OFFICE OF
THE PRESIDENT

# Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University Response to the National Call to Action for Higher Education

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

Dear Secretary McMahon:

Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University is pleased to respond to your letter dated August 3, 2026, regarding the National Call to Action to University Presidents and Governing Boards. Our university welcomes the opportunity to describe how our mission, standards and results serve students, families, employers and the American people.

As the world's leading university dedicated to aviation and aerospace, Embry-Riddle has entered its second century with a defined mission: to educate professionals who advance flight, engineering, space, safety, security, business and national defense. Our focused educational model — through our Daytona Beach, FL; Prescott, AZ; and Worldwide Campuses — combines rigorous academic study, hands-on learning, applied research and close engagement with industry and government. It is designed to prepare graduates not simply for their first position, but for careers of consequence and leadership.

We share the Department's view that public confidence in higher education must be earned through academic quality, transparency, responsible stewardship and measurable results. Our admissions expectations, student costs/return on investment, educational outcomes, research safeguards and institutional commitments are publicly available and subject to regular review. We protect lawful expression and academic inquiry, evaluate students and employees according to relevant qualifications and achievement, and safeguard the integrity of our learning and research environments.

Where required and in many other cases, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University — a private, not-for-profit institution — aligns with the commitments, viewpoints, operations and guidance set forth by the State University System of Florida and the Arizona state public universities, under the leadership of the Florida Board of Governors and the Arizona Board of Regents, respectively. However, it is important to recognize that Embry-Riddle demonstrates a unique value proposition. Our university endeavors to operate to elevated expectations; measure our unique results consistently and transparently; accept accountability; and continuously improve to support our distinctive position in higher education, both in the United States and globally.

Our response below addresses each of the seven questions in the National Call to Action and identifies both established practices and areas of continued improvement. Across these commitments, Embry-Riddle will continue to publish meaningful measures, review performance regularly, address identified gaps and communicate candidly about the value and responsibilities of an Embry-Riddle education.

# 1. Transparency and Merit in Admissions

***How will admissions criteria be fully described to prospective applicants, and how will decisions reflect merit, achievement and the university's educational purpose?***

Embry-Riddle is committed to a transparent, mission-driven and merit-based admissions process that assesses applicants fairly and consistently. Our admission standards are specifically structured to assess whether prospective students are prepared for the rigorous academic, technical and — where applicable — operational safety and security expectations inherent to aviation and aerospace education. Decisions consider relevant academic preparation, demonstrated achievement, program prerequisites and the university's educational mission, consistent with university policy and applicable law.

The education provided by our university — across our residential campuses and our global Worldwide Campus — aligns with the workforce needs identified by the aviation and aerospace industry. Importantly, our mission also aligns with research and subject matter that is central to national security. This provides our institution with a unique value proposition, attracting students whose focus is singular.

Embry-Riddle regularly responds directly to needs identified by industry. For example, our institution was among the first to be approved by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to join the Enhanced Air Traffic Collegiate Training Initiative — a national program that allows eligible graduates to report directly to an FAA facility for on-the-job training, thereby addressing air traffic control workforce shortages. Additionally, our university, largely in response to input from federal legislators and agencies, has added an associate's degree in air traffic management which complements our existing bachelor's program in air traffic management and helps solve a national shortage in a critical area.

A transparent recruitment and enrollment process is vital to ensure that the students we attract are aligned with our unique vision and mission. Race, ethnicity and other demographic factors are not used in our application-review process, ensuring that all decisions are based solely on the information relevant to a candidate's qualifications.

