



THE EQUAL PROTECTION PROJECT
A Project of the Legal Insurrection Foundation
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September 18, 2025

BY EMAIL (OCR@ed.gov)

Craig Trainor, Acting Assistant Secretary
Office for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

BY EMAIL (OCR.DC@ed.gov)

Washington DC (Metro)
Office for Civil Rights
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202-1475

**Re: Civil Rights Complaint Against Craven Community College Regarding
Discriminatory Scholarship Programs**

Dear Mr. Trainor and OCR Staff:

This is a federal civil rights complaint pursuant to the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights ("OCR") discrimination complaint resolution procedures.¹ We write on behalf of the Equal Protection Project of the Legal Insurrection Foundation, a non-profit that, among other things, seeks to ensure equal protection under the law and opposes unlawful discrimination in any form.

We bring this civil rights complaint against Craven Community College ("Craven"), a public university, for discrimination in five (5) scholarships and programs based on race, color, or national origin, in violation of Title VI, and based on sex, in violation of Title IX. Because

¹ See 42 U.S.C. § 2000d-1; 34 C.F.R. §§ 100.7, 100.8, and 100.9.

Craven is a public institution these discriminatory programs also violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

The Craven Community College Foundation (CCCF) provides scholarships and financial awards for new, returning, and graduating Craven.² Applications open in January and only one application per category is required to be considered for multiple scholarships. Students are encouraged to apply online through links provided on the college's website. Craven is involved in promoting, facilitating, administering, and enabling the scholarships even if the funding is provided by CCCF.

**Course Catalog**

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Craven Community College Scholarships

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The **Craven Community College Foundation** offers a variety of scholarships and financial awards established for new, returning, and graduating students. Recipients of these scholarships are selected based upon donor criteria, which could include demonstrated financial need, academic achievement, faculty recommendations, and the availability of scholarship funds. All scholarship forms are available in early January from the college website. Applicants are encouraged to [apply for scholarships online](#). Students need to file only one application for a given category of scholarships (one application will submit the student's name for consideration for many of the scholarships). There are many opportunities to get assistance with paying for college. Please review the College's website for more information.

Craven's General Scholarship applications should be completed by May 30, 2025 for the next academic year. Contact the Financial Aid Office for additional information and requirements at scholarships@cravencc.edu.

Tuition, Financial Aid, Scholarships, and Military Benefits

Tuition
College Fees
Course-Specific Fees

The scholarships listed below were offered to Craven students and applicants for admission for the 2025-2026 academic year, according to the Craven website, and violate Titles VI and/or IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (“Title VI”) and its implementing regulations³ by discriminating against students based on their race, color, national origin, or sex. Because Craven is a public institution, these discriminatory scholarships also violate the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

Each of the scholarships listed below was available for the 2025-2026 school year according to the Craven website with the general application period ending May 30, 2025.⁴

² <https://catalog.cravencc.edu/craven-community-college-scholarships> [<https://archive.is/wip/kDDdx>] (accessed September 10, 2025).

³ 42 U.S.C. § 2000d et seq.; 28 C.F.R. Part 100.

⁴ Emphasis (bold) for the discriminatory criteria. Links ‘live’ and in use as of September 17, 2025.

SCHOLARSHIPS THAT VIOLATE TITLE VI (1)

1. Herbert Lee and Rosa Bell Perry Memorial Scholarship

Link: <https://cravencc.academicworks.com/opportunities/3029>

Archived Link: <https://archive.ph/wip/kUBeN>

Discriminatory Requirement: “The scholarship recipient must be an **African American Student.**”

The screenshot shows a web page with a dark blue header containing a dropdown menu labeled "Opportunities". Below the header, the title "Herbert Lee and Rosa Bell Perry Memorial Scholarship" is displayed. The main content area lists eligibility requirements: "The scholarship recipient must be an African American Student", "Must carry an academic course load of at least 12 Credit Hours for Fall and Spring Semester", "Citizen of the United States of America, a resident of North Carolina and Craven County", "No less than a 2.5 GPA", "May not receive scholarship funds in combination with any Federal, State, or College administered scholarships that would exceed the total charges for tuition, fees, and required course materials", and "Scholarship is renewable". At the bottom, there are two sections: "Award" with the value "Varies" and "Deadline" with the date "05/30/2025".

