

Equal Protection Project v. Seattle University

Case Particulars

TRIBUNAL

Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights

DATE FILED

June 4, 2025

DOCKET NO.

OCR Case Number 10-25-2238

CASE STATUS

OCR Complaint Filed

Case Overview

On June 4, 2025, the Equal Protection Project (EPP) filed a Civil Rights Complaint with the US. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) against Seattle University (SU) "for discrimination in two (2) scholarships and one (1) program based on race, color, national origin, sex, or both, in violation of Title VI and Title IX, respectively."

The Complaint continues:

SU has a heavy institutional focus on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA). As the university states, "Diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility efforts throughout

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of color,” the fund’s eligibility criteria do not restrict applications to any specific racial or ethnic group of students, unlike at SU.

SU’s focus on DEIA has resulted in discriminatory scholarships and a program in which the university promotes exclusionary criteria.

According to the SU website, the following scholarships and program are currently active. Each violates either Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (“Title VI”), Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (“Title IX”), or both, by unlawfully excluding students based on race, color, national origin, and/or sex[.]

EPP’s Complaint then uses SU’s own website to explain the discriminatory nature of the challenged scholarships and program.

Following that, the Complaint explains why the challenged scholarships and program violate federal civil rights laws:

The scholarships and program identified above violate either Title VI, by discriminating on the basis of race, skin color, or national origin, or Title IX, by discriminating on the basis of sex, or both.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act prohibits intentional discrimination on the basis of race, color or national origin in any “program or activity” that receives federal financial assistance. See 42 U.S.C. § 2000d. The term “program or activity” means “all of the operations ... of a college, university, or other postsecondary institution, or a public system of higher education.” See 42 U.S.C. § 2000d-4a(2)(A); *Rowles v. Curators of the Univ. of Mo.*, 983 F.3d 345, 355 (8th Cir. 2020) (“Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race in federally funded programs,” and thus applies to universities receiving federal financial assistance). As SU receives federal funds, it is subject to Title VI...

Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education. The statute provides: “No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation

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The Complaint then summarizes and requests that OCR take action:

SU's explicit race, color, national origin, and/or sex-based scholarships and program are presumptively invalid; SU's offering, promotion, and administration of these programs violates federal civil rights statutes...

The Office for Civil Rights has the power and obligation to investigate SU's role in creating, funding, promoting and administering these scholarships and program as well as the duty to impose whatever remedial relief is necessary to hold it accountable for this unlawful conduct. This includes, if necessary, imposing fines, initiating administrative proceedings to suspend or terminate federal financial assistance and referring the case to the Department of Justice for judicial proceedings to enforce the rights of the United States under federal law. After all, "[t]he way to stop discrimination ... is to stop discriminating[.]" *Parents Involved in Cmty. Sch. v. Seattle Sch. Dist. No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701, 748 (2007).

Accordingly, we respectfully ask that the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights promptly open a formal investigation, impose such remedial relief as the law permits for the benefit of those who have been illegally excluded from SU's various scholarships and program based on discriminatory criteria, and ensure that all ongoing and future scholarships and programming at SU comport with the federal civil rights laws.

OCR is evaluating EPP's Complaint against SU for further action.

Case Documents

- **EPP OCR Complaint v. Seattle University**

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- **Legal watchdog says Seattle U. violated federal law with discriminatory scholarships**, Brendan McDonald, Campus Reform (June 17, 2025)
- **Seattle University faces federal civil rights complaint over Costco-sponsored DEI scholarships**, Ari Hoffman, The Post Millennial (June 12, 2025)
- **Costco-Affiliated Scholarship and Others At Seattle U Challenged By Equal Protection Project**, William A. Jacobson, Legal Insurrection (June 8, 2025)
- **EXCLUSIVE: Seattle University Hit With Federal Complaint Over Costco-Backed DEI Scholarship**, Spencer Lindquist, Daily Wire (June 7, 2025)

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