STETSON UNIVERSITY

November 2, 2026

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon:

As Stetson University prepares to celebrate its 150th anniversary in 2033 and our nation commemorates the 250th anniversary of the United States, we welcome this opportunity to describe who we are, what we value, and how we serve students and society. This response reflects Stetson's longstanding commitment to academic excellence, intellectual exploration, open inquiry, student success, civic engagement, and the public good.

Founded in 1883, Stetson remains grounded in the belief that higher education should prepare individuals for engaged citizenship, principled leadership, meaningful careers, and lives of significance. By responding, we reaffirm the values and purposes that have guided Stetson for nearly a century and a half.

Last year, Stetson reaffirmed these institutional values and purposes throughout our University, which includes our College of Arts and Sciences, School of Business Administration, School of Music, and College of Law. Through our *Forward Together 2030* strategic plan, we remain committed to expanding educational opportunity, advancing knowledge, and preparing students to thrive in a rapidly changing world. While colleges and universities pursue differing missions and priorities, public trust is strengthened when institutions clearly articulate their values, demonstrate accountability, and remain focused on serving students and society. Stetson's *Forward Together 2030* strategic plan can be found here: stetson.edu/other/about/strategic-priorities.php

Academic Excellence, Intellectual Vibrancy, and Open Inquiry

Academic excellence and intellectual rigor are foundational to Stetson's mission. Faculty teach students to think critically, communicate effectively, evaluate evidence, and engage complex questions. Through teaching, scholarship, creative activity, and service, faculty mentor students in an environment characterized by curiosity, mutual respect, and intellectual engagement.

Stetson embraces intellectual pluralism as an essential component of academic excellence. Students benefit when they encounter a wide range of perspectives, engage ideas different from their own, and learn to evaluate competing claims through evidence, reason, and respectful dialogue. Through our Statement of Principles of Free Expression, our Center for Dialogue and Civic Action, and our broader educational mission, we promote open inquiry, civil discourse, rigorous debate, and respectful disagreement.

The University protects freedom of inquiry, expression, and peaceful protest while maintaining policies necessary to support the educational mission of the institution and the wellbeing of the community. We believe that the free exchange of ideas, guided by professional standards, intellectual integrity, and evidence-informed inquiry, remains essential to the pursuit of truth and knowledge.

As artificial intelligence and other emerging technologies reshape higher education and society, Stetson remains committed to maintaining rigorous academic and research expectations while helping students develop the information literacy, ethical reasoning, academic integrity, and professional judgment necessary to use these tools responsibly.

Relationship-Rich Education, Student Success, and Workforce Readiness

Through our recently launched *Hatter Ready* curriculum, students participate in experiences that connect academic study with professional practice, civic engagement, and personal growth. Faculty mentoring, internships, undergraduate research, experiential learning, and personalized support create a relationship-rich educational environment that promotes enduring student success.

Our residential learning community further strengthens meaningful connections among students, faculty, and staff. By intentionally bridging theory and practice, Stetson equips students with the skills, experiences, and dispositions needed to thrive following graduation.

Through *Hatter Ready* and other experiential learning initiatives, Stetson seeks to ensure that graduates leave with the knowledge, skills, experiences, and professional preparation necessary to contribute meaningfully to their communities and to succeed in their chosen professions. Stetson graduates serve as educators, healthcare professionals, attorneys, entrepreneurs, artists, and community leaders who contribute to the vitality and prosperity of their communities, states, and the nation.

Access, Affordability, and Educational Opportunity

Making a Stetson education accessible and affordable remains a central institutional priority. Through scholarships, financial aid, philanthropy, academic support, and student success initiatives, the University works to reduce barriers and expand educational opportunity.

Admissions decisions are guided by published criteria, established policies, and a commitment to fairness, consistency, transparency, and educational excellence. We strive to ensure that prospective students and families understand both our expectations and the educational opportunities available through a Stetson education.

Forward Together 2030 calls for impactful experiential, contemporary, and integrative learning while strengthening Stetson's position as a distinctive, student-centered university. Our over 45,000 alumni strengthen communities and professions throughout Florida, across the nation, and around the world.

Responsible Stewardship, Accountability and Civic Engagement

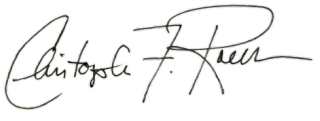
Higher education serves a vital civic function. Universities prepare citizens to engage constructively with complex issues, evaluate competing evidence and claims, participate thoughtfully in democratic institutions, and work productively across differences. In doing so, they contribute not only to economic prosperity, but also to the strength and resilience of communities and the nation.

Stetson remains committed to responsible stewardship of resources, transparency, accountability, and continuous improvement. Institutional planning aligns programs and investments with student interests, institutional strengths, long-term sustainability, and educational relevance.

The University supports research, scholarship, and creative activity conducted with integrity, transparency, and adherence to applicable legal, ethical, and regulatory standards. Through responsible governance and careful stewardship, we seek to maintain public confidence while ensuring that our educational and scholarly endeavors continue to serve students and society.

As Stetson approaches its sesquicentennial and our nation commemorates its 250th anniversary, we reaffirm our commitment to academic excellence, intellectual exploration, intellectual pluralism, open inquiry, student success, civic engagement, and the public good. These principles transcend political moments, have guided Stetson since 1883, and will continue to shape our future as we educate principled professionals, thoughtful leaders, and engaged citizens.

Respectfully submitted,



Christopher F. Roellke, Ph.D.
President and Professor of American Studies and Education



Lila Jaber, Esq., BA 88, JD 90
Chair, Board of Trustees