Prospective students can access published university and program-specific recruitment materials, requirements, application procedures, deadlines and academic profiles. Embry-Riddle also provides direct advising so that students can understand not only whether they qualify for admission, but whether a program aligns with their preparation and goals. Examples of supporting materials can be accessed below:

- Admissions: General Procedures
- Admissions: Undergraduate Applicants
- Admissions: Graduate Applicants
- Admissions: International Applicants
- Program Specific Criteria
- Accreditation
- Common Data Set
- Transfer Portal

As we continue to focus on transparency and confidence, Embry-Riddle commits to the following continual actions:

- Regularly review admissions pages and catalogs to ensure criteria, prerequisites and decision processes are current and consistent across campuses and delivery modalities.
- Explain how academic preparation and other relevant measures relate to success in each program, especially where specialized technical or professional standards apply.
- Train admissions personnel to apply published criteria consistently and document exceptions or discretionary decisions through appropriate review.
- Monitor admissions and student-success outcomes to confirm that requirements remain educationally relevant and aligned with the university's mission.

## 2. Free Expression, Open Inquiry and Orderly Operations

***How will the university protect the free exchange of ideas, wide-ranging debate and open-minded campus discourse while preventing violence, harassment and disruption of teaching, research, public lectures and campus operations?***

Embry-Riddle promotes the free exchange of ideas across our campuses and protects lawful expression, assembly, academic inquiry and civil discourse. The university does not require institutional agreement with a speaker or viewpoint as a condition of expression, and we encourage our students and faculty to think critically, examine evidence, challenge competing ideas and test assumptions with the ability to disagree without fear of intimidation or retaliation.

However, freedom of expression does not include a right to threaten, intimidate or assault others; damage property; engage in harassing behavior; obstruct another person's participation or viewpoint; or prevent a class, research activity, lecture or university operation from proceeding. Our university Student Code of Conduct prohibits disorderly behavior and unauthorized disruption. Employees and students are expected to respect the rights and safety of others, while encouraging behavior that demonstrates the principles of respect, integrity, service and excellence.

The vast majority of Embry-Riddle students attend our university for the purpose of obtaining a high-value, marketable degree in aviation and aerospace, based on long-held dreams and passions. As such, Embry-Riddle encourages the expression of content that is mission-focused, while recognizing that existing social discourse and current events may influence the perspectives of our diverse student population.

When an event presents credible safety or operational concerns, Embry-Riddle has put into place requirements for appropriate security staffing, controlled access or provisions for alternative locations. These measures are intended to protect both the opportunity for expression and the community's ability to learn and work safely.

We strictly prohibit the admittance of external agitators to our campus community. Our Safety and Security team remains highly vigilant to campus events and speakers that may attract significant public attention. The team partners with local law enforcement to ensure a safe and secure environment for our students, faculty and staff.

In the interest of student self- and group-expression, Embry-Riddle encourages the use of the Spirit Rock on its residential campuses. The Spirit Rock is a campus tradition that provides students with a platform to creatively express ideas and promote school spirit within a culturally diverse community. Messages left on the Spirit Rock must be thoughtful, respectful and uplifting, adhering to Embry-Riddle's values, mission and vision with an emphasis on collaboration and teamwork. The Spirit Rock tradition offers students a way to express themselves freely, guided by appropriate protections.

Embry-Riddle will continue to:

- Communicate free-expression and conduct expectations clearly during student and employee orientation and before major campus events.
- Apply conduct rules consistently without regard to viewpoint or affiliation.
- Prepare event, safety and student-affairs personnel to distinguish protected expression from threats, unlawful harassment and material disruption.
- Provide opportunities for students to practice civil discourse, engage competing perspectives and develop the skills needed for professional and civic leadership.

# 3. Intellectual Pluralism, Faculty Excellence and Public-Serving Research

***How will academic units encourage intellectual pluralism; how will faculty hiring and evaluation support academic vitality and relevant perspectives; and how will research advance knowledge, understanding and public benefit?***

Embry-Riddle is committed to strong, independent academics that are free from ideological pressure in hiring, and the university is committed to research that serves national interests, along with the aviation and aerospace industries in the United States and globally. Embry-Riddle's academic mission is grounded in evidence, disciplinary expertise, methodological rigor, peer critique and a commitment to engaging relevant competing explanations. We foster intellectual diversity by expecting faculty and students to follow evidence, distinguish fact from opinion, consider credible alternatives and remain open to professional scrutiny and challenge.

