



Trump Education Department Drops Biden's Record Fine Against GCU

Grand Canyon University (GCU) [announced](#) Friday that President Donald Trump's Department of Education (ED) has rescinded the record \$38 million fine the Biden administration levied against it.

Heavy Levy

In 2023, President Joe Biden's ED slapped a [\\$37.7 million fine](#) on the nation's largest private Christian university, accusing it of deceiving doctoral students about the cost of their degrees.

Now, thanks to a change in administrations, GCU is finally free of that threat. According to the school's press release:



GrandCanyonU/Wikimedia Commons

In a Joint Stipulation of Dismissal order issued by ED's Office of Hearings and Appeals, the Department dismissed the case with no findings, fines, liabilities or penalties of any kind. ED confirmed it has not established that GCU violated any Title IV requirements, including the claim that GCU "substantially misrepresented" the cost of its doctoral programs that was alleged by ED officials under the Biden Administration. The Dismissal stated unequivocally that "there are no findings against GCU, or any of its employees, officers, agents, or contractors, and no fine is imposed."

The ED dismissed the case with prejudice, so it cannot be refiled.

ED spokeswoman Ellen Keast told the [Daily Caller](#):

Unlike the previous Administration, we will not persecute and prosecute colleges and universities based on their religious affiliation. The Trump Administration will continue to ensure every institution of higher education is held accountable based on facts — but Department enforcement will be for the purpose of serving students, not political bias.

Complex Persecution

The American Principles Project (APP), a Virginia-based conservative advocacy organization, charged in an April [letter](#) to congressional leaders that the Biden administration had

weaponized the Department of Education against Christian colleges and universities through the Office of Enforcement. Nearly 70 percent of the Department's enforcement actions have involved faith-based and career schools, despite those schools representing less than 10 percent of students nationwide.



Written by [Michael Tennant](#) on May 20, 2025

The ED's threatened fine against GCU and its [\\$14 million fine against Liberty University](#) "total more than all other penalties assessed by the Department of Education over the past seven years," wrote APP President Terry Schilling.

There can be little doubt that the Biden ED had it in for GCU. In 2018, the school reverted from a for-profit institution to a nonprofit, which it had been for most of its then-69-year existence. [The New American](#) reported:

Every agency involved granted GCU permission: the Internal Revenue Service (IRS), the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the State of Arizona, the Arizona Private Postsecondary Board, and the NCAA. Every agency, that its [sic], except the Department of Education.

The One That Got Away

GCU took the ED to court, whereupon the administration began what the school [termed](#) a "fishing expedition" to find some way to "get" GCU. It sicced multiple federal agencies on the university and demanded "voluminous amounts of information and records about our operations," wrote GCU.

According to [The New American](#):

After spending thousands of hours and millions of taxpayer dollars on that expedition, the agency found that a few doctorate students paid more than advertised in order to get their degrees.

In an attempt to help those students estimate those costs, the school developed a cost-estimation program for them to use. The problem is that a doctorate degree is not a cut-and-paste program with fixed courses involving so many credit hours. Each course is custom designed for the student to complete his degree.

Estimates, according to college materials made available to incoming students into the doctoral program, ranged from \$40,000 to \$50,000. Some students invested more than that in order to get their degrees.

That was the "gotcha!" that ED was looking for.

On the basis of that flimsy allegation, which had already been [rejected](#) by two federal courts in another case, the ED ordered GCU to pay what then-Education Secretary Miguel Cardona bragged was the department's "largest fine in history."

As of now, that fine itself is history.

Said GCU President Brian Mueller:

The facts clearly support our contention that we were wrongly accused of misleading our Doctoral students and we appreciate the recognition that those accusations were without merit. GCU is a leader in innovation, transparency and best practices in higher education and we look forward to working cooperatively with the Department in the future — just as we have with all regulatory agencies.



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Will the Persecution Rest?

GCU isn't out of the woods yet, however. Although the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in November that the ED had acted unlawfully in refusing to accept GCU's nonprofit status — a decision that should have immediately ended its pursuit of the fine — the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) hasn't given up trying to nail the university. It filed two lawsuits with similar charges of false cost estimates, one against GCU and another against Grand Canyon Education, a GCU service provider. A district court dismissed the case against GCU in March, declaring the nonprofit school outside the FTC's jurisdiction. The case against Grand Canyon Education remains pending.

While it is gratifying to see the Trump administration reversing Biden's policy of persecuting Christian institutions, more must be done to ensure that it is never revived. In his letter to Congress, APP's Schilling asked lawmakers to investigate the policy. "Those who actively pursued this anti-Christian agenda must be held accountable," he wrote.

"The reaction from lawmakers," he contended, "must be made perfectly clear so that we can ensure our schools are protected from attacks on religious freedom in the future."



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