

FOREIGN INTERFERENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE NEED FOR A FEDERAL GOVERNMENT INVESTIGATION

Cornell University's recent disclosures of over \$1 billion in additional Qatari funding reveal specific faculty restrictions backdated to 2020 and a 2025 "Knowledge Transfer Partnership" agreement designed to support Qatar's national interests

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For further information contact:

Institute for the Study of Global Antisemitism and Policy

info@isgap.org

www.isgap.org

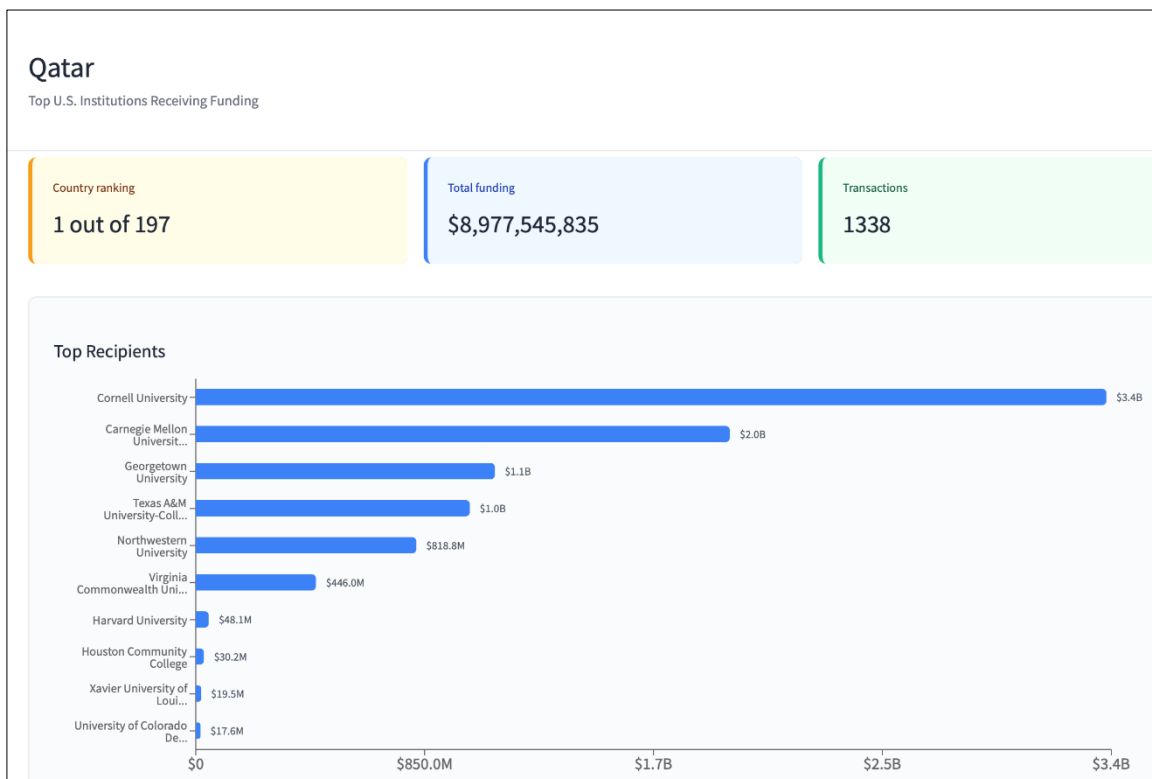
Foreign Interference In Higher Education and the Need for a Federal Government Investigation

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In early July 2026, the United States Department of Education’s foreign funding dashboard released new data from Cornell University tied to its February 2, 2026 submission, with Cornell disclosing a restricted contract involving an additional \$1.08 billion funding stream from Qatar. This, in combination with additional Qatari funding revealed by Cornell as part of its July 31, 2026 disclosures, represents a 47.3 percent increase over the baseline data on Qatari funding of Cornell when the Department of Education opened its dashboard in January 2026, bringing the cumulative total of disclosed Qatari funding of Cornell from \$2,295,657,152 reported as of December 2025 to \$3,381,883,836 as of the date of this report’s publication.^{1,2}

