



Oregon, California universities in limbo after federal funding threats over DEI

Jefferson Public Radio | By [Jane Vaughan](#)

Published March 10, 2025 at 3:04 PM PDT



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Southern Oregon University's Churchill Hall.

The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights sent a letter telling educational institutions to end what it calls racial discrimination through things like diversity, equity and inclusion programs, or DEI.

Since the [Feb. 14 letter](#), universities and colleges have struggled with knowing how to respond to the letter, which threatens federal funding.

Oregon's Higher Education Coordinating Commission and the attorneys general of Oregon and California have provided some guidance, but how this plays out is still unclear.

Colleges and universities have reacted to the Department of Education's letter in different ways.

Southern Oregon University President Rick Bailey said SOU is following all state and federal laws, but so far, they haven't felt the need to make changes.

"We've had some very serious conversations as an institution about how best to move forward," he said. "And I think we're all in agreement that we can celebrate the fact that we are an open and inclusive tent and remain compliant with the directives coming out of D.C."

Bailey said this focus on inclusion and diversity is at the core of SOU.

"The way we approach the work is in cultivating an environment where everyone knows that they are loved," he said. "And yes, that means trans students, and yes, that means students of color. [...] But when we talk about inclusivity, we also talk about political perspectives diversity. We talk about people from rural communities, we talk about military veterans, we talk about people with accessibility needs. All of those groups are in this tent, and we have shown that all of those groups can not only coexist but can do it in a loving and respectful and thoughtful way."

According to [reporting from *The Times-Standard*](#), College of the Redwoods in Eureka has [proposed changes](#) to its Board of Trustees' goals regarding DEI.

Rogue Community College, Oregon Institute of Technology and College of the Redwoods all declined to comment on the issue.

A statement from the California State University, which includes Cal Poly Humboldt, reads, "The CSU continues to comply with longstanding applicable federal and state laws and CSU policies and does not discriminate or provide preferences on the basis of race, sex, color, ethnicity or national origin. CSU remains committed to fostering an inclusive and equitable learning environment that is open to all. CSU respects the diverse opinions and viewpoints of our students, staff and faculty."

The Department of Education's letter threatens potential loss of federal funding if colleges and universities don't comply.

"Educational institutions have toxically indoctrinated students with the false premise that the United States is built upon 'systemic and structural racism' and advanced discriminatory policies and practices," the letter reads. "Proponents of these discriminatory practices have attempted to further justify them—particularly during the last four years—under the banner of 'diversity, equity, and inclusion' ('DEI'), smuggling racial stereotypes and explicit race-consciousness into everyday training, programming, and discipline."

"We remain committed to advancing policies that reflect Oregon's values while ensuring compliance with all applicable laws," reads a Feb. 25 email from Ben Cannon, executive director of the Oregon Higher Education Coordinating Commission.

Various states' Attorneys General, including Oregon and California, wrote in a Mar. 5 letter, "The President cannot change longstanding legal precedent by executive order, and a Dear Colleague letter and FAQ document certainly cannot do so. The 'Dear Colleague' letter has inspired fear, and the Attorneys General write to mitigate that fear."

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