



Palm Beach Atlantic University

West Palm Beach, Florida

PBA response to Aug. 3, 2026 national call to action letter from U.S. Secretary of Education

Background

Since its inception in 1968, Palm Beach Atlantic University (“PBA”) has been guided by the conviction that higher education should prepare students not only for successful careers, but also for lives of purpose, leadership, and service. This is clear in our mission ***to equip students to grow in wisdom, lead with conviction, and serve God boldly***. As an intentionally faith-based, Christ-centered university, we were established on the belief that the pursuit of truth, intellectual rigor, moral character, and service to others are inseparable elements of a quality education. We prepare students not just for employment, but for a life of impact.

PBA is distinctive in being built on three foundational pillars: *Worship*, *Workshop (community service)*, and *American Free Enterprise*. As a comprehensive master’s level university with three additional doctoral programs (nursing, pharmacy, and practical theology), PBA’s academic enterprise is classically grounded in the liberal arts and sciences while simultaneously attaining the highest possible accreditations in a variety of work-related professions. In other words, PBA focuses on our Christian mission with academic excellence. Our pillars are described below.

- ***Worship:*** Our motto is “enlightening minds, enriching souls, and extending hands” and the *imago Dei* undergirds our view of ethics and morality. At PBA we believe all people are made in the *imago Dei*— the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). This is beautifully lived out through regular worship, the practice of honoring God with who we are and everything that we do (<https://www.pba.edu/campus-life/christian-community/chapel/>).
- ***Workshop:*** Workshop is a distinctive community service program that responds to human needs with Christ-like action in the community and the world (<https://www.pba.edu/campus-life/christian-community/workshop/>). Every PBA student completes 180 hours of free community service as a graduation requirement, so thousands of students serve 45 hours each year. Workshop projects are proactively approved for volunteer work completed with 501(c)(3) nonprofits, churches/ministries, academic schools (K-12), or U.S. government organizations; all volunteer projects are completed at sites distinct from the university. To date, ***PBA has served 4.3 million volunteer hours, reflecting the university’s longstanding belief that higher education should prepare students not only for careers, but also for lives of service and civic responsibility.*** Indeed, PBA celebrated the United States 250th anniversary by performing 14,500 hours of service across 304 projects June 1-30, 2026, exceeding the initial 250 project goal.
- ***American Free Enterprise (AFE):*** The final pillar ensures students understand the value of American Free Enterprise, with a course on free enterprise in the core curriculum. AFE Day is an annual PBA tradition dating back to 1984; it is a day where we honor outstanding individuals whose work and achievement exemplify the best of the American free enterprise system. Award winners over the years have included Thomas Petterfy, Ken Langone, Steve Forbes, Leo Vecellio, Paul Leone, Y. Michele Kang, George Elmore, and many others (<https://www.pba.edu/about/growth/free-enterprise-day/medal-recipients/>). In addition, PBA’s Raney Center for Free Enterprise promotes study and understanding of principles of the American Free Enterprise system through student engagement, scholarship, programming, and engagement with business and community leaders. Together, PBA’s academic curriculum, AFE Day, and the Raney Center for Free Enterprise help ensure that the principles of free enterprise remain an active part of PBA’s intellectual life and are passed on to future generations.

As America's colleges and universities answer the Department of Education's challenge to affirm academic excellence, meaningful research, principled leadership, and service to our nation, PBA *reaffirms* that these principles reflect values which have shaped our identity for nearly six decades. In essence, they have always been part of our university's "DNA." We appreciate the opportunity to share how PBA has pursued these objectives since our founding and how they remain central to our mission today.

1. Ensure Mission Fit, Transparency, and Merit in Admissions

We seek to communicate clearly with prospective students and families regarding admissions, educational opportunities, costs, and outcomes. Transparency and integrity are longstanding priorities at PBA. The university's admissions philosophy reflects its belief that higher education should be accessible to qualified students who will benefit from, and contribute to, its Christ-centered learning environment. Through the lens of *imago Dei*, admissions decisions are guided by the conviction that every applicant deserves thoughtful and individualized consideration, reflecting PBA's commitment to honoring the God-given dignity of each person. We also recognize the significant investment students make in their education, and are committed to providing a transformative educational experience that delivers enduring value.