Consistent with the requirements of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and other federal employment discrimination statutes and regulations, no factor such as sex, ethnicity, race, national origin, disability or religion shall be considered in any decision related to the appointment, advancement or reappointment of academic, administrative or support staff at any level, except as otherwise provided by Title VII or other federal employment discrimination statutes and regulations.

Faculty are recruited and evaluated on the basis of qualifications, teaching ability, scholarship, professional expertise, service and their capacity to advance Embry-Riddle's educational mission. Hiring and evaluation practices are consistent with university policy, use job-related criteria, and recognize the value of both academic and industry experience. Embry-Riddle has implemented an academic faculty review process which requires tenured faculty members to undergo a comprehensive post-tenure review every five years.

Academic programs are strengthened through faculty governance, outcomes assessment, peer review, industry advisory boards, and engagement with employers and public agencies. As a result of Embry-Riddle's strong association with the aviation and aerospace industries, the university routinely recruits and hires faculty from industry, complementing faculty — both new and tenured — from a more traditional academic environment. This ensures diversity of both experience and thinking, and allows our students a more inclusive and experiential understanding of both research and industry pertaining to aviation and aerospace.

Our research enterprise is purposefully application-focused and in alignment with convergent challenges facing aviation and aerospace. We ensure that research advances knowledge and expands understanding while maintaining strong connections to government, industry and real-world applications. This approach helps translate discovery into improvements in areas such as aviation safety, resilient aerospace systems, space technologies, autonomy and other emerging technologies. Just as importantly, we engage students directly in authentic research, preparing the next generation of scientists, engineers and other aviation and aerospace professionals. Embry-Riddle research produces returns through new knowledge, practical solutions, technological innovation, and a highly skilled aviation and aerospace workforce that addresses complex, high-priority challenges facing our nation and our world today while providing a direct pipeline of high-paying, high-value careers to our graduates.

Embry-Riddle will continue to:

- Review curricula and academic programs for rigor, relevance, coherent learning outcomes and appropriate engagement with significant perspectives in the discipline.
- Use consistent, job-related faculty hiring and evaluation criteria that emphasize excellence in teaching, scholarship, professional contribution and service.
- Invite external perspectives through advisory boards, accreditation, peer review, industry partnerships and collaboration with government agencies.

- Assess research and academic initiatives for scholarly merit, student benefit, ethical integrity, national relevance and measurable public value.

## 4. Affordable, Transparent and High-Return Degrees

***How will families access affordable, high-return degrees; how will the university contain costs and improve pricing transparency; and how will programs support completion, employment and responsible repayment of student loans?***

Embry-Riddle recognizes that the value of a degree must be judged in relation to its full cost, likelihood of completion, return on investment and the opportunities it creates. Prospective students and families deserve a realistic picture of total educational expenses, including tuition, mandatory fees, housing, food, books, transportation, personal expenses and, where applicable, flight or other program-specific costs. The university publishes relevant guidance, including net price calculators, and offers financial-aid counseling to help students understand the magnitude of their commitment before they enroll.

Embry-Riddle's results demonstrate a strong return on investment. For the 2022-23 graduating class, the university reported a one-year placement rate of 94 percent across the residential campuses and 96 percent for the Worldwide Campus, including graduates who were employed or continuing their education. A recent Business Insider analysis, published in June of 2026, has also identified Embry-Riddle as the institution with the highest-earning graduates in both Florida and Arizona in its state-by-state evaluation. This placed Embry-Riddle alongside institutions such as Caltech, MIT, Georgia Tech, the University of Chicago, Johns Hopkins, Duke and Yale as the highest earning institution in their respective states.

Embry-Riddle recognizes the need for unwavering support for its students through academic advising, tutoring, early intervention, career preparation, professional development, scholarships, need-based aid and student employment. The university has launched the transformational Imagine What's Next: The Campaign for Embry-Riddle, an effort which aims to raise $300 million to enrich education, support groundbreaking research and advance the excellence of the university.

