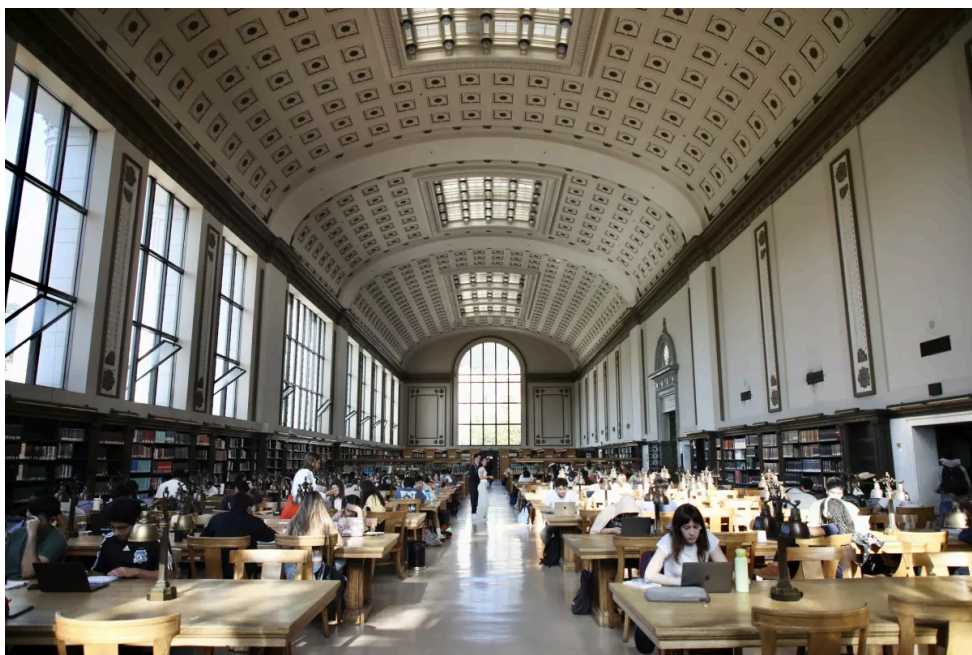


CALIFORNIA

UC Berkeley law professors take on a case for colleagues: Fighting Trump research cuts



UC Berkeley students study in the university's Doe Library. (Apolline Guillerot-Malick / SOPA Images/LightRocket via Getty Images)



By Jaweed Kaleem

Staff Writer | [✕ Follow](#)

June 25, 2025 3 AM PT

- UC researchers fight Trump cuts in federal court and get an early win.
- They got help from prominent UC Berkeley law school colleagues who pressed their case.

Amid an avalanche of lawsuits in which [universities and states are fighting](#) the Trump administration over slashing research funding, a significant early win this week in California stands out.

Six individual UC arts, science and medical researchers banded together to fight cancellations to their at times relatively small, but distinct federally funded studies: examining racial equity in education, assessing health risks to racial minorities who face wildfire smoke, evaluating the role of Greek Orthodox Christians in Istanbul in the 19th century.

Lacking the power of big institutional legal backing to pursue their case, they got help from two of their UC Berkeley colleagues to personally make their case: [Erwin Chemerinsky](#), dean of the law school and an

expert in constitutional law, and [Claudia Polsky](#), former California deputy attorney general-turned-UC law professor.

The result?

A federal judge has not only ordered the Trump administration to restore millions of dollars in UC grants, but also said the case could proceed as a class-action suit, opening it to UC researchers statewide.



CALIFORNIA

Trump sues to end college tuition benefits for undocumented students. Could California be next?

June 23, 2025

Neeta Thakur, a UC San Francisco associate professor and physician whose \$1.3-million grant to study how wildfire smoke affected millions of California emergency room patients was canceled in April with \$700,000 left to spend, called the judge's decision "heartening." Thakur, whose work was funded by the

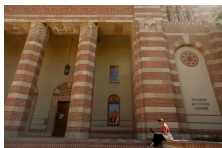
Environmental Protection Agency, said she was “cautiously optimistic, knowing this was one step in the right direction. We will see how the case unfolds as it moves forward.”

San Francisco-based Judge Rita F. Lin of the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California said in orders late Monday that the federal government engaged in “quintessential viewpoint discrimination” when it rescinded funding this year to the researchers at Thakur’s campus and UC Berkeley.

Lin issued a preliminary injunction blocking the Trump administration from halting grants to the researchers who sued the Environmental Protection Agency, National Endowment for the Humanities and National Science Foundation.

And because she approved a class-action suit, the judge said the government must restore virtually all grants from the three agencies to researchers at any University of California campus that saw their funding discontinued after Trump’s inauguration if projects

were flagged over [diversity-related topics](#) or cut off via form letters that did not contain specific reasons for funding halts.



CALIFORNIA

How California schools, colleges are responding to Trump's DEI crackdown

Feb. 25, 2025

It is unclear how many grants or the dollar amount the case will cover.