- First and foremost, PBA ensures that all applicants, at all stages of recruitment, understand that our community is an intentionally Christian community. Faculty and staff attest yearly to our faith and values statements, and this is mirrored for our students by the student behavior manual, *"The Navigator."* Students must attest to *The Navigator's* code of conduct each year prior to coming to PBA. In addition, all students must complete Chapel and Worship requirements as well as our *"Faith, Roots, and Reason"* core curriculum.
- PBA itself is a non-denominational Christian university, and we welcome students, faculty, and staff from a wide variety of Christian denominational backgrounds. This provides a rich tapestry of diversity on our campus for discussion and practice while sharing the same core belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.
- Student applications are initially screened for academic ability through a minimum high school GPA. Some majors require science/math specific GPAs as well.
- PBA has no quotas for race, sex, or ethnicity categories. The university is blessed to be embedded in the richly diverse and international culture of South Florida, so we benefit greatly from the diversity around us, which is reflected in our faculty, staff and student body.
- Although undergraduate applicants are not required to submit standardized test scores to be considered for admission, inclusion of ACT, SAT, and/or CLT scores as part of the admission application is encouraged. Some scholarships require reporting of test scores to apply, and applicants are made aware of this reality. Of note, all applicants to PBA's premier scholarship programs, the Farish Scholars and Supper Honors Programs, are required to provide test scores and an additional essay to be considered.
- As a way of providing financial transparency, every prospective undergraduate student can access the net price calculator available on PBA's financial aid website. Our admissions team directs students to this site, so they are clear on costs and their financial aid package.
- Students and families are responding to PBA's values and academic rigor. PBA had $\approx 1,800$ completed applications in 2020 and this increased dramatically to $>13,000$ completed applications for the most recent incoming class (freshmen and transfers, fall 2026). We continue to grow our student body in a thoughtful and controlled manner (≈ 50 -100 students/year), so selectivity is increasing.

2. Protect Free Speech and Open Inquiry

PBA is committed to fostering open inquiry and civil discourse. At PBA, we strive to create an environment where respectful dialogue flourishes, and members of our community are challenged to think deeply and engage constructively and with civility across differing viewpoints. These are not just notions to which we aspire.

- PBA's LeMieux Center for Public Policy, founded in 2012, provides space for "reasoned, thoughtful, and civil discourse on pressing public policy issues confronting Florida, the United States and the world." A few examples...

- A few weeks after October 7, 2023, when Hamas terrorists invaded Israel, PBA's LeMieux Center sponsored a gathering of students and Palm Beach County residents designed to explore the history of the Holy Land for the prior 100 years in order to give context for recent events. Senator George LeMieux and our past PBA Dean of Liberal Arts & Sciences, both who had deep expertise in the topic, reviewed key events and treaties such as the "Abraham Accords" and their implications. The audience asked thoughtful questions about the perspectives of both Israel and Hamas.
- Another example is the LeMieux Center event that occurred on February 26, 2026, in which former U.S. Secretaries of State John Kerry and Mike Pompeo discussed current international events and concerns. The gathering provided multiple perspectives with differing political views and was widely attended by both students and community members. While viewpoints expressed were dramatically different, the event modeled beautifully how to disagree with respect.
- LeMieux Center events are provided free for both PBA and our broader Palm Beach County community.
- In 2020, PBA added *Wordship* to its regular programming at PBA. Complementing Workshop (community service as a form of worship), *Wordship* is defined as cultivating the practice of using words wisely to speak with others, including those with whom we may disagree, as a form of worship. Essentially it is the practice of using one's voice, spoken and written, to bring people together rather than push them apart (<https://www.pba.edu/campus-life/christian-community/wordship/>). These practices are much needed in our polarized world today.

3. *Encourage Academic Vitality, Intellectual Pluralism, and Scholarly Pursuits*

We are committed to academic excellence grounded in high expectations for student achievement and faculty scholarship. Our undergraduate core curriculum, entitled "*Faith, Roots, and Reason*," is designed to integrate biblical principles, cultivate critical thinking, effective communication, ethical leadership, and professional competence. Classes are generally small, and students are encouraged to meet often with their professors outside of the classroom for discussion, support, and challenge. Examples of outstanding academic achievement and academic vitality and intellectual pluralism are given below.

- Undergraduate students take a 3-semester sequence of Western Civilization/Humanities which covers classical literature and history. Honors students have a 6-semester sequence focused on great books. Both sequences provide grounding in the primary classic literature and critical thinking skills needed to become informed citizens.
- Since 2018, PBA has produced graduates who have received 26 Fulbright awards (22 student awards and 4 faculty awards). Given our university's size, having 26 Fulbright awards over the past 8 years is remarkable and a marker of national academic excellence.
- AACSB accreditation for the Rinker College of Business places PBA in the top 6% of all business schools globally. Our *God-Sized Dreams* strategic plan calls for working toward having the top accreditation possible for each of our schools/colleges, and programs, as markers of academic excellence. All business students complete a course on financial literacy through our Center for Financial Literacy (<https://www.pba.edu/academics/schools/centers-of-excellence/financial-literacy/>) and students volunteer to help on financial training days for our local West Palm Beach community. Similarly, accounting students provide help with tax returns for broader community members.
- One way to drive positive scholarly and societal outcomes is to start innovative programs that solve community concerns. Since 2020, PBA's School of Ministry has received \$17.25M support from the Lilly Foundation for 4 major initiatives:
 - *Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative* is a project where PBA leads a large-scale collaborative effort across all theological schools (seminaries, colleges, universities) in South Florida designed to respond to challenges ministry schools face in preparing pastoral leaders for Christian congregations now and into the future.
 - *Community Transformation Center* helps establish new routes from theological education to careers in community development and chaplaincy.

