



## CSU students discuss federal higher ed initiatives amid uncertainty

Chloe Waskey, Staff Reporter

March 13, 2025



Collegian | Abigail Burns

Colorado State University students and faculty and Fort Collins community members rally at the Lory Student Center Plaza for the nationwide Stand Up for Science protest March 7. “This is the worst existential threat that higher education has ever faced,” said Mary Van Buren, president of CSU’s chapter of the American Association of University Professors. “Whether we use critical race theory or the theory of evolution in our research, we must defend our right, our obligation to investigate, freely, the world around us.”

Less than two months into his second term, President Donald Trump has enacted a series of sweeping federal initiatives that could directly impact thousands of students at Colorado State University, leaving many uncertain about the future.

Students voiced concerns about potential federal funding cuts, the rollback of diversity, equity and inclusion measures and the broader societal impact of Trump’s policies.

Many worry that reductions in federal research grants could have significant consequences, especially in light of federal efforts to **slash funding** for the National Institutes of Health, the **U.S. Agency for International Development** and other agencies that support academic research. Last year, CSU received nearly **\$437 million** in federal grants, a critical source of funding that is now at risk.

In addition to defunding research efforts, Congress recently proposed a budget **bill** that would drastically reduce funding for colleges and remove tax provisions that are aimed at making college more affordable for students.

“I feel like CSU would try to give me a sense of security that I’m not on the chopping block, but I feel like when it gets down to it and I am on the chopping block, it will just be condolences, thoughts and prayers. They want us to still be engaged, but they’re not telling us what action plan they’re doing to keep us safe. Until I know what they’re doing to keep me safe, I will not feel protected.” *-Jebrail Dempsey, CSU student*

Jebrail Dempsey, a Ph.D. candidate and Associated Students of CSU director of diversity and inclusion, said she would not be able to finish her degree if the NIH stopped funding her, as her research on malaria currently relies on funds from USAID.

“It’s been tough trying to think of what the future may look like for me within science and within American society,” Dempsey said. “At the same time, I have to be living in the present and finishing the projects that I currently have and working with funding that I currently have.”

Dempsey and hundreds of other students **gathered** at the Lory Student Center Plaza on Friday, March 7, to support the national Stand Up for Science march, demonstrating CSU students’ support for research initiatives.

Zack Topham, a CSU student studying zoology, attended the march to advocate against partisan barriers to science.

“When it comes to conservation, that is one of the things, of course, that they’re gutting,” Topham said. “It’s important because we all live on this planet, and we all need to keep the planet livable.”

While anxieties over potential funding losses have risen, many students acknowledge that CSU must comply with federal guidelines in order to secure the money it relies on.

“I think a lot of people are really upset,” restoration ecology major Aisling Groarke said. “But it’s a land-grant university. It is literally funded by the government, so I really feel like there’s not much (CSU) can do. Like, if there are new directives that come out, they can’t follow them.”

On several occasions, the Trump administration has attempted to halt funding to universities on partisan grounds. Many of these orders have been stopped by the federal judiciary, but universities across the nation have already begun to **prepare for budget cuts** by reducing admissions, inciting layoffs, scaling back research and more.

CSU has engaged in preliminary action as well, although it is unclear to what extent. Several students have **raised concerns** that the university may be attempting to scale back DEI initiatives in order to comply with the **Dear Colleague letter** that was issued Feb. 14, but CSU President Amy Parsons said in a Feb. 20 **statement** that this is not yet the case.

“It’s really disappointing to see when no action is really being taken against CSU directly, and they’re still taking all these resources that students actively use,” said Fiona Miller, ASCSU associate senator for the Asian Pacific American Cultural Center. “I’ve also heard a lot of other people that feel like the administration isn’t really telling them everything.”

DEI policies have been a key target of the Trump administration’s funding cuts, alongside past student activism surrounding the Israel-Hamas War. On March 7, the White House **canceled** \$400 million in federal funding to Columbia University, citing its involvement in last year’s pro-Palestine movement — a directive that has since triggered **hiring freezes** across multiple Ivy League institutions.

However, the federal government has not yet passed any legally sound resolutions that would restrict DEI, activism or federal funding at CSU. Given CSU’s **Principles of Community** and its current lack of restrictions on DEI initiatives, some students are upset that the university has not reaffirmed its commitment to protecting vulnerable groups over securing federal assistance.

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Other students doubt that CSU would fully eliminate DEI processes, predicting that the university will comply with federal directives on paper while maintaining the same values in practice.

“I don’t think they’re just going to change philosophies overnight, even if they’re not officially allowed to do (DEI) anymore,” CSU student Brianna Pernicka said.

Uncertainty over how the university will respond to federal DEI initiatives led to a student-organized **march** and a **sit-in**, both urging the administration to explicitly commit to protecting CSU’s Cultural Resource Centers and inclusive values.

The administration has since stated that it values CRCs and believes they are in compliance with the law but noted that changes may occur as federal guidelines are updated.

“I like some of the words that ... admin is saying, like saying that they’re not going to get rid of DEI things and are just going to change the wording around it,” Miller said. “But it also feels like they’re not doing enough, and they’re also not really holding themselves to the words they’re saying to us in these (ASCSU) meetings.”

