

## [Trump should end Biden admin's attack on Grand Canyon University](#)

**Washington Times**

**By Jon Riches**

**December 5, 2024**

The incoming Trump administration faces numerous priorities in addressing the damage to higher education left by its predecessor. Among these, confronting its predecessors' unprecedented assault on Grand Canyon University in Phoenix, one of the nation's largest and most successful private colleges, should be paramount.

In 2023, the Biden administration's Department of Education levied a \$37.7 million fine against the university, known as GCU — the largest in the department's history. The alleged transgression? GCU purportedly misled doctoral candidates by not adequately clarifying the requirement to continue coursework while writing dissertations.

The fine against GCU dwarfs penalties levied against institutions involved in actual grave misconduct. For example, Penn State was fined \$2.4 million for failing to report the crimes of Jerry Sandusky. Michigan State faced a \$4.5 million fine for its mishandling of sexual assaults committed by athletic director Larry Nassar.

Moreover, GCU categorically denies the allegations, and the department's evidentiary foundation seems exceptionally thin.

By all metrics, GCU is an American success story. Once a small institution with limited offerings, GCU now provides thriving academics in nearly every discipline, impressive athletics programs, and a palpable culture of purpose among its students and faculty. Its bustling campus sits in a once-neglected Phoenix neighborhood and is a symbol of the transformative power of higher education done right.

Unlike many public universities, which have embraced bureaucratic bloat, GCU has not raised tuition in over 15 years. More importantly, its students graduate equipped to contribute meaningfully to countless trades and professions and ready to make a difference in their communities. In this way, GCU achieves the goals that higher education is meant to accomplish.

Against this backdrop, it is difficult to view the fine against GCU as not an act of neutral adjudication but one of calculated reprisal.

Seeking answers, the Goldwater Institute, where I work, filed public records requests to uncover the rationale behind the fine. The Department of Education has withheld most requested documents, prompting us to take the matter to federal court. But what has emerged from the limited disclosures we received is unsettling.

Emails reveal coordinated messaging between the department, various federal agencies and the White House.

In one instance, a department communications official sought input from the White House regarding the public rollout of the fine. Shortly after this email was sent, the department launched an unprecedented media blitz to publicize the penalty — actions that suggest a political agenda rather than a fair and independent investigation.

Further fueling suspicion, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona vowed in congressional testimony to shut down GCU.

Why would a federal agency advancing higher education target one of the nation's most successful universities?

Part of the explanation may come from GCU's motto: "Private, Christian, Affordable." This credo reflects values starkly opposed to the prevailing model of public higher education in America, which stresses bureaucratic command and ideological conformity, resulting in ever-increasing student costs.

GCU has rejected these excesses, focusing instead on graduating students who are not only prepared and well educated but also capable citizens.

As a result, GCU's remarkable achievements expose the prevailing higher education model as inefficient and unsustainable. Perhaps this is the real reason for the Biden administration's assault on GCU: stifling an innovative institution that has disrupted the statist, ideological orthodoxy of modern higher education.

Until the Department of Education is forced to fully disclose its actions, or until a court compels transparency, the true motives behind the fine against GCU will remain hidden. The evidence, however, suggests an ideological vendetta, not a neutral enforcement action.

As the Trump administration prepares to tackle an ambitious education agenda, ending the shameful attack on GCU should be a top priority. This would not only correct the injustice done to GCU but also make clear the broader principle that higher education should be a domain of innovation and student achievement — not a fiefdom for ideological conformity and bureaucratic rule.

*Jon Riches is vice president for litigation at the Goldwater Institute.*