

Changing the climate on science: Nationwide movement pushes back on cuts for research

Ruth Dusseaul | Bay City News | March 9, 2025



Waving signs and banners, more than a thousand scientists, student researchers, Nobel laureates and elected officials participate in a