Academic programs are reviewed using learning outcomes, completion patterns, student demand, industry input and labor-market evidence. These reviews allow the university to enhance programs, improve academic strategies and direct resources toward the academic and student-support activities that contribute most directly to success.

Embry-Riddle engages in several programs that support hands-on education leading to high-paying jobs. For example, the university's Aviation Maintenance Technology (AMT) SkillBridge Program helps U.S. service members transition into high-demand careers through professional certifications and engagement with industry partners. The program recently marked its 1,000th graduate.

Additionally, Embry-Riddle routinely engages in out-of-the-box thinking and approaches that support the industry as a whole. Illustrative of this strategy, Embry-Riddle and Daytona State College (DSC) — a Florida College System (FCS) institution — have formed an Aviation Maintenance Science (AMS) partnership to enhance Airframe and Powerplant (A&P) mechanic training and expand certification and bachelor's degree opportunities. The collaboration will leverage the expertise of both institutions to address industry needs and support local workforce development — all while maintaining the quality of the degree and significantly lowering the cost to the student.

Each year, more than 200 industry, government and nonprofit organizations engage in formal partnerships with Embry-Riddle, drawing on the university's faculty expertise, research capabilities, specialized infrastructure and high-caliber student talent. The Embry-Riddle Research Park, located adjacent to the Daytona Beach Campus, serves as a collaborative facility that provides incubator space, technical resources and direct access to university researchers and students. The Research Park supports established companies and emerging ventures in the development, refinement and

commercialization of technologies relevant to aviation, aerospace and related fields. The facilities and tenants demonstrate connections between academic research and the organizations that contribute to regional and sector-wide economic development. The Research Park also supports the creation of high-wage employment, facilitates knowledge transfer and enhances the university's role in fostering innovation within the community and the broader aerospace industry.

Embry-Riddle holds itself to the highest degree of accountability for honest pricing, academic quality, support for completion, preparation for employment and transparent reporting. To reinforce that accountability, the university will continue to:

- Present the full estimated cost of attendance and clearly identify program-specific expenses before students commit.
- Expand program-level information about retention, completion, placement, graduate earnings and other outcomes as reliable data become available.
- Use employer feedback, career outcomes and labor-market evidence to ensure curricula remain relevant to high-demand fields.
- Review administrative and academic costs and prioritize investments that directly support teaching, research, safety, student success and career preparation.
- Strengthen financial literacy, borrowing counseling and early academic support so students can make informed decisions, remain on track and limit avoidable debt.

# 5. Academic Rigor and Excellence in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

***How will the university preserve authentic learning, address grade inflation and prioritize excellence in teaching and learning as artificial intelligence changes education?***

For over a century, Embry-Riddle has prepared the next generation of aviation and aerospace professionals by staying ahead of technological changes. As such, it is important to consider the advancement of artificial intelligence (AI) as we explore ways to leverage it responsibly across our university. We support the responsible use of artificial intelligence where it can improve learning, enhance professional preparation and/or advance research. At the same time, students must demonstrate their own knowledge and abilities. AI may support learning, but it may not substitute for required intellectual work, misrepresent authorship or undermine the validity of assessment.

Embry-Riddle faculty have the authority and responsibility to establish clear course standards, define permissible uses of AI, use authentic assessments and address misconduct. Academic leaders review course quality, learning outcomes and performance patterns across sections and modalities. Where grades and demonstrated mastery diverge, programs are expected to examine the cause and improve curriculum, assessment or instructional support.

Teaching excellence is a central faculty responsibility and a formal component of evaluation. Embry-Riddle supports faculty development in course design, assessment, instructional technology and discipline-specific applications of AI. Embry-Riddle's university-wide AI activities, including its annual AI Summit, bring together faculty, researchers and educators from the Daytona Beach, Prescott and Worldwide campuses to examine responsible applications and emerging challenges across aviation and aerospace.

Embry-Riddle will continue to:

- Require clear course-level guidance about acceptable and unacceptable uses of AI.
- Expand authentic assessments such as demonstrations, oral defenses, laboratories, simulations, projects and supervised applications that verify individual mastery.
- Review grade distributions alongside direct measures of learning and investigate material inconsistencies across sections or modalities.

