

# Federal investigation targets Ohio universities over diversity program

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COLUMBUS, Ohio - The U.S. Department of Education has opened investigations into Ohio State University, the University of Cincinnati and 43 other schools for their participation in a program that encourages diverse people to get doctoral degrees in business.

The Friday announcement of the federal civil rights investigation follow another probe of OSU and UC that began earlier in March for alleged antisemitism on campus.

The investigations come after the election of President Donald Trump, who has criticized progressive or “woke” movements on U.S. campuses.

The U.S. Department of Education is focused on removing diversity, equity and inclusion across America’s college campuses.

Trump has signed a series of executive orders aimed at eliminating DEI. The agency in February sent college administrators a “Dear Colleague” letter warning that schools are on notice and should scrub racial diversity programs that could violate a 2023 U.S. Supreme Court decision against race-based admissions.

OSU, as a result of that letter, eliminated two diversity offices and reorganized a third.

In Friday’s investigation announcement, OSU, UC and the 43 other schools – mostly large flagship public state universities, but also Ivy League schools such as Yale and Cornell – were accused of violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 for working with The PhD Project.

According to its website, the 30-year-old PhD Project identifies diverse candidates for doctoral degrees in business. The goal is for diverse students to see themselves represented in their professors, whose encouragement and mentorship could inspire a new generation of business leaders.

“Business needs the talents of many outstanding professionals,” the website says. “Students deserve to be confident that their unique viewpoints are valued and that everyone should have the opportunity to succeed.”

On Monday, The PhD Project sent Cleveland.com/ The Plain Dealer a statement saying it has broadened membership.

“This year, we have opened our membership application to anyone who shares that vision,” the statement said. “The PhD Project was founded with the goal of providing more role models in the front of business classrooms, which remains our goal today.”

But the U.S. Department of Education accuses The PhD Project of limiting participation based on race.

Education Secretary Linda McMahon said in the investigation announcement that her department is working to “reorient civil rights enforcements to ensure all students are protected from illegal discrimination.”

“Students must be assessed according to merit and accomplishment, not prejudged by the color of their skin,” she said. “We will not yield on this commitment.”

OSU spokesman Chris Booker said in an email Monday that all qualified candidates can get a doctorate degree.

“Ohio State does not discriminate on the basis of race, ethnicity or any other protected class, and our PhD programs are open to all qualified applicants,” he said.

Cleveland.com/ The Plain Dealer reached out to UC for a response to the investigation.