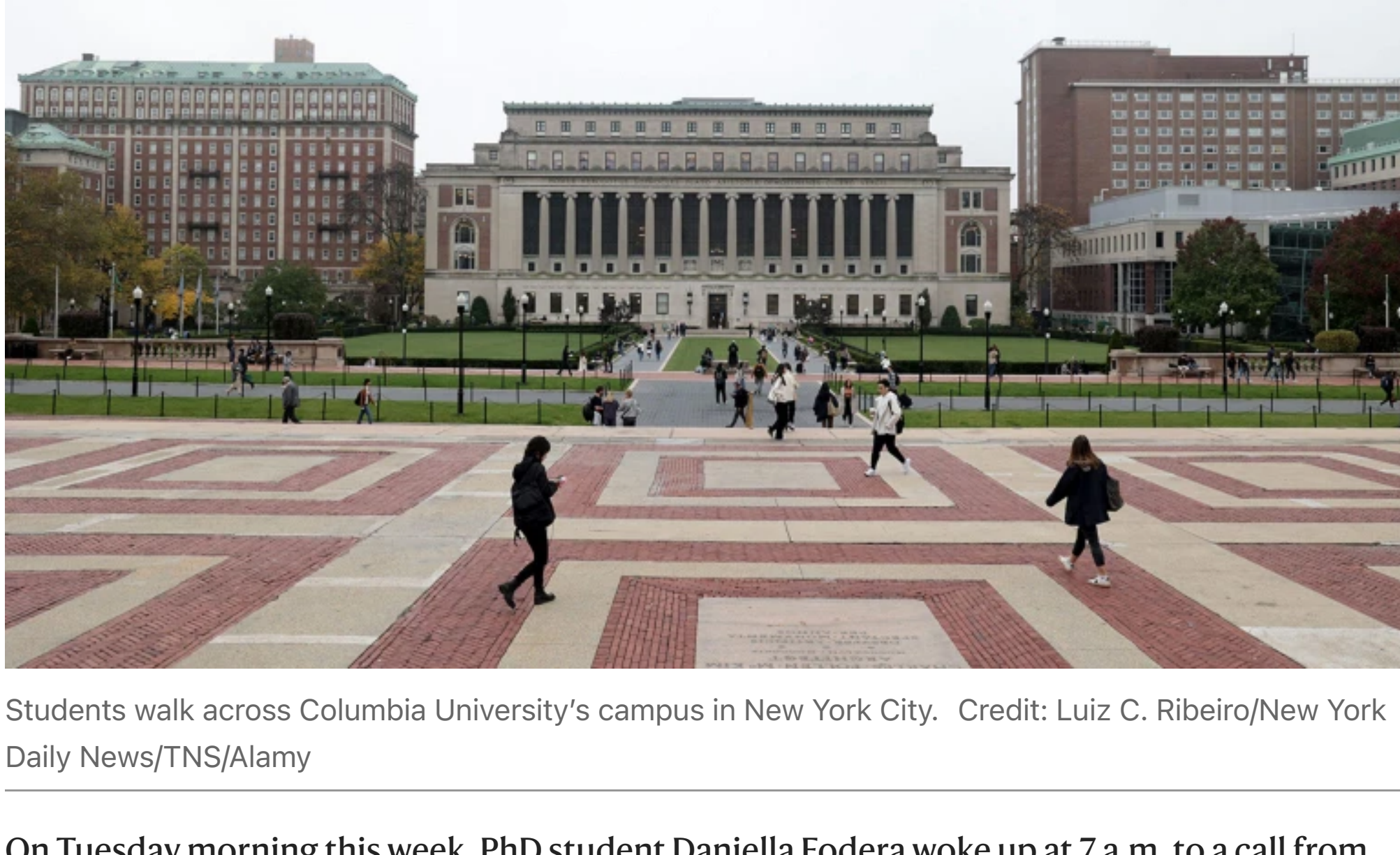
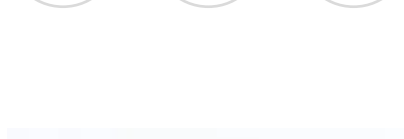


‘My career is over’: Columbia University scientists hit hard by Trump team’s cuts

The US government has begun slashing US\$400 million in research grants at Columbia University over pro-Palestinian campus protests.