▼ Opportunities

Herbert Lee and Rosa Bell Perry Memorial Scholarship

The scholarship recipient must be an African American Student
Must carry an academic course load of at least 12 Credit Hours for Fall and Spring Semester
Citizen of the United States of America, a resident of North Carolina and Craven County
No less than a 2.5 GPA
May not receive scholarship funds in combination with any Federal, State, or College administered scholarships that would exceed the total charges for tuition, fees, and required course materials
Scholarship is renewable

Award
Varies

Deadline
05/30/2025

SCHOLARSHIPS THAT VIOLATE BOTH TITLE VI AND TITLE IX (1)

2. R. Scott and Lisa Ralls Leadership Endowment

Link: <https://cravencc.academicworks.com/opportunities/2937>

Archived Link: <https://archive.is/c3kmc>

Discriminatory Requirement: “1st scholarship – **female student**; 2nd scholarship – **African American male.**”

The screenshot shows a web page with a dark blue header containing a dropdown menu labeled "Opportunities". Below the header, the title "R. SCOTT AND LISA RALLS LEADERSHIP ENDOWMENT" is displayed. The main content area lists eligibility requirements: "ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS: 1st scholarship – female student with a 2.0 GPA average or above; majoring in math and science; enrolled in 9 credits or above; and a US citizen and resident of NC. 2nd scholarship – African American male with 2.0 GPA or above; enrolled in 9 credit hours or above; US citizen and resident of NC; and involved in leadership activities." At the bottom, there are two sections: "Award" with the value "Varies" and "Deadline" with the date "05/30/2025".

▼ Opportunities

R. SCOTT AND LISA RALLS LEADERSHIP ENDOWMENT

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS: 1st scholarship – female student with a 2.0 GPA average or above; majoring in math and science; enrolled in 9 credits or above; and a US citizen and resident of NC. 2nd scholarship – African American male with 2.0 GPA or above; enrolled in 9 credit hours or above; US citizen and resident of NC; and involved in leadership activities.

Award
Varies

Deadline
05/30/2025

SCHOLARSHIPS THAT VIOLATE TITLE IX (3)

3. Coastal Women's Forum Scholarship

Link: <https://cravencc.academicworks.com/opportunities/2999>

Archived Link: <https://archive.is/EFgsp>

Discriminatory Requirement: “**female**; must be at least 25 years of age.”

▼ Opportunities	
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COASTAL WOMEN'S FORUM

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS: female; must be at least 25 years of age; full or part-time student; 3.0 GPA; must show financial need; cannot be an immediate family member of a Coastal Women's Forum member (mother, sister, daughter).
Student Recipient must be able to attend Coastal Womens Forum Lunch Meeting

Award
\$2,000.00

Deadline
05/30/2025

4. New Bern Woman's Club Educational Scholarship

Link: <https://cravencc.academicworks.com/opportunities/3045>

Archived Link: <https://archive.is/OCUeg>

Discriminatory Requirement: “**Female**”

▼ Opportunities	
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NEW BERN WOMAN'S CLUB MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS: female; 3.0 GPA; over 21 years of age; returning to school to improve life; must be employed part-time; Must have financial need.

Award
Varies

Deadline
05/30/2025

Supplemental Questions

1. Are you 25 years old or older?
2. Are you returning to school to improve your life circumstances?
3. Please explain how you are striving to overcome personal and/or social struggles.

5. P.E.O. Program for Continuing Education Scholarship

Link: <https://cravencc.academicworks.com/opportunities/2916>

Archived Link: <https://archive.is/40Lk0>

Discriminatory Requirement: “Female student.”