Figure 1: Section 117 Foreign Gift and Contract Public Transparency Dashboard



As shown in Figure 1, this newly disclosed funding places Cornell \$1.4 billion ahead of Qatar’s next-largest university recipient. Even this latest data does not represent the full extent of Qatari funding to Cornell. Cornell’s disclosures, rather than aligning contemporaneously with the associated reporting period, have produced information on gifts and contracts known to Cornell in prior reporting periods. For example, although Cornell received \$1.2 million in two Qatari gifts in December 2025—a month after a federal settlement that closed pending federal civil rights investigations³—it chose not to disclose those gifts as part of its January 31, 2026 submissions, waiting instead another six months before finally revealing those gifts as part of its July 31, 2026 submission.⁴ This invariably casts doubt on the reliability and completeness of its disclosures in any given reporting cycle, and the overall integrity of the reporting process. Cornell has also omitted material historic funding, as its reports to the Department of Education of the approximate \$156 million per year from Qatar since 2012 that concerns Cornell’s medical campus in Qatar,

Weill Cornell Medicine-Qatar (WCM-Q), do not capture the previous decade's worth of data correlating to Cornell's announcement in 2001 that Qatar Foundation had committed \$750 million to establish WCM-Q.⁵

On the surface, the disclosure of the restricted contract appears to be an extension for WCM-Q, with the \$1.08 billion an estimate of projected receipts for the next six years. Cornell's description of the restricted contract states:

Establish and support WCM/Q. In some circumstances admission preference may be given to Qatar citizens. Amount reported represents a reasonable estimate of the balance of the award for the period January 1, 2026 through June 30, 2032.⁶

The magnitude of the award and the seemingly candid forecast concerning the Qatar campus distracts from two highly concerning details. First, while Cornell described the award amount as pertaining to the six-year period beginning January 1, 2026, the disclosure otherwise lists the contract's start date as October 27, 2020. This is peculiar given that the date does not align with any of the previously disclosed WCM-Q contract cycle start dates of July 1 in 2020 and 2021, subsequently moving to a January 1 start date each consecutive year beginning in 2022.

Second, when comparing the WCM-Q-specific disclosures to each other, there is a clear distinction between prior disclosures to the Department of Education and the most recent one. Contract extension or not, the newly disclosed data reveals, *for the first time*, the presence of faculty restrictions that, according to Department of Education records, extend back to 2020. Such restrictions include conditions on the employment or termination of faculty, or conditions on how or where faculty are assigned.⁷

Figure 2: Cornell's Section 117 disclosures, sorted for contracts for the support of WCM-Q since 2020

