

Federal Government Freezes \$339M in UCLA Grants Over Civil Rights Allegations

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The Trump administration has frozen \$339 million in federal research funding to the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), citing civil rights violations. The decision comes after multiple agencies concluded that the public university failed to uphold legal standards related to antisemitism, affirmative action, and women's athletics.

According to sources familiar with the matter, several federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH), informed UCLA this week that funding would be suspended. The move affects approximately \$240 million in grants from HHS and NIH alone. This is one of the few times such action has been taken against a public university, though similar funding freezes have occurred at private institutions.

A recent investigation by the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Civil Rights Division found that UCLA violated both the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment and Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. The DOJ concluded that the university failed to prevent a hostile environment for Jewish and Israeli students by acting with “deliberate indifference.”

This development follows a \$200 million settlement with Columbia University last week. That agreement resolved federal claims that Columbia had also breached anti-discrimination laws. The settlement additionally reinstated more than \$400 million in grants and is reportedly being used as a model for similar enforcement efforts at other universities.

The National Science Foundation (NSF), which also suspended awards to UCLA, stated that the university is not in alignment with the agency’s funding priorities. In a separate communication, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) cited instances of noncompliance at UCLA, such as encouraging applicants to disclose race in admissions materials and considering socioeconomic indicators like ZIP codes and household income—practices that the department argues are a veiled continuation of race-based admissions.

California voters banned affirmative action in public universities in 1996 through Proposition 209, a position reaffirmed by the U.S. Supreme Court in 2023. The DOE’s letter accuses UCLA of trying to circumvent these legal constraints, effectively disadvantaging white, Jewish, and Asian American applicants.

Further concerns were raised regarding the university’s handling of women’s sports. The DOE said that UCLA allows biological males who identify as transgender women to participate in women’s teams, amounting to discrimination against female athletes.

UCLA Chancellor Julio Frenk criticized the funding freeze as “deeply disappointing,” arguing that it jeopardizes critical research and punishes scientists and students. “This far-reaching

penalty of defunding life-saving research does nothing to address any alleged discrimination,” Frenk stated.

The decision follows a \$6 million legal settlement UCLA reached earlier this week with three Jewish students and a professor who claimed their civil rights were violated during pro-Palestinian protests in 2024. Protesters reportedly blocked Jewish students from accessing classes and campus facilities. While UCLA initially denied responsibility, stating that the actions were carried out by protesters, not the institution itself, the university eventually collaborated with law enforcement to dismantle protest camps and restore access.

Despite the controversies, UCLA has reiterated its commitment to campus safety, inclusion, and implementing future recommendations. However, the financial and reputational consequences from the federal government’s actions signal that broader scrutiny of higher education institutions over civil rights compliance may continue.