

November 10, 2025

President J. Larry Jameson  
Office of the President  
1 College Hall, Room 100  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Dear President Jameson,

I graduated from Penn in 1984 with B.A. and M.A. degrees in English. I have always valued the excellent education I experienced at Penn. My father, who immigrated from India and earned his Ph.D. in electrical engineering at the University, felt the same way.

I've never written to anyone at Penn before. I'm doing so now because I'm alarmed at how our current federal government is trying to take control of higher education in our country. I've started to pay more attention to my alma mater because I dearly want to see Penn preserve its independence, integrity, and freedom of inquiry and expression in the face of threats and attempted extortion by our President and his agents.

I was heartened to read that Penn has rejected the Trump administration's "invitation" to sign on to the "Compact for Academic Excellence in Higher Education" in exchange for vague promises of federal funding unavailable to non-signatory institutions. The government has no business dictating which academic departments are allowed to exist, who is hired to teach, how many international students a university can admit, and so on. Thank you for rejecting this unacceptable relationship with the federal government.

You and other university presidents are clearly in a tough place, and I appreciate that you are doing your best to preserve Penn's integrity in the face of attempted authoritarian takeover, while also preserving important research contracts and federal student aid. I understand that Penn has many types of stakeholders – trustees, donors, students, faculty, alumni – and their priorities will naturally differ.

Nonetheless, I wish you had held firm against earlier government demands, even at the risk of losing some funding. I was particularly shocked when Penn agreed to retroactively strip Lia Thomas of her swim victories and apologize to other swimmers for having allowed her to compete against them. The issue, as I see it, is not whether a trans-female athlete has an unfair advantage over cisgender women athletes – that's a question

that reasonable people can research and debate – but rather Penn’s acquiescence to demands that were patently ridiculous: for the athletic contests in question, Penn had conformed to Title IX and NCAA rules in force at the time. Who on earth apologizes in such a scenario, or rewrites history by pretending the rules and race results were different? If the speed limit on a highway is lowered from 60 to 50 miles per hour today, no one can be punished for having driven 60 yesterday, nor is anyone expected to apologize for having done so. Yet faced with threats and extortionary demands from the Trump administration, Penn agreed to equally absurd actions.

Such compliance only invites further depredations by our government. I want to see my alma mater lead by example and be willing to take risks to push back against raw authoritarian power and lawlessness – as Penn and several other elite universities have done by rejecting the “Compact.” Please know that I and many other alumni are behind you in this. And we have faith that Penn can survive, thrive, and make an invaluable contribution to our nation by standing strong.

Sincerely,

Shobhana Kanal  
CAS '84, GAS '84