Section 117 of the Higher Education Act - Public Records														
Foreign Funding Disclosure Reports														
Data Sources: Foreign Gifts and Contracts Reporting System (new data) and Postsecondary Education Participants (legacy Data)														
Date Range: All public records (through 2/23/2026)														
Transactions are sorted in ascending order by School Name, Transaction Type, Attribution Country, and then in descending order by Amount.														
OPEID	School Name	Transaction Type	Direct Transaction	Indirect Transaction (Intermediary Involved)	Attribution Country	Amount	Contract Start Date	Contract End Date	Restricted Transaction Description	Faculty Restriction (117(h)(5)(A))	Infrastructure Restriction (117(h)(5)(B))	Admissions Restriction (117(h)(5)(C))	Legacy Data	Disclosure Report Submission Date
00271100	Cornell Univ	Restricted Contract	Yes	No	QATAR	\$ 1,079,963,287	2020-10-27	2032-06-30	Establish and support WCM/Q. In some circumstances admission preference may be given to Qatar citizens. Amount reported represents a reasonable estimate of the balance of the award for the period January 1, 2026 through June 30, 2032.	Yes		No	No	2/2/26
00271100	Cornell Univ	Restricted Contract	Yes	No	QATAR	\$ 163,575,804	1/1/25	12/31/25	Establish and support WCM/Q. In some circumstances admission preference may be given to Qatar citizens.	No	Yes	Yes	No	1/28/25
00271100	Cornell Univ	Restricted Contract	Yes	No	QATAR	\$ 159,772,293	1/1/24	12/31/24	Establish and support WCM/Q. In some circumstances admission preference may be given to Qatar citizens.	No	Yes	Yes	No	1/29/24
00271100	Cornell Univ	Restricted Contract			QATAR	\$ 154,974,110	1/1/23	12/31/23	Establish and support WCM/Q. In some circumstances admission preference may be given to Qatar citizens.	No	Yes	Yes	No	1/31/23
00271100	Cornell Univ	Restricted Contract			QATAR	\$ 148,864,293	1/1/22	12/31/22	Establish and support WCM/Q. In some circumstances admission preference may be given to Qatar citizens.	No	Yes	Yes	No	1/27/22
00271100	Cornell Univ	Restricted Contract			QATAR	\$ 137,255,000	7/1/21	6/30/22	Establish and support WCM/Q. In some circumstances admission preference may be given to Qatar citizens.	No	Yes	Yes	No	7/29/21
00271100	Cornell Univ	Restricted Contract			QATAR	\$ 151,000,000	7/1/20	6/30/21	Annual budget for the establishment and operation of Weill Cornell Medicine/Qatar. Under some circumstances admission preference to the programs at the Qatar site may be given to Qatar citizens.	No	Yes	Yes	No	7/28/20

As Figure 2 indicates, the February 2, 2026 submission, as recently updated by Cornell, was the only time that Cornell reported a contract concerning its WCM-Q campus that also indicates the presence of faculty restrictions.⁸

These are astounding revelations. While the disclosures suggest that the funding itself is tied to the operation of WCM-Q in Qatar, there is nothing to suggest that the faculty restrictions existed only in Qatar and not within Cornell's US campus in Ithaca, New York. Indeed, exactly this kind of restriction has already been revealed at another university that similarly benefits from Qatari largesse and operates a Qatar branch campus. In an ongoing Title VI civil rights lawsuit involving a Jewish student's allegations of intentional discrimination and harassment by Carnegie Mellon's faculty and administration, a federal judge in Pennsylvania ruled on the plaintiff's motion to compel additional discovery, with the unsealed opinion reflecting multiple restrictions that two contracts previously produced in discovery imposed on Carnegie Mellon faculty.⁹ These included Carnegie Mellon's contract with the Qatar Foundation for the capital costs and operational expenses of its Qatar campus (CMU-Q), which, as the court's opinion reflected, implemented various requirements, including: required consultation with the Qatar Foundation during the candidate identification, review and selection process for CMU-Q's dean and associate deans; the establishment of a Joint Advisory Board for the management of CMU-Q that included Qatar Foundation representatives; and required consultation with the Qatar Foundation on the addition, elimination, or modification of course offerings.¹⁰ It also included Carnegie Mellon's cooperation contract with the Qatar Investment Authority (QIA), Qatar's sovereign wealth fund, under which QIA funded CMU-Q faculty members to support their research efforts and funded CMU-Q for educational programs, so long as those efforts were aligned to Qatar's national strategy and vision.¹¹ That contract injected QIA's "input" and "subject matter experts" into CMU-Q content, even giving QIA decision-making authority over "appropriate" guest lecturers requested by CMU-Q.¹² In ruling on the plaintiff's motion to compel, the court's opinion recognized that Carnegie Mellon's Vice Provost for DEI and Title IX coordinator—whose salary Carnegie Mellon conceded was partially funded by Qatari interests, and who dually served Carnegie Mellon's main campus as well as its Qatari branch campus—was the same official that the plaintiff alleged was responsible for enforcing the university's anti-discrimination policies, and aggressively discouraged her from filing a formal discrimination complaint.¹³ While Carnegie Mellon's Section 117 disclosures, according to the Department of Education's data, still do not reference a single restriction whatsoever in the university's contracts with Qatar,¹⁴ the federal judge's particular findings cannot be ignored.

