

**From:** OCR  
**To:** OCR Seattle  
**Cc:** (b)(6); (b)(7)(A);  
**Subject:** FW: Request for investigation into antisemitism at Whitman College  
**Date:** Wednesday, November 22, 2023 7:35:03 AM  
**Attachments:** OCR - Whitman College 11.21.23.pdf

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November 22, 2023

Dear OCR Seattle Office,

The attachment above and email below are being forwarded to your office for review and appropriate handling.

Thank you,

OPEN Center Customer Service Team

Office for Civil Rights

U.S. Department of Education

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**From:** (b)(6); (b)(7)(A); (b)(7)(C)  
**Sent:** Tuesday, November 21, 2023 7:24 PM  
**To:** OCR <OCR@ed.gov>  
**Subject:** Request for investigation into antisemitism at Whitman College

**CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organization. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.**

You don't often get email from (b)(6); (b)(7)(A); (b)(7)(C) [Learn why this is important](#)

Dear OCR,

Please see the attached PDF request for an OCR investigation into pervasive and persistent antisemitism at Whitman College. In addition, the text of the request is included below. We look forward to hearing from you in a timely fashion.

November 21, 2023

REQUESTING HELP: Whitman College

Dear OCR,

Since the Hamas attacks on Israel on October 7, President Bolton and other senior leaders at Whitman College have perpetuated a campus environment that is discriminatory, threatening, and hostile for Jewish people.

We, the undersigned, including long-standing faculty and staff, implore the OCR to help us. The college leadership has allowed Whitman to become a place where Jewish people do not feel safe coming to campus, do not want to come to work, and do not want to interact with members of the campus community in the context of the discharge of their jobs. We have not been given the opportunity to freely choose where, when, and how we want to work. Rather than addressing key issues of antisemitism and campus climate, the sole work accommodation has been to teach or work from home on zoom. This results in isolation while the rampant antisemitism is allowed to go unchecked. We implore you to open an investigation as to why Whitman College has allowed our campus to become one where antisemitic hostility is allowed to exist without regard for Jewish people impacted.

We have a repository of emails, images, news coverage and other documentation

that shows the incredibly pervasive and persistent messaging that has filled our campus that we would be happy to share with the Department if necessary. A few of the many harms that we have witnessed and experienced include the following: harassment and abuse of staff by members of our campus community, students leaving campus because of rampant harassment, faculty leaving campus because of rampant harassment, and other significant harms.

What is additionally upsetting to all of us is that we believe that the campus climate and culture that has taken over since early October could have been completely prevented. During Spring 2023, several of us noticed antisemitic messages around campus and reported them to senior leadership and indicated that antisemitism was likely to increase in the coming year. We met with senior leadership and offered many ways the college could take steps to utilize best practices at other higher education institutions to get ahead of antisemitic language and actions on campus. Since there was no one in the senior leadership with specific experience in addressing antisemitism, including the Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion, we asked college leaders to reach out to the many, many experts around the country – many of whom we have personal and professional connections with – to help.

Unconscionably, senior leadership took no steps. To date, we have not heard that the college has reached out to anyone we suggested. To date, the college has not developed any plans to implement any of the suggestions we offered. To date, the college still has not even developed a definition of antisemitism. To date, the college has not done anything to address the antisemitism that is pervasive on campus. The President has repeatedly acknowledged to some of the cosigners that harm was caused and that the harms caused were a result of her actions or inactions. At the time of this filing, nothing has been communicated to us.

OCR's May 25, 2023 "Dear Colleague" letter identifies how to assess whether a hostile environment exists on a campus. We believe that college leadership here has allowed a hostile antisemitic environment to take over our campus. We have all experienced this. We have spoken with many students who have experienced this as well. While we are writing to OCR as employees of Whitman College we can also confidently say that an investigation will allow students to speak – students who feel too scared to raise these concerns to faculty or campus leaders because they fear harm and retribution or worse.

We are grateful that OCR has followed through on your stated goals of addressing the worsening situation for Jewish people in higher education. It is horrifying to think how these conditions might get even worse without the federal government stepping in.