▼ Opportunities

P.E.O. PROGRAM FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP (BB)

ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS: must be a female student who is within two years of reaching their educational goal; has had at least 24 consecutive months as a non-student sometime in her adult life; must be a US or Canadian citizen; must have financial need (this is a need-based grant, and applicant must furnish Income and Expense Statement Form); must have a 2.0 GPA; must be selected by the Local Grant Committee for Chapter sponsorship; scholarship amount determined by a national committee who issues the grant.

Award
\$0.00

Deadline
05/30/2025

Supplemental Questions

1. Are you within two years of reaching your educational goal?
2. Please explain how you are striving to overcome personal and/or social struggles.

The Scholarships Listed Above Violate The Law

The scholarships identified above violate either Title VI, by discriminating on the basis of race, skin color, or national origin, or Title IX, by discriminating on the basis of sex, or both.⁵ Furthermore, because Craven is a public institution, such discrimination also violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Title IX prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education. The statute provides: “[n]o person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.” 20 U.S.C. § 1681(a). Accordingly, a school receiving federal funding may not administer scholarships, fellowships, or other forms of financial assistance that impose preferences or restrictions based on sex, except in limited exceptions that are not applicable here. *See* 34 C.F.R. § 106.37(a).

⁵ Although OCR does not enforce Title II of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that statute makes it unlawful to discriminate on the basis of race or color in a place of “public accommodation,” such as Craven. 42 U.S.C. § 2000(a)(a). These scholarships also violate Craven’s own nondiscrimination policy. *See* <https://cravencc.edu/sites/default/files/2021-08/Student-Rights-Responsibilities.pdf> [<https://archive.ph/wip/nYnYN>] (accessed September 17, 2025).

Restrictions that limit eligibility for scholarships based on sex are underinclusive, as they arbitrarily exclude students who would otherwise qualify. While sex-based classifications are subject to “heightened” scrutiny, *Sessions v. Morales-Santana*, 582 U.S. 47, 57 (2017); *United States v. Virginia*, 518 U.S. 515, 532–34 (1996), this standard—though less exacting than the strict scrutiny applied to race-based classifications—still requires an “exceedingly persuasive justification.” *Virginia*, 518 U.S. at 531. To meet this burden, the government must demonstrate “at least that the [challenged] classification serves important governmental objectives and that the discriminatory means employed are substantially related to the achievement of those objectives.” *Id.* at 533. Even if the classifications based on sex or other immutable characteristics were intended to further a compelling interest, discriminatory programs must involve “individualized consideration” and must apply criteria in a “nonmechanical way.” *Grutter*, 539 U.S. at 334.

Title VI prohibits intentional discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any “program or activity” that receives federal financial assistance. *See* 42 U.S.C. § 2000d. The term “program or activity” encompasses “all of the operations ... of a college, university, or other postsecondary institution, or a public system of higher education.” *See* 42 U.S.C. § 2000d-4a(2)(A). As noted in *Rowles v. Curators of the University of Missouri*, 983 F.3d 345, 355 (8th Cir. 2020), “Title VI prohibits discrimination on the basis of race in federally funded programs,” and therefore applies to universities receiving federal financial assistance. Because Craven receives and administers federal funds, it is subject to Title VI.⁶

Regardless of Craven’s reasons for offering, promoting, and administering such discriminatory scholarships, it is violating Title VI by doing so. It does not matter if the recipient of federal funding discriminates in order to advance a benign “intention” or “motivation.” *Bostock v. Clayton Cnty.*, 590 U.S. 644, 661 (2020) (“Intentionally burning down a neighbor’s house is arson, even if the perpetrator’s ultimate intention (or motivation) is only to improve the view.”); *accord Automobile Workers v. Johnson Controls, Inc.*, 499 U.S. 187, 199 (1991) (“the absence of a malevolent motive does not convert a facially discriminatory policy into a neutral policy with a discriminatory effect” or “alter [its] intentionally discriminatory character”). “Nor does it matter if the recipient discriminates against an individual member of a protected class with the idea that doing so might favor the interests of that class as a whole or otherwise promote equality at the group level.” *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President & Fellows of Harvard Coll.*, 600 U.S. 181, 289 (2023) (Gorsuch, J., concurring).

