HBCUs to expand access for Black students and historically marginalized communities. As noted in our institutional analysis, such provisions would unintentionally force HBCUs to choose between compliance and survival, a position that is neither feasible nor consistent with congressional intent.

Similarly, provisions related to gender definitions, tuition freeze mandates, and international enrollment caps raise operational challenges for HBCUs that maintain smaller endowments, global partnerships across the African diaspora, and inclusive campus policies shaped by both community needs and regulatory frameworks. Without mission-sensitive accommodations, these sections risk unintended consequences that would impede our ability to serve students effectively.



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Despite these concerns, Saint Augustine's University **remains eager to participate as a constructive partner and early-engagement institution.** Our recent strategic framework outlines significant opportunities for national leadership, including scalable new pathways to academic access—such as the Reentry Institute, which can immediately enroll 2,000–5,000 justice-impacted learners and generate sustainable revenue for reinvestment in academic quality. This work embodies the spirit of innovation, excellence, and accountability that the Compact seeks to promote across higher education.

We believe that with thoughtful collaboration, the Department and participating institutions can refine the Compact to ensure that its implementation is rigorous, mission-aligned, and inclusive of the Nation's diverse higher education landscape. Saint Augustine's University respectfully requests a dialogue process that allows HBCUs to contribute expertise, articulate mission-specific constraints, and help shape the final framework in ways that uphold both the letter and spirit of the Compact while safeguarding our statutory purpose.

We look forward to working closely with your office to advance a version of the Compact that strengthens American higher education, honors the unique role of HBCUs, and expands pathways to opportunity for all students. Saint Augustine's University would be honored to participate fully in this important national initiative—**with the understanding that we cannot adopt provisions that contradict the mission that Congress itself has charged us to uphold.**

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to help shape a transformative moment for higher education nationwide.

Respectfully,

Verjanis Peoples, Ph.D.

Verjanis A. Peoples

Interim President
Saint Augustine's University

Sophie Gibson

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