- Recognize and reward excellent teaching through evaluation, professional development and institutional recognition.
- Prepare every graduate to use AI ethically, critically and effectively within the standards of the student's profession.

## 6. Research Security and Protection from Improper Foreign Influence

***How will the university protect academic programs, sensitive technology, funding integrity and the research enterprise from improper foreign influence or access?***

Embry-Riddle welcomes legitimate international scholarship and collaboration that advance knowledge and comply with U.S. law. The university also recognizes its responsibility to protect national security, sensitive technology, research integrity and eligibility for federal support. International engagement is therefore reviewed according to the risks presented by the project, technology, sponsor, collaborator, role, access, destination and proposed activity.

Embry-Riddle safeguards the integrity of its research enterprise through a coordinated institutional approach to evaluating and monitoring foreign influence, research security and compliance. Rather than assigning responsibility to a single office, university processes and policies are connected through established review and approval workflows that integrate expertise in research administration; information technology and cybersecurity; export controls; legal and compliance; and other relevant functions. These integrated processes provide multiple points of review and accountability for international engagements; conflicts of interest and commitment; sponsor requirements; export controls; research security; and sensitive or proprietary information. This coordinated structure helps ensure consistent institutional monitoring while protecting research integrity, intellectual property, and technologies important to aviation and aerospace leadership, economic competitiveness, and national security.

Representatives of Embry-Riddle do not accept gifts, contracts, appointments or collaborations when conditions would compromise admissions, hiring, curriculum, research independence, publication integrity, legal compliance or control of sensitive information and technology. Research personnel are subject to university requirements governing disclosure, conflicts of interest and commitment, responsible conduct of research, export controls, research security, restricted-party screening and sponsor obligations.

Embry-Riddle's research administration and compliance functions review projects for publication or participation restrictions, sanctioned-country concerns, foreign travel and activity, controlled information, physical exports and deemed exports. The university also monitors federal requirements concerning malign foreign talent recruitment programs, restricted entities, visiting scholars, foreign gifts and technology access.

Embry-Riddle will continue to:

- Provide recurring research-security, export-control and disclosure training that is appropriate to an individual's responsibilities and access.
- Screen relevant sponsors, collaborators, visitors, and transactions while escalating higher-risk matters for specialized review.
- Maintain secure research documentation, data classification and access controls proportionate to the sensitivity of the work.
- Update safeguards as federal requirements, threat information and research technologies evolve.
- Support lawful international collaboration while protecting U.S. national and economic security interests.

# 7. A Direct Contribution to American Security, Workforce and Prosperity

***How will Embry-Riddle advance American security interests, deliver academic programs that meet urgent workforce needs and contribute materially to the Nation's prosperity?***

Embry-Riddle's specialized mission is directly aligned with emergent national workforce and security needs and interests. The university educates pilots, engineers, air traffic controllers, aviation maintenance professionals, safety specialists, cyber defenders, intelligence professionals, researchers, managers and military officers. Its graduates enter fields essential to transportation, defense, space exploration, advanced manufacturing, autonomous systems, cybersecurity and economic competitiveness.

Embry-Riddle offers more than 100 degree programs and maintains extensive relationships with NASA, the Federal Aviation Administration, the U.S. military and leading aviation, aerospace, space, defense and technology employers. More than 250 active faculty and student research projects engage private-sector and government collaborators. Research centers of excellence and institutes focus on advanced air mobility, aviation and aerospace safety, aerospace resilience, cybersecurity, autonomy, space, human factors, weather, and other fields with direct implications for public safety, infrastructure and national defense.

Since 2018, Embry-Riddle's Aviation and Aerospace Cyber Resilience Symposium has convened leading aerospace cybersecurity experts to discuss research, technology, guidance, regulations, standards and policy priorities in a confidential setting. Participating stakeholders from across the nation and from industry, government and academia have utilized the symposium as a forum to explore some of the most pressing challenges faced by the aviation, aerospace and space cyber community.

