

Trump administration threatens Columbia University's accreditation



New York, June 5 (RHC)-- The U.S. Department of Education has notified Columbia University's accreditor that the Ivy League school allegedly broke federal anti-discrimination laws.

In a statement on Wednesday, the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) claimed that Columbia University had "acted with deliberate indifference towards the harassment of Jewish students."

As a result, they said that Columbia violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits recipients of federal funding from discriminating on the basis of race, colour or national origin.

"Specifically, OCR and HHS OCR found that Columbia failed to meaningfully protect Jewish students against severe and pervasive harassment on Columbia's campus and consequently denied these students' equal access to educational opportunities to which they are entitled under the law," the statement said.

It quoted Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, who accused Columbia University of ignoring the ongoing harassment of Jewish students on its campus since Israel's war on Gaza began on October 7, 2023. "This is not only immoral, but also unlawful," McMahon said

She added that the accreditor, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, has "an obligation to ensure member institutions abide by their standards".

The commission is one of seven regional bodies that reviews colleges, universities and other institutions of higher education to ensure they meet the standards needed to grant degrees.

McMahon described accreditation institutions as the "gatekeepers of federal student aid" and explained that they decide which schools are eligible for student loans.

"We look forward to the Commission keeping the Department fully informed of actions taken to ensure Columbia's compliance with accreditation standards including compliance with federal civil rights laws," McMahon said.

The statement specified that the Education Department and HHS had come to their determination about Columbia University's civil rights compliance on May 22nd.

The Ivy League school had been an epicentre for pro-Palestinian and anti-Israel student protest movements, with some of the first student encampments cropping up on its lawn in April 2024.

The university has remained in the news with arrests of high-profile student activists like Mahmoud Khalil in March and Mohsen Mahdawi in April. Mahdawi has since been released, though he, like Khalil, continues to face deportation proceedings.

The administration of President Donald Trump has accused the demonstrators of creating unsafe conditions for Jewish students on campus, something the protest leaders have denied. It reiterated that allegation in Wednesday's statement, where it summed up the "noncompliance findings" that allegedly show Columbia at odds with civil rights law.

"The findings carefully document the hostile environment Jewish students at Columbia University have had to endure for over 19 months, disrupting their education, safety, and well-being," said Anthony Archeval, acting director of the Office for Civil Rights at HHS, in the statement.

"We encourage Columbia University to work with us to come to an agreement that reflects meaningful changes that will truly protect Jewish students."

The university did not immediately respond to a request by the Reuters news agency for comment.

The Trump administration and Columbia University were in negotiations over \$400m in federal funding for the New York-based Ivy League school. Columbia agreed to a series of demands from the administration

in a bid to keep the funds flowing, but the U.S. government has not confirmed whether it will restore the contracts and grants that it paused.

In March, McMahon had said Columbia University was “on the right track” toward recovering its federal funding.

[SOURCE: AL JAZEERA and NEWS AGENCIES]

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