Expressed criteria can serve as “signals” of racial and sex-based preferences. As the Second Circuit recognized in *Ragin v. New York Times Co.*, 923 F.2d 995, 999–1000 (2d Cir. 1991), even subtle messaging can convey discriminatory preferences: “Ordinary readers may reasonably infer a racial message from advertisements that are more subtle than the hypothetical swastika or burning cross, and we read the word ‘preference’ to describe any ad that would discourage an ordinary reader of a particular race from answering it.”

⁶ *See* https://www.usaspending.gov/award/ASST_NON_P063P242856_091 [<https://archive.ph/gIraV>] (accessed on September 17, 2025).

As Craven is a public institution, its offering, promoting, and administering these discriminatory scholarships also violates the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In *Students for Fair Admissions*, the Supreme Court declared that “[e]liminating racial discrimination means eliminating all of it The guarantee of equal protection cannot mean one thing when applied to one individual and something else when applied to a person of another color. If both are not accorded the same protection, then it is not equal.” *Id.* at 206 (cleaned up). “Distinctions between citizens solely because of their ancestry [including race] are by their very nature odious to a free people whose institutions are founded upon the doctrine of equality.” *Id.* at 208. Consequently, “[a]ny exception to the Constitution’s demand for equal protection must survive a daunting two-step examination known . . . as strict scrutiny.” *Id.* at 208 (internal quotation marks and citation omitted). The scholarships at issue here cannot withstand that exacting standard.

Under strict scrutiny, suspect classifications “are constitutional only if they are narrowly tailored measures that further compelling governmental interests.” *Adarand Constructors, Inc. v. Peña*, 515 U.S. 200, 227 (1995). It is the government that bears the burden to prove “that the reasons for any [racial] classification [are] clearly identified and unquestionably legitimate.” *Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.*, 488 U.S. 469, 505 (1989). Here, Craven cannot carry its burden.

A “racial classification, regardless of purported motivation, is presumptively invalid and can be upheld only upon an extraordinary justification.” *Shaw v. Reno*, 509 U.S. 630, 643–44 (1993) (citation omitted). Here, Craven cannot demonstrate that restricting scholarships based on race, color, or national origin serves any legitimate governmental purpose, let alone an extraordinary one. Classifications based on immutable characteristics “are so seldom relevant to the achievement of any legitimate state interest” that government policies “grounded in such considerations are deemed to reflect prejudice and antipathy—a view that those in the burdened class are not as worthy or deserving as others.” *City of Cleburne v. Cleburne Living Ctr.*, 473 U.S. 432, 440 (1985).

The Supreme Court has recognized only two interests compelling enough to justify racial classifications. The first is remedying the effects of past de jure segregation or discrimination in the specific industry and locality at issue, where the government played a role. The second is “avoiding imminent and serious risks to human safety in prisons, such as a race riot.” *Students for Fair Admissions*, 600 U.S. at 207 (citation omitted). Neither applies here.

If the scholarships are intended to achieve racial balance, such an objective has been “repeatedly condemned as illegitimate” and “patently unconstitutional” by the Supreme Court. *Parents Involved in Cmty. Sch. v. Seattle Sch. Dist. No. 1*, 551 U.S. 701, 726, 730 (2007) (“Accepting racial balancing as a compelling state interest would justify the imposition of racial proportionality throughout American society, contrary to our repeated recognition that at the heart of the Constitution’s guarantee of equal protection lies the simple command that the Government must treat citizens as individuals, not as simply components of a racial, religious, sexual, or national class”) (cleaned up, citation omitted).