- *Lift Every Voice Partnership* is a collaboration where PBA helped establish a new culturally competent graduate theological education venue at Florida Memorial University, a historically Black university in Miami-Dade County, Florida.
- *Mark 16:15 Preaching Initiative* is designed to develop preachers capable of sharing the Gospel through intracultural and intra-ecclesial encounters.
- We share the view that research and scholarship should be conducted with integrity, accountability, and a commitment to advancing knowledge for the public good. Our faculty and students pursue academic inquiry that serves communities, solves real-world problems, advances their field, and contributes constructively to society.

4. *Ensure Affordability, Value, and Positive Student Outcomes*

As a Christian university, we are committed to providing a transformative educational experience that delivers enduring value. We strive to be affordable and to help our students thrive. Several examples are listed below.

- PBA commits over \$50 million in academic, need-based, talent, and athletic scholarships annually to its students.
 - PBA serves students from all 50 states and over 90 nations, with the fall 2026 incoming class representing 44 states and 41 nations.
 - Over 30% of PBA's oncoming student class are Pell-grant eligible.
- To ensure students and their families are able to evaluate affordability and value, every prospective undergraduate student has access to the net price calculator available on PBA's financial aid website. As stated above, our admissions team directs students to this site, so they are clear on costs and their financial aid package.
- Many PBA students are dedicated to serving their communities through teaching, ministry, or other low-paying service jobs that require a university degree. To support such future servant leaders, PBA partners with Ardeo Education Solutions to offer up to 100% loan repayment assistance for those working 30+ hours earning at least minimum wage but less than \$55,000 annually. PBA sponsors this coverage for select students and makes the coverage available for purchase to all students.
- Supporting the quality of a PBA education, our students have been awarded numerous prestigious national awards and have strong pass rates for national professional exams. A sampling is listed below.
 - PBA has achieved 22 distinct Fulbright awards (to new PBA graduates), 4 Fulbright Scholars (faculty); also 3 Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarships (students) in the last 8 years.
 - First time pass rates for PBA nursing students (NCLEX-RN) above the national average for the last 2 years.
 - First time pass rates for PBA pharmacy students (NAPLEX) above the national average for the last 5 years.
 - Education graduates consistently achieve 100% pass rate on the Florida certification exam.
- The PBA Office of Career Development helps match students with internships and jobs after graduation. The office's expertise includes career coaching, review of resumes and cover letters, practicing interviewing skills, connecting students with companies all over the country via our job database (Handshake), and networking with local companies to suggest specific job interview matching. At PBA, we believe each student has a God-given calling. The Office of Career Development helps our students discover how their passion and purpose intersect with where the world needs those skills.

5. *Prioritize Excellence in Teaching and Maintain Academic Rigor in the Age of Artificial Intelligence*

While PBA faculty are expected to advance their academic discipline in a myriad of ways, their primary responsibility is to create a vibrant learning environment. Overall, PBA class sizes are small, which facilitates meaningful connections between faculty and students. This results in individualized tutoring sessions and mentorship. In terms of faculty expertise, 84% of our faculty hold the highest degree in their field of study. Below we address issues such as grade inflation and artificial intelligence (AI).

- PBA average GPA has remained remarkably stable from 2019 (3.17 pre-pandemic) to 2026 (3.18, today), suggesting grade inflation has not occurred over many years.
- Ethical AI competency is needed by every university graduate today. At the same time, academic rigor involves developing the ability to think critically; this means that AI may not be appropriate in some fundamental courses. PBA has taken such a blended approach.
 - *Traditional Classes*: In introductory courses, in person hand-written exams or oral presentations are making a resurgence, as well as a “flipped classroom” where students prepare the lesson/reading before class, so classroom time can be used for more in-depth discussion. Both approaches reinforce development of critical thinking skills.
 - *AI Certificate*: Since June 2025, PBA has provided an elective AI certificate to our students, so they are AI ready for their first employment. In fall 2026, the certificate will become available online to alumni, faculty, staff, and the broader PBA community. The certificate consists of 3 courses:
 - *1-Fundamentals of Artificial Intelligence* (overview of AI uses and the multiplicity of AI programs)
 - *2-Culture, Technology, and the Future of Humanity* (course on ethical use of AI)
 - *3-Use of AI as a tool* (practicum using AI in a research project in the student’s specific major; many courses). This final capstone AI course provides immediate expertise to the graduate as they move toward employment in their chosen field.