The Center for Advanced Air Mobility integrates research, workforce development, curriculum, student engagement and government-industry collaboration. In May 2026, Embry-Riddle and the Florida Department of Transportation convened more than 300 researchers, policymakers and innovators to advance safe integration and workforce preparation in this rapidly developing field.

Embry-Riddle's three-campus system serves more than 15,000 military-affiliated students. Its global alumni network includes more than 170 generals and admirals, including 12 four-star generals. Through more than 110 Worldwide Campus locations and flexible online programs, the university brings education to service members and working professionals wherever they serve. Military pathways and support include the Yellow Ribbon Program, U.S. Naval Community College degree options, Community College of the Air Force articulation programs and a Department of War (DOW) SkillBridge aviation maintenance curriculum that combines academic credit, technical certification and employer connection.

Furthermore, the university employs several retired military leaders as members of its faculty and Board of Trustees. Of note, the February 2026 appointment of Maj. Gen. Jeannie Leavitt as Dean of the College of Aviation at Embry-Riddle's Prescott Campus highlights the university's commitment to disciplined, safety-focused aviation education. Maj. Gen. Leavitt boasts a distinguished 31-year U.S. Air Force career, which includes her role as the first female fighter pilot and the first woman to command an Air Force combat fighter wing. Her background in aerospace engineering, comprehensive command experience, and dedication to developing aviation professionals contribute to her ability to provide strategic leadership to the university's aviation programs.

Board of Trustees member General Jacqueline D. Van Ovost brings strategic and operational experience to the university's leadership, having led U.S. Transportation Command and Air Mobility Command and accumulated more than 4,200 flight hours as a test and command pilot. Her leadership of major mobility, training and joint organizations; her role as a leader for women in the military; and her contributions to aerospace innovation and national security strengthen Embry-Riddle's mission, particularly her dedication to advancing the nation's STEM talent pipeline and supporting excellence in aviation and aerospace education.

In the Fall 2026 academic semester, our David B. O'Maley College of Business on the Daytona Beach Campus will welcome retired United States Air Force General Norton Schwartz as an Executive in Residence. General Schwartz previously served as commander, United States Transportation Command. And in Fall of 2027, Embry-Riddle will unveil a 28,000-square-foot ROTC complex including advanced training spaces, mission simulators and a memorial honoring Eagles who gave their lives in service.

Embry-Riddle also partners with the military and federal agencies on research involving additive manufacturing, electromagnetic systems, sensor fusion, aerospace dynamics and other technologies relevant to national capability.

Embry-Riddle contributes materially to regional and national prosperity. The university's 2025 economic impact study estimated a $3.2 billion total impact across Florida and Arizona, a 23 percent increase in two years, while supporting more than 18,000 jobs. Embry-Riddle's industry partnerships, alumni earning power and planned capital investments generate high-wage employment, business formation, household income and regional growth.

Embry-Riddle will continue to:

- Align academic programs and credentials with urgent workforce needs in aviation, aerospace, defense, space, autonomy, cybersecurity and advanced technology.
- Translate employer and government partnerships into internships, apprenticeships, sponsored research, student projects and direct career pathways.
- Expand opportunities for service members, veterans and military families while strengthening officer education and national-service pathways.
- Advance applied research that improves safety, strengthens national security and accelerates American innovation and competitiveness.
- Measure and communicate the university's workforce, research and economic contributions to the American public.

## Conclusion

The priorities highlighted in this National Call to Action are consistent with Embry-Riddle's responsibility to its students, to the nation, and to the global aviation and aerospace community.

Over 100 years ago, our founders gave wings to possibility. As Embry-Riddle begins its second century, we remain committed to academic and operational excellence, affordability and transparency, free and orderly inquiry, responsible innovation, secure and ethical research, student success, and direct contributions to American security, workforce development and prosperity.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide this response and look forward to continued engagement with the Department of Education and the American people.

Sincerely,



P. Barry Butler, Ph.D.
President
Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University