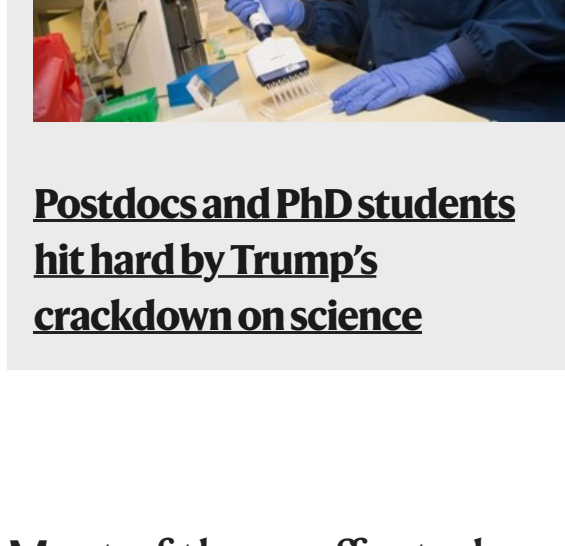
By [Humberto Basilio](#)



Students walk across Columbia University’s campus in New York City. Credit: Luiz C. Ribeiro/New York Daily News/TNS/Alamy

On Tuesday morning this week, PhD student Daniella Fodera woke up at 7 a.m. to a call from the head of her research laboratory in Columbia University’s Department of Biomedical Engineering, delivering devastating news. Her F31 fellowship, a research training grant that provides the majority of her annual income, had been terminated.

“It was traumatic,” Fodera says. “I immediately just broke into tears.”



Postdocs and PhD students hit hard by Trump’s crackdown on science

Fodera, who studies fibroids in the uterus – non-cancerous growths that affect 70–80% of women by the age of 50, and can cause severe pain and infertility – is just one of numerous scientists affected by the decision of US President Donald Trump’s administration to cancel US\$400 million in federal grants and contracts to Columbia, located in New York City.

Announced on 7 March, the move, Trump’s team said, stemmed from the university’s “continued inaction in the face of persistent harassment of Jewish students” and that more cancellations “are expected to follow”.

Most of those affected are researchers and students whose grants and fellowships come from the US National Institutes of Health (NIH), the world’s largest funder of biomedical research. The agency announced on Monday that it was terminating more than \$250 million in funding – including more than 400 research grants – to Columbia.

Several university lab leaders, PhD students and postdocs have expressed concern to *Nature* about their future in science and their ability to support themselves and their families. Although a complete list of cancelled grants hasn’t been released, *Nature*’s reporting suggests that early-career scientists receiving NIH training grants such as F30, F31, R25 and T32 fellowships are heavily affected. Sources inside the NIH tell *Nature* that the lists of cancelled grants come from the agency’s Office of Extramural Research, which is in turn receiving them from the NIH’s parent agency, the US Department of Health and Human Services, in coordination with the US Department of Government Efficiency. Action on the lists is required immediately, often within the hour.

A spokesperson at Columbia told *Nature* that the university is in the process of reviewing termination notices and “cannot confirm how many grant cancellations have been received from federal agencies since March 7”. Still, she wrote, Columbia “pledges to work with the federal government to restore Columbia’s federal funding”.

Losses for the public

Jamie Daw, a lab leader at Columbia’s Mailman School of Public Health, was also taken by surprise when the grant-termination news arrived. Daw, who studies how policies affect the ability of women of reproductive age and pregnant people to access health services, got the e-mail on Monday night.