There is no reason to think that the hiring and appointment restrictions that bound the second largest university recipient of Qatari funds were not also present one state away at Cornell, given Cornell's recent disclosure and the similar patterns of Qatari funding at these universities. Even if the faculty restrictions noted in the Cornell disclosure were theoretically contained to WCM-Q in Qatar, the newly revealed existence of these restrictions once again exposes the utter falsity of Qatar's repeated claims of academic independence of these branch campuses, insisting to the US Department of Justice, for example, that each one "operates independently, maintaining academic freedom; curriculum, admissions, faculty appointments, and educational content are unaffected by funding, both in Qatar and the United States."¹⁵

The backdating of the disclosure and timing of this submission to the Department of Education should also raise serious inquiry, as they suggest concerted gamesmanship rather than good-faith performance of Cornell's disclosure obligations under federal law. Exactly one week before the October 27, 2020 start date of the restricted contract indicated by the Department of Education's records as reflected on its foreign funding dashboard, the Department of Education published on October 20, 2020 its findings on its 2019 investigation into what it described as Cornell's and other universities' "systematically underinclusive and inaccurate reporting" of foreign funding under Section 117.¹⁶ Cornell had specifically been directed by the Department of Education in 2019 to produce documents related to Qatari and Chinese foreign gifts and contracts.¹⁷ On October 21, 2020, the day after the release of the Department of Education's report, Cornell released a statement explaining its failure before 2019 to report on the funding of WCM-Q, stating that the university had fully corrected its omissions and implemented substantial changes to enhance compliance and oversight.¹⁸ That statement was a mere six days before the October 27, 2020 start date of the contractually rendered faculty restrictions finally disclosed in the February 2026 submission by Cornell.

It strains credulity that Cornell did not know at the time of its 2020 public statement about a pending new contract or a change to an existing contract that would impose a faculty restriction that it was obliged to disclose. Yet Cornell waited until February 2026—for over five years after it publicized its allegedly corrected compliance status, and for months *after* its November 2025 federal settlement that closed pending federal civil rights investigations¹⁹—to reveal restrictions that should have been disclosed in 2020, when the Department of Education made clear that failure to make timely Section 117 disclosures or the making of retroactive "catch-up" disclosures are inadequate and violative of Section 117.²⁰ It seems particularly telling that on June 26, 2026, when Cornell's president rejected a student assembly measure seeking to have the university reassess its relationship with Qatar,²¹ he did not use the explanation he gave in a 2025 interview, when he previously stated, "The most important thing is this narrative that somehow Qatari funding coming to the university affects the university's decisions or faculty courses could not be further from the truth."²²

Cornell's most recent July 31, 2026 disclosures are just as troubling, revealing the delayed disclosure of an additional contract that potentially implicates the national security concerns that underlie the very purpose of Section 117's disclosure requirements. The Department of Education recognized that the requirement of timely and detailed disclosures is essential because universities have solicited foreign funding sources without effective controls to manage and mitigate risk, despite being on direct notice that at least some foreign sources are hostile to the United States and target their investments to project soft power, steal sensitive and proprietary research, and spread propaganda.²³ In February 2025, the US House of Representatives' Committee on Oversight and Government Reform reaffirmed that these disclosures "remain indispensable because adversarial governments and their instrumentalities have targeted the higher education sector for exploitation to infiltrate cutting-edge American research projects [and] influence curricula."²⁴ The newly disclosed data reveals that merely one month after the Committee's statement, Cornell entered into a four-year contract in March 2025 with the Qatar Foundation, receiving