In addition to the potential direct impact on students, many fear that the Trump administration’s measures are fostering a contentious environment that will ultimately fuel bigotry and division.

“The executive orders are really going to encourage a more hateful culture in the U.S., and I am concerned about that,” Miller said. “I worry for my friends and my family that live in the D.C. area because of that promotion of hate toward marginalized groups.”

Reach Chloe Waskey at [news@collegian.com](mailto:news@collegian.com) or on social media [@CSUCollegian](https://twitter.com/CSUCollegian).

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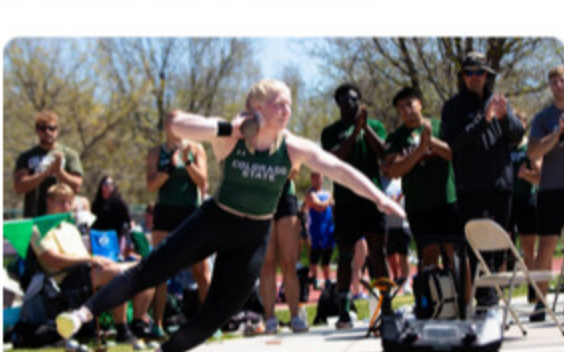


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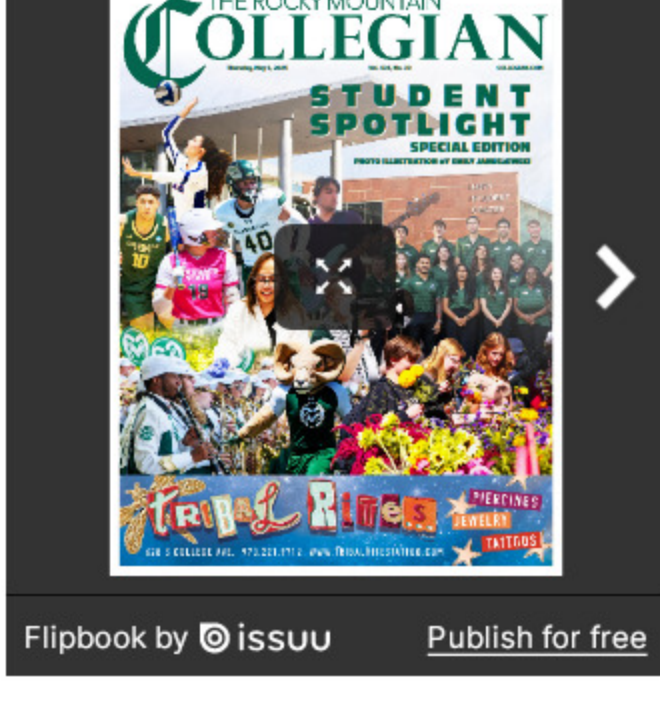


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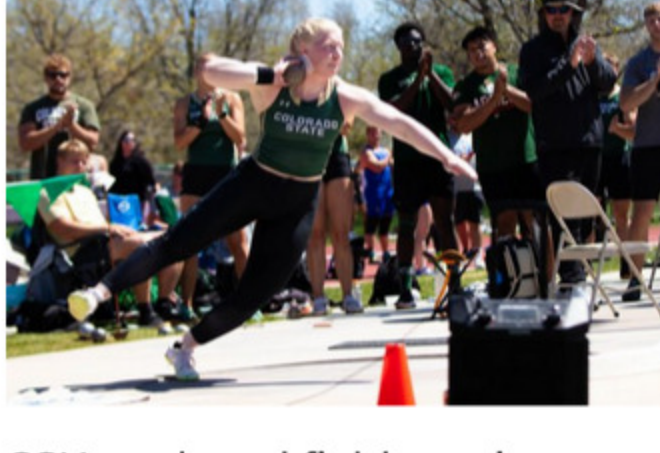
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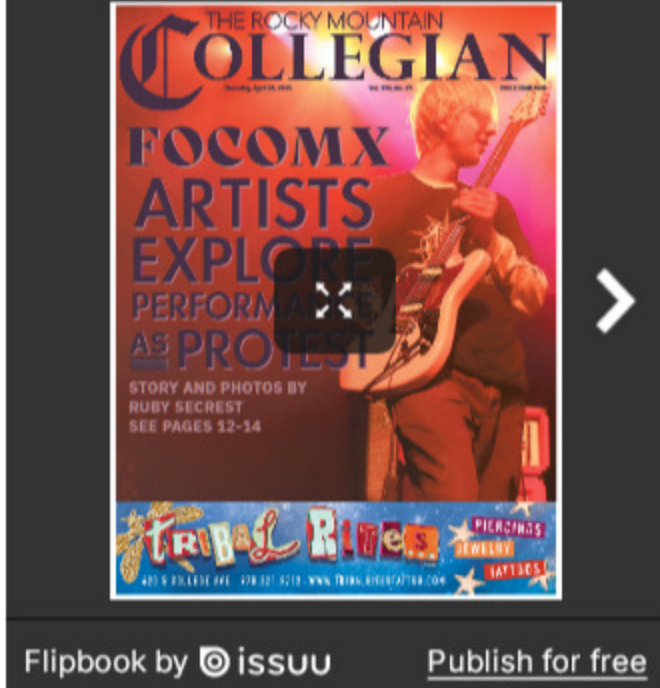
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