(in alphabetical order)

(b)(6); (b)(7)(A); (b)(7)(C)



(b)(6); (b)(7)(A); (b)(7)(C)

November 21, 2023

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(in alphabetical order)

(b)(6); (b)(7)(A); (b)(7)(C)



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS

915 2nd AVENUE, ROOM 3310  
SEATTLE, WA 98174-1009

REGION X

ALASKA  
AMERICAN SAMOA  
GUAM  
HAWAII  
IDAHO  
MONTANA  
NEVADA  
NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS  
OREGON  
WASHINGTON

December 8, 2023

Via E-mail Only to: [sbolton@whitman.edu](mailto:sbolton@whitman.edu)

Sarah Bolton  
President  
Whitman College  
345 Boyer Avenue  
Walla Walla, Washington 99362

Re: Whitman College  
OCR Reference No. 10242045

Dear President Bolton:

The purpose of this letter is to notify you that the U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has received a complaint against Whitman College (College). The Complainant alleges that the College discriminated against faculty, staff, and students on the basis of their national origin (shared Jewish ancestry) by failing to respond to incidents of harassment on the College campus in spring 2023 and since October 2023.

OCR has the authority to enforce Title VI of the Civil Rights of 1964 (Title VI), 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq., and its implementing regulation, at 34 C.F.R. Part 100, which prohibit discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin, including shared ancestry, in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education. The College receives federal financial assistance from this Department; therefore, it is required to comply with these laws.

OCR is opening for investigation the following issue:

Whether the College failed to respond to alleged harassment of faculty, staff and students based on national origin (shared Jewish ancestry) in a manner consistent with the requirements of Title VI.

The complaint may be resolved in a variety of ways, including a voluntary written agreement in which the College agrees to take remedial actions that OCR determines fully resolve the complaint consistent with applicable legal standards. Where

*The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.*

appropriate, the complaint may also be resolved through mediation facilitated by OCR. If a resolution of the complaint is not reached before OCR completes its investigation, OCR will make findings and a determination as to whether the College is in compliance with applicable legal standards and, in the event that non-compliance is found, OCR will propose that the College enter into a voluntary resolution agreement in which the College commits to take specific steps to comply with applicable laws and regulations. Additional information about OCR’s case processing procedures can be found at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/complaints-how.html>.

Opening this investigation in no way implies that OCR has made a determination with regard to its merit. During the investigation, OCR is a neutral fact-finder, collecting and analyzing relevant evidence from the complainant, the College, and other sources, as appropriate. OCR will conduct its investigation in accordance with the provisions of Article III of OCR’s Case Processing Manual available at <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/ocrcpm.html>

As part of its investigation, OCR is requesting information from the College. OCR is authorized to obtain information pursuant to 34 C.F.R. § 100.6(c). OCR is entitled to access information that may otherwise be protected as private or confidential as provided for by 34 C.F.R. §§ 99.31(a)(3)(iii) and 99.35(a)(1). Please submit the following documents and information by December 27, 2023:

1. The name, job title, and contact information of the College’s point of contact for this matter.
2. A copy of the College’s policies and procedures relating to discrimination and harassment on the basis of national origin, including shared ancestry.
3. A copy of all documents relating to reports or complaints of national origin discrimination, including harassment, for the 2022-23 and 2023-24 academic years, including but not limited to, e-mail, memoranda, investigative reports, witness statements, determinations, logs, forms, meeting minutes, notes, and other records, whether generated or received by the College.
4. All other information the College believes will assist OCR in resolution of the issue OCR is opening for investigation, such as a narrative response to the issue opened for investigation.

To the extent that any responsive documents or information are published on the College’s publicly accessible website, the response may consist of the exact web



address where the relevant information is located. To the extent that other documents or information are available in electronic format, please provide them electronically.

Please be advised that the College must not harass, coerce, intimidate, discriminate, or otherwise retaliate against an individual because that individual asserts a right or privilege under a law enforced by OCR or files a complaint, testifies, assists, or participates in a proceeding under a law enforced by OCR. If this happens, the individual may file a retaliation complaint with OCR.

Under the Freedom of Information Act, it may be necessary to release this document and related correspondence and records upon request. If OCR receives such a request, we will seek to protect personally identifiable information that could reasonably be expected to constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy if released, to the extent provided by law.

If you have any questions about this matter, you may contact me by e-mail at [Lauren.Boothe@ed.gov](mailto:Lauren.Boothe@ed.gov) or by phone at telephone at (202) 987-1250.

Sincerely,

(b)(6); (b)(7)(A); (b)(7)(C)

Lauren Boothe  
Attorney