Further, a policy is not narrowly tailored if it is either overbroad or underinclusive in its use of racial classifications. *J.A. Croson Co.*, 488 U.S. at 506. Indeed, in *Students for Fair Admissions*, the Supreme Court found that similar categories as those used to determine eligibility for Craven’s scholarships were “imprecise,” “plainly overbroad,” “arbitrary,” “undefined” and “opaque,” 600 U.S. at 216-17,⁷ and declared that “it is far from evident ... how assigning students to these ... categories and making admissions decisions based on them furthers the educational benefits that the universities claim to pursue.” *Id.* at 216.

For a policy to satisfy narrow tailoring, the government must demonstrate “serious, good faith consideration of workable race-neutral alternatives,” *Grutter v. Bollinger*, 539 U.S. 306, 339 (2003), and show that “no workable race-neutral alternative” could achieve the purported compelling interest. *Fisher v. Univ. of Tex. at Austin*, 570 U.S. 297, 312 (2013). There is no evidence that such alternatives were ever considered here.

Craven’s explicit sex, race, ethnicity, and/or national origin-based scholarships are presumptively invalid, and since there is no compelling government justification for such invidious discrimination, Craven’s offering, promotion, and administration of these programs violates state and federal civil rights statutes and constitutional equal protection guarantees.

OCR Has Jurisdiction

Craven is a public entity and a recipient of federal funds, including from the U.S. Department of Education.⁸ It is therefore liable for violating Title VI, Title IX, and the Equal Protection Clause, and OCR therefore has jurisdiction over this complaint.

The Complaint Is Timely

This complaint is timely brought because it includes allegations of discrimination based on race, color, national origin, and/or sex that occurred within 180 days and that is ongoing.⁹

Request For Investigation And Enforcement

In *Richmond v. J. A. Croson Co.*, Justice Scalia aptly noted that “discrimination on the basis of race is illegal, immoral, unconstitutional, inherently wrong and destructive of a democratic society.” 488 U.S. at 505 (citation omitted). This is true regardless of which race suffers – discrimination against white applicants is just as unlawful as discrimination against black or other non-white applicants. As Justice Thomas correctly noted in *Students for Fair*

⁷ In his concurrence, Justice Thomas criticizes these categories as being “artificial.” *Students for Fair Admissions*, 600 U.S. at 276 (Thomas, J., concurring).

⁸ See https://www.usaspending.gov/award/ASST_NON_P063P242856_091 [<https://archive.ph/gIraV>] (accessed on September 17, 2025).

⁹ <https://catalog.cravencc.edu/craven-community-college-scholarships> [<https://archive.is/wip/kDDDx>] (accessed September 17, 2025).

Admissions, race-based admissions preferences “fly in the face of our colorblind Constitution and our Nation’s equality ideal” and “are plainly – and boldly – unconstitutional.” 600 U.S. at 287 (Thomas, J., concurring).

Because the discrimination outlined above is presumptively illegal, and since Craven cannot show any compelling government justification for it, the fact that it conditions eligibility for multiple scholarships on race, color, national origin, and sex violates federal civil rights statutes and constitutional equal protection guarantees.

The Office for Civil Rights has the power and obligation to investigate Craven’s role in promoting and administering these scholarships – and, given how many there are, to discern whether Craven is engaging in such discrimination in its other activities –and to impose whatever remedial relief is necessary to hold it accountable for that unlawful conduct. This includes, if necessary, imposing fines, initiating administrative proceedings to suspend or terminate federal financial assistance and referring the case to the Department of Justice for judicial proceedings to enforce the rights of the United States under federal law. After all, “[t]he way to stop discrimination ... is to stop discriminating[.]” *Parents Involved in Cmty. Sch.*, 551 U.S. at 748.

Accordingly, we respectfully ask that the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights promptly open a formal investigation, impose such remedial relief as the law permits for the benefit of those who have been illegally excluded from Craven’s various scholarships based on discriminatory criteria, and ensure that all ongoing and future scholarships and programming at Craven comports with the Constitution and federal civil rights laws.

Respectfully submitted,

/William A. Jacobson/

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