US universities curtail PhD admissions amid Trump science funding cuts

The university stated that her grant – which supported around 20 people – had been cancelled with immediate effect, and that she needed to stop her work and notify collaborators both inside and outside Columbia.

“It hurts,” Daw says. “We’re really trying to do work in the public interest – we’re working to improve the US maternal mortality crisis.” (Maternal mortality rates in the United States are high compared with in other high-income nations, particularly among Black women.)

Some postdoctoral fellows at Columbia are protected from losing their positions despite a lack of funding because they are part of a union that has an agreement with the university. It is therefore the responsibility of university staff members such as lab leaders to try to find funding for those postdocs that have their grants terminated, says Sherida de Leeuw, a chair of the union.

“If I did not have that protection, my last pay cheque would have been two weeks ago and I would be out on the streets now,” says Columbia postdoc Gordon Petty, who was notified on Tuesday morning that his T32 training grant to study schizophrenia was cancelled. “It is hard to know what the immediate fallout of this will be, but at this point I believe my academic career is effectively over,” he says.



Demonstrators barricaded themselves in a Columbia University academic building during a pro-Palestinian protest in April 2024. Credit: Alex Kent/Getty

Columbia’s woes have their roots in campus protests that broke out after Israel invaded Gaza following the 7 October 2023 attacks by Hamas, an Islamist organization designated by some countries as a terrorist group. Twelve hundred people died in the Hamas attacks, and about 250 were taken hostage. Some students at Columbia and other universities across the United States have called Israel’s response disproportionate, pointing to more than 48,000 Palestinians who have died, according to Gaza’s health ministry. But some Jewish students have felt threatened by the protests.

Trump, who has long said that he wants to rid the US education system of “left-wing indoctrination”, wrote on his social-media network Truth Social on 4 March that “All federal funding will STOP for any College, School, or University that allows illegal protests.”

By Monday, the US Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights had sent letters to 60 universities, including Columbia, warning them of potential enforcement actions if they do not “fulfill their obligations to protect Jewish students on campus”.

Columbia, where protests were particularly intense and where New York City police were called in to break up demonstrations, is the first to be affected by the campaign.

Caught in the crossfire

Researchers and students at Columbia told *Nature* that statements about protecting Jewish students by the Trump administration seem like an excuse to justify its ongoing attacks on science and elite universities.



Scientists will not be silenced; thousands protest Trump research cuts

A Jewish PhD student at Columbia’s Irving Medical Center, who asked for anonymity out of fear of retaliation, told *Nature* their own grant is at risk of being cancelled and that they knew of at least four other Jewish students who lost their grants in the preceding three days.

“It’s completely unfair” that this is being done in the name of protecting against antisemitism, the student says. “It’s frustrating, my community of Jewish students and grad students are furious.”

The US Department of Education and the NIH did not respond to *Nature*’s requests for comment. The White House pointed *Nature* to a letter sent to Columbia by the Department of Education on 13 March. In it, the department lays out preconditions for continuing federal funding negotiations, including the university enforcing disciplinary policies against student protestors such as expelling them, and the university reforming its admissions process.

Four days after announcing the grant terminations for Columbia, the Trump administration also cancelled more than \$800 million in grants to Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. Those cuts don’t target antisemitism, but instead research projects that were being done in conjunction with the US Agency for International Development, which runs overseas health programmes and disaster-relief efforts, which the administration has said is wasteful. In response, the university announced yesterday that it would be cutting 2,000 jobs.

Although it is too early to know what the long-term consequences of these grant actions will be, for scientists, the current situation is like being a “bystander” in the crossfire of a political battle, says Dietrich Egli, a molecular biologist also at Columbia’s Irving Medical Center. It’s hard to understand why efforts to study and cure disease are caught up in it, he adds. “Patients are coming to the medical campus for their treatment, are waiting for research progress to solve their problems, and are not seeking to get involved in any fight other than that.”

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With additional reporting from Max Kozlov.

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