6. *Safeguarding Research from Malign Foreign Influence*

As a primarily education-focused university, not a R1 or R2 university, PBA does not currently have federally funded research. All sponsored research (whether from federal, state, or private foundation sources) is screened by relevant Deans and the CFO’s office prior to submission to ensure it is free from malign foreign influence. Advancement at PBA operates within the Board of Trustees approved gift acceptance policy; gifts with problematic conditions are not accepted. We are also careful to ensure that all employees undergo careful vetting for both mission fit and subject expertise. Once finalists are identified for any position, interviews with the search committee, reference checks, background checks, and personal interviews with the provost and president occur for all full-time and visiting faculty and senior staff. This vetting process protects the university by ensuring that malign foreign actors are not hired who might unduly influence academic programming.

7. *Prioritizing American Interests and Workforce Needs*

As a university, we are dedicated to serving both students and society. In this regard, PBA emphasizes programs that respond to workforce needs while also developing principled servant-leaders equipped to address the challenges facing their communities. As a Christian university, PBA also puts a profound emphasis on its students being the hands and feet of Christ in serving its community. One of the most visible expressions of this commitment is our *Workshop* program (see Background section above). This commitment is reflected across our academic programs as well.

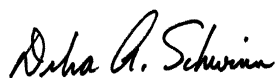
- *Health Science*: There is a deep need in our community for more skilled healthcare providers. PBA’s School of Nursing offers undergraduate, master’s, and doctoral degrees, and prepares its graduates to meet critical healthcare needs while serving patients and communities. Our Gregory School of Pharmacy offers both a PharmD and a combined PharmD/MBA. PBA received provisional accreditation to start a new Physician Associate in Medicine program in 2025 and welcomed its second class in fall 2026. All PBA’s health science programs are growing as the need is tremendous.
- *Counseling*: PBA’s Master of Science in Clinical Mental Health Counseling achieved CACREP accreditation in 2024. With the mental health crisis in our country, both in person education in West Palm Beach and our new online program are growing.
- *Business*: Unique to West Palm Beach, is *Wall Street South*. Many financial companies are moving their global headquarters very close to the PBA campus in downtown West Palm Beach. In addition to having an AACSB accredited Rinker College of Business (top 6% globally in quality), PBA opened the new Marshall and Vera Lea

Rinker Business Hall in spring 2026 (125,000 sq ft 6-story building) as a resource to PBA and our local community. Students benefit from internships at Fortune 500 companies while attending PBA. This program is also growing.

- *Leadership:* The need for effective, principled leadership in our world has never been greater. The Center for Global Leadership is a cross-university center that integrates biblical truth and spiritual formation with modern leadership best practices. Under its umbrella, “PBA Lead” was developed as a four-year transformative student experience that includes leadership development, retreats, and coaching for sustained transformational leadership development. The Center also offers mentorship and service opportunities, engagement with accomplished business and community leaders, and programs that strengthen communication, professionalism, networking, and character. Together, these efforts develop leaders who drive lasting impact in business and society.
- *Engineering:* PBA initiated an engineering program four years ago, with the first engineering student graduating in May 2026. This reality allowed us to apply for initial ABET accreditation in August 2026. Engineering is very important for the future since quantum computing is key to empowering the future of AI and engineering undergirds many other disciplines as well.
- *Education:* The United States, and world, need more gifted K-12 teachers. PBA has a very innovative elementary education program as well as a 6-12 teacher education program that combines a student’s major expertise (e.g. music, math, etc.) with teaching. Given the overwhelming need for excellent, compassionate, and well-trained teachers in our country, PBA has begun to grow this program.
- *PhD in Practical Theology:* Our School of Ministry is quite innovative and recognized several years ago that there are problems that can occur in the church and non-profit ministries that could be solved through data-driven research, but from a practical perspective. This led to the initiation of PBA’s first academic PhD program, but one that is focused on practical problems within the Christian community and non-profits.
- PBA is nimble and coalesces expertise needed to start new programs as needs arise in the workforce.

Summary

Palm Beach Atlantic University understands that public trust is earned through consistency between mission and action. We are grateful for the opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to principles that have defined our institution from the beginning: *academic rigor, intellectual exploration, personal responsibility, service to others, and faithful stewardship of the opportunities entrusted to us*. These values are evident across our website and promotional materials. We stand alongside other colleges and universities seeking to strengthen public confidence in higher education. In summary, “Christ-centered mission with excellence” has been the guiding ethos at Palm Beach Atlantic University since our founding.



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