

# OCR's Ph.D. Project Agreements Put Universities on Notice: Partnership Eligibility Rules Matter

*OCR agreements highlight that university partnership eligibility rules must align with Title VI and be clearly published.*

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, March 12, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights announced it secured 31 agreements with colleges and universities to end partnerships with The Ph.D. Project, stating the partnerships violated Title VI due to race-based eligibility restrictions. [You can read about it here.](#)



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## Opportunity Shouldn't Require Guesswork

**OCR agreements highlight why transparency matters in university partnerships.**

OCR agreements underscore that university partnership programs must clearly publish eligibility rules aligned with nondiscrimination standards.

The announcement is a reminder that civil-rights compliance includes not just admissions and discipline, but also school-sponsored programs and outside partnerships.

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Whatever a program's mission, eligibility should be clear, consistently applied, and aligned with published nondiscrimination standards.”

*Dan Rothfeld*

Students access opportunities - mentorships, pipeline programs, internships - through school-affiliated partnerships. When eligibility criteria are unclear or inconsistent with nondiscrimination policies, students can be unfairly excluded or discouraged from applying.

Transparency is the baseline: who can apply, why, and where to raise concerns.

Opportunity shouldn't require guesswork. Institutions should publish eligibility criteria in plain language, and students should be able to request clarification without fear of informal retaliation. Families can support students by encouraging early documentation and calm, written questions when an eligibility rule seems unclear.

“Students succeed when the rules of opportunity are transparent. Whatever a program’s mission, eligibility should be clear, consistently applied, and aligned with published nondiscrimination standards.” - [Dan Rothfeld](#), Co-Founder/COO, [The Advocacy Circle](#)

What families and students should do now

- If you’re applying to a school-sponsored program, save the published eligibility criteria.
- If criteria are unclear, ask for clarification in writing before you spend time and money applying.
- Keep copies of applications, notices, and communications.
- Know where the school publishes its nondiscrimination policy and complaint pathway.

About

The Advocacy Circle (TAC) is an education-advocacy platform built to help families and students organize, document, and act on their rights—especially in special education and school-discipline situations. TAC provides practical tools, templates, and step-by-step guidance designed to reduce confusion and improve follow-through.

Disclaimer

This press release is for general informational purposes only and does not constitute legal advice. No outcome is promised or guaranteed. Laws and procedures vary by jurisdiction and by school, and outcomes depend on specific facts.

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