Overall, UC received more than \$4 billion in federal grants last year, with \$2.6 billion coming from the National Institutes of Health. The second largest federal source — at more than \$524 million — was the National Science Foundation. There were millions of dollars in grants from the EPA and National Endowment for the Humanities.

Trump administration filings in the case and other litigation have shown that a vast swath of cancellations took place this year using keyword searches related to

“diversity,” “equity” and “inclusion” — or were slashed via generic agency letters.

“The record reflects that the challenged grant terminations were likely performed en masse, without individualized analysis, and without providing grantees with reasoned explanation for the terminations,” Lin said in her order.

The judge said she was open to expanding the class to include recipients of grants from other federal departments and agencies if more researchers join the suit.



CALIFORNIA

FOR SUBSCRIBERS

As college graduates hit the job market, here are the lowest- and highest-paying majors

June 17, 2025

Reached Tuesday, a spokesperson for the National Science Foundation declined to comment and an EPA spokesperson said the agency was “reviewing the

decision.” A request to the National Endowment for the Humanities was not returned.

Chemerinsky, who argued the case at a hearing Friday, said in an email that the judge’s order was “a clear and very detailed explanation of why the arbitrary cutoff of funds to researchers in the University of California was unconstitutional and violated federal law.”

Polsky, the UC Berkeley Environmental Law Clinic director who spearheaded the suit, said she expected lawyers to make filings addressing grant cuts by other agencies in order to expand the class action to a wider group of UC faculty.

“It will not be hard for us to do what will be required of us to expand this to many agencies,” Polsky said. “It will not be difficult for plaintiffs to produce evidence that numerous agencies terminated UC grants on an unlawful basis.”

The judge told federal lawyers to submit a report to the court by June 30 “confirming that all steps to comply

with the preliminary injunction have been completed or, in the event that has not occurred, an explanation of why it was not feasible and a description of the steps that have been taken thus far.”

The suit is one of dozens filed against the Trump administration over grant terminations — but one of the few to come directly from researchers.

The Trump administration said in court filings and at the hearing that the case was in the wrong venue and should be at the Court of Federal Claims. A Justice Department lawyer, Jason Altabet, said the professors did not have standing to sue because they received the grants via UC, which he said was a “third party” that passed the funds on to the professors.

Lin did not buy the arguments.

“It’s hard to imagine who would be more affected by the grant terminations than the researchers who applied for the grants and are conducting the research,” she said.

Chemerinsky, who specializes in the 1st Amendment and constitutional law, also argued against the government's position.

“The Supreme Court has always said that an economic standing is sufficient.... The grants functionally are to the researchers,” he said in court Friday.

In addition to Chemerinsky and Polsky, the researchers are represented by the San Francisco law firm Lief Cabraser Heimann and Bernstein as well as Farella Braun and Martel.

Other challenges to Trump's funding cuts — including a multistate suit from California and other blue states opposing grant reductions from the National Institutes of Health — are ongoing in federal courts.

UC has joined or filed in support of several other suits protesting Trump cuts, including those addressing National Institutes of Health, National Science Foundation and Education Department reductions, but it was not part of the case Lin is overseeing.

“By virtue of our groundbreaking research, everyone has benefited from the positive impacts of the federal government’s strong partnership with American universities,” UC Senior Director of Strategic and Critical Communications Rachel Zaentz said in a statement. “The University of California was not a party to the suit, and we are evaluating the court’s ruling. Separately, the UC system is engaged in numerous legal and advocacy efforts to restore funding to vital research programs across the humanities, social sciences and STEM fields.”

More to Read

| *Voices*

Hiltzik: The UC faculty just won a big court victory over Trump. But why didn’t UC join their lawsuit?

Nov. 21, 2025



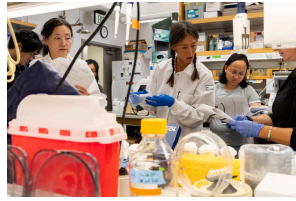
Judge blocks Trump administration push to fine UCLA \$1.2 billion for alleged antisemitism

Nov. 14, 2025



Federal judge orders Trump to restore \$500 million in frozen UCLA medical research grants

Sept. 22, 2025



Sign up for Essential California

The most important California stories and recommendations in your inbox every morning.

Sign Me Up



Jaweed Kaleem

Jaweed Kaleem is an education reporter at the Los Angeles Times, where he covers the University of California and higher education. He specializes in reporting on campus activism and culture, including issues on free speech, religion, race and politics. Kaleem previously worked for The Times as a Los Angeles-based national correspondent and a London-based

foreign correspondent. Follow him on Bluesky
[@jaweedkaleem.bsky.social](https://bsky.app/profile/jaweedkaleem.bsky.social) and X [@jaweedkaleem](https://twitter.com/jaweedkaleem).

Copyright © 2026, Los Angeles Times | [Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [CA Notice of Collection](#) | [Do Not Sell or Share My Personal Information](#)