\$116,321 in funds “to support the Knowledge Transfer Partnership Fund Management Agreement.” Such “KTP” agreements are vehicles designed to serve Qatar’s national strategy, distributing government grants to embed Qatari companies within a partner institution, leveraging the partner’s institutional expertise and research to “strengthen the research and innovation ecosystem in Qatar.”²⁵ The intellectual property policy governing such KTP agreements states that intellectual property yielded by these grants will be made available to Qatari state institutions, accomplished through the assignment of an irrevocable and sub-licensable license to the Qatar Research Development and Innovation (QRDI) Council, which facilitates Qatar’s KTP program.²⁶ Although little information is publicly known about Cornell’s particular KTP agreement, the structure of these agreements indicates a glaring need to understand critical details about the nature and scope of the research and data that appear to be implicated by this agreement, whether Cornell’s participation was a condition of any of its other agreements, grants, or gifts, and why Cornell waited 16 months before disclosing it.

Cornell’s glaring omission from timely and fully disclosing the restricted nature of its contracts in earlier submissions only highlights that the current disclosure structure is inadequate, as lucrative investments from countries like Qatar quite apparently outweigh the risk to universities of even knowing disclosure gaps. The US government’s capacity to fortify our national security is particularly undermined when our universities show how readily they abandon their roles as the gatekeepers of institutional integrity.

ISGAP calls for an investigation into the nature and scope of both the faculty restrictions and the “knowledge transfer” that stem from Cornell’s relationship with Qatar. It is clear that the priorities of universities like Cornell have led it to stray far from the national security concerns that anchor Section 117, such that additional measures are needed to both ensure timely transparency and assign a significant cost for failing to comply and specifically for withholding information. This investigation is long overdue; despite Cornell’s assertions since 2020 that it has been in compliance with Section 117, ISGAP’s 2024 report documented significant omissions in Cornell’s disclosures.²⁷

ISGAP additionally suggests the following policy recommendations:

- **Stakeholder support for passage of the DETERRENT Act and robust enforcement of Section 117 of the Higher Education Act.** This includes lowering the reporting threshold and the reporting of gifts to individual faculty and staff members in research-intensive institutions. Moreover, Title IV federal aid eligibility must be conditioned on full, good-faith Section 117 compliance.
- **Comprehensive disclosure of all agreements with foreign entities.** The US Department of Education should require universities to disclose all agreements with foreign governments or foreign entities (including appendices, modifications, and updates to such agreements), with retroactive disclosure from 2005 to the present.
- **Require public reporting of all funding arising from foreign agreements.** The US Department of Education should require universities to disclose all funding resulting

from agreements with foreign entities, including: direct institutional funding; indirect funding to faculty; in-kind contributions; tuition, living expenses, and stipends for students funded by foreign entities; research funding arrangements (including disclosure of intellectual property ownership); faculty endowments and sponsorships; and funding of schools, centers, or area studies programs.

- **Enforce transparency and oversight of funding to student associations.** The US Department of Education should require universities to report all financial support to student associations on all campuses (in Qatar and the United States); file full annual reports detailing expenditures by these associations; and disclose all use of university facilities by such groups.
- **Strategic reassessment of Cornell's presence in Qatar.** Following the precedent set by Texas A&M University's 2024 decision to exit Education City in Doha, Cornell should conduct an independent review of its Qatar operations, assess compliance with academic freedom, institutional values and US national interests, and plan for a phased withdrawal to preserve the university's integrity and global standing.

