

Qatari Funding of U.S. Universities and Section 117 Disclosure

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RELATED BILLS H.R. 1048 (DETERRENT Act); H.R. 1049 (Transparency in Reporting of Adversarial Contributions to Education Act); H.R. 9602 (Less Bureaucracy, Better International Foreign Gift Transparency Act)

ONLINE <https://notes.meforum.org/notes/qatar-section-117/>

In brief

Core point: Qatar is the largest single country in the Education Department's Section 117 file: \$8.98 billion across 1,338 disclosed transactions with 67 institutions.¹

Where it lands: Six universities with campuses in Doha's Education City hold most of it, led by Cornell at \$3.38 billion.²

Trend line: An MEF audit counted a record \$980 million in Qatari contributions between January 2023 and October 2024.³

Contested: A registered foreign agent for Qatar argues that more than 90 percent of the funding is spent in Qatar on branch-campus operations.⁴

Reporting gap: 587 of Qatar's 1,338 disclosed transactions carry no source name in the federal file.⁵

What the disclosures show

Section 117 of the Higher Education Act requires universities to report foreign gifts and contracts above \$250,000.⁶ In the Education Department's cumulative file dated August 31, 2026, Qatar-origin entries total \$8.98 billion, ahead of every other country. Contracts account for \$8.82 billion of that sum. Six institutions hold most of it: Cornell (\$3.38 billion), Carnegie Mellon (\$1.98 billion), Georgetown (\$1.11 billion), Texas A&M (\$1.02 billion), Northwestern (\$819 million), and Virginia Commonwealth (\$446 million).⁷ Institutions self-report these entries, and 69 Qatar-origin contracts worth \$2.60 billion carry end dates after the file date.⁸

Totals vary with method. MEF's May 2025 audit counted \$6.25 billion in Qatari grants to U.S. higher education, making Qatar the largest foreign donor.⁹ A later MEF analysis put Qatar's reported 2025 gifts and contracts at over \$1.1 billion and the cumulative total at no less than \$6.6 billion since 1986.¹⁰

1. U.S. Department of Education, "Section 117 Foreign Gift and Contract Data," cumulative file dated September 30, 2026, Qatar-origin entries, MEF calculation, <https://foreignfundinghighered.gov/>.

2. Department of Education, "Section 117 Data"; Gregg Roman, "Qatar's Quiet Campaign: How Doha Is Buying America," *Middle East Forum Online*, April 23, 2025, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/qatars-quiet-campaign-how-doha-is-buying-america>.

3. Benjamin Baird, "America for Sale: Qatar's \$40 Billion Spending Spree Buys Influence and Control of Elite Institutions," Middle East Forum report, May 13, 2025, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-reports/america-for-sale-qatars-40-billion-spending-spree-buys-influence-and-control-of-elite-institutions>.

4. Hollie McKay, "Qatar's Quiet Conquest of the American Classroom," *Middle East Forum Observer*, August 13, 2026, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/qatars-quiet-conquest-of-the-american-classroom>.

5. Department of Education, "Section 117 Data."

6. Keren Karmiel, "How Qatar Has Co-opted the University of South Carolina," *Middle East Forum Observer*, July 6, 2025, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/how-qatar-has-co-opted-the-university-of-south-carolina>; Baird, "America for Sale."

7. Department of Education, "Section 117 Data."

8. Department of Education, "Section 117 Data."

9. Baird, "America for Sale."

10. Victor Vahidi Motti, "Will U.S. Promotion of Regional Resilience Create an Opening for Rivals' Influence?" *Middle East Forum Observer*, August 20, 2026, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-observer/will-u-s-promotion-of-regional-resilience-create-an-opening-for-rivals-influence>.

Campus case files

Northwestern. The Qatar Foundation has put more than \$700 million into Northwestern's Doha partnership since 2007, by MEF's count.¹¹ The Doha campus serves 473 students and offers two undergraduate majors.¹² Of 729 graduates from 2014 to 2025, about 21 percent bear surnames from the Al-Thani family or 11 other elite Qatari families. The university's contract requires personnel to "respect the cultural, religious and social customs" of Qatar.¹³

Georgetown and Texas A&M. Georgetown has received more than \$971 million from Qatar, and Sheikh Abdulla bin Ali Al Thani sits on its Board of Directors.¹⁴ Texas A&M announced it would close its Doha campus by 2028; a court-ordered release of its records showed almost half a billion dollars in Qatari grants and contracts.¹⁵ Smaller programs show the same pattern: the University of South Carolina received nearly \$4.5 million from Qatar between 2016 and early 2025.¹⁶

Where reporting is thin

Of the Qatar-origin transactions in the federal file, 44 percent name no source entity.¹⁷ MEF's Georgetown study documented a separate route: Turkish government money that reached the university through the Diyanet Center, a U.S. 501(c)(3), and so did not appear as a foreign gift.¹⁸ As of April 2025, Qatar was not designated a "country of concern" under the DETERRENT Act framework.¹⁹

Congress has examined the issue directly. Northwestern President Michael Schill testified before the House Committee on Education and the Workforce in 2024 about Qatar's role in campus operations,²⁰ and Charles Asher Small testified before the Senate HELP Committee in March 2026.²¹ The House passed the DETERRENT Act in March 2025; it would lower the disclosure threshold from \$250,000 to \$50,000 and set a zero threshold for countries of concern.²² The bill was received in the Senate and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions on March 31, 2025.²³

Questions for oversight

1. How much of Qatar's \$8.98 billion in disclosed entries reflects funds already received, as opposed to contract values that run into future years?
2. How does the Department of Education verify the source field, given that 587 Qatar-origin transactions name no source?
3. Do branch-campus clauses on respecting Qatari customs bind faculty who also teach at U.S. home campuses?
4. How are foreign-government funds routed through U.S.-registered nonprofits treated under Section 117?
5. What rights do foreign funders hold over research performed at branch campuses, and does any of it fall in export-controlled fields?
6. What audit capacity does the Department have for institutions reporting more than \$1 billion from a single country?

VERSION	DATE	CHANGE
1.0	October 4, 2026	First release.

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11. Gregg Roman, "Qatar's Elite Pipeline at Northwestern," *Middle East Forum Online*, January 7, 2026, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-online/qatars-elite-pipeline-at-northwestern>.

12. "Qatar-Funded Northwestern Employs Hamas Money Launderer to Teach U.S. Students," Middle East Forum press release, September 8, 2025, <https://www.meforum.org/press-releases/qatar-funded-northwestern-employs-hamas-money-launderer-to-teach-u-s-students>.

13. Roman, "Qatar's Elite Pipeline at Northwestern."

14. Winfield Myers, "Qatar's Takeover of Georgetown University Should Be Investigated," *Campus Watch*, January 30, 2026, <https://www.meforum.org/campus-watch/qatars-takeover-of-georgetown-university-should-be-investigated>.

15. McKay, "Qatar's Quiet Conquest."

16. Karmiel, "How Qatar Has Co-opted."

17. Department of Education, "Section 117 Data."

18. Sam Westrop and Anna Stanley, "Beachhead: Georgetown U.," Middle East Forum report, July 8, 2025, <https://www.meforum.org/mef-reports/georgetown>.

19. Roman, "Qatar's Quiet Campaign."

20. Myers, "Qatar's Takeover of Georgetown."

21. McKay, "Qatar's Quiet Conquest."

22. Baird, "America for Sale."

23. DETERRENT Act, H.R. 1048, 119th Cong. (2025), <https://www.congress.gov/bill/119th-congress/house-bill/1048>.