NOTES

- ¹ Section 117 Foreign Gift and Contract Public Transparency Dashboard, available at <https://www.foreignfundinghighered.gov/>; Section 117 Data Downloads, available at <https://www.foreignfundinghighered.gov/downloads>.
- ² As ISGAP has previously reported, billions of dollars more in unreported Qatari funding benefit Cornell through Sidra Medical and Research Center, which is both physically and institutionally linked to WCM-Q as a primary physician training hospital and research center, key to WCM-Q's operations. The center was established with a Qatar Foundation endowment of \$7.9 billion. *Cornell University's Ten Billion Dollar Sale: Soft Power, Qatar, the Muslim Brotherhood, and an Antisemitism Crisis on Campus* (ISGAP 2024), https://isgap.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Cornell_Ten_Billion_Dollar.pdf; see also "Her Highness Sheikha Moza Announces New Name and Logo for Premier Medical and Research Center at Education City," WCM-Q, <https://qatar-weill.cornell.edu/news-archive/Reports/2007/SidraMedical.html>.
- ³ "The United States Announces Agreement with Cornell University," *US Department of Justice Office of Public Affairs*, November 7, 2025, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/united-states-announces-agreement-cornell-university>; Agreement Between the United States of America and Cornell University, available at <https://statements.cornell.edu/2025/documents/cornell-settlement-agreement.pdf>.
- ⁴ Section 117 Data Downloads, available at <https://www.foreignfundinghighered.gov/downloads>.
- ⁵ Zeinab Faraj, "In Data: Cornell Receives Second Most Funds from Foreign Nations at over \$3 Billion," *Cornell Daily Sun*, January 31, 2026, <https://www.cornellsun.com/article/2026/01/in-data-cornell-receives-second-most-funds-from-foreign-nations-at-over-3-billion> ("Budgeted funding for the medical school in Qatar has averaged approximately \$156 million per year from 2012 to 2025, totaling \$2.2 billion"); Henrik N. Dullea, "Cornell University to Establish Medical School in Qatar," *Cornell Chronicle*, April 9, 2001, available at <https://web.archive.org/web/20190628153859/https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2001/04/cornell-university-establish-medical-school-qatar>.
- ⁶ Section 117 Data Downloads, available at <https://www.foreignfundinghighered.gov/downloads>.
- ⁷ Higher Education Act of 1965, 20 USC § 1011f(h)(5)(A).
- ⁸ Section 117 Data Downloads, available at <https://www.foreignfundinghighered.gov/downloads>.
- ⁹ Memorandum Opinion, *Canaan v. Carnegie Mellon University*, No. 2:23-cv-02107-WSH (W.D. Pa. 2025), available at https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCOURTS-pawd-2_23-cv-02107/pdf/USCOURTS-pawd-2_23-cv-02107-3.pdf.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.; Kenneth L. Marcus, "Does Qatar Fund Antisemitism at American Campuses?," *Wall Street Journal*, January 28, 2026, <https://www.wsj.com/opinion/does-qatar-fund-antisemitism-at-american-campuses-2218c9fe>. Notwithstanding the federal judge's finding about Carnegie Mellon's contractual obligation to Qatar on hiring, US Department of Education data indicates that Carnegie Mellon has not flagged a single restriction in its Section 117 disclosures. Section 117 Data Downloads, available at <https://www.foreignfundinghighered.gov/downloads>.
- ¹⁴ Section 117 Data Downloads, available at <https://www.foreignfundinghighered.gov/downloads>.
- ¹⁵ "The State of Qatar," briefing pack, US Department of Justice, June 5, 2024, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/5931-Informational-Materials-20240605-20.pdf>; "US-Qatar Bilateral Relations," US Department of Justice, June 30, 2025, <https://efile.fara.gov/docs/7271-Informational-Materials-20250630-1.pdf>.
- ¹⁶ Elizabeth Redden, "Colleges Under Fire for Foreign Gift Reporting," *Inside Higher Ed*, October 20, 2020, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/10/21/education-department-issues->

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- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Letter from the US House of Representatives Committee on Oversight and Government Reform to Denise Carter, Acting Secretary of the US Department of Education, February 19, 2025, <https://oversight.house.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Department-of-Education-re-Section-117-02192558.pdf>.
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- 26 “Qatar Research Development and Innovation Council Intellectual Property Policy,” QRDI Council, available at <https://a.storyblok.com/f/309294/x/b26adbf041/qrdi-intellectual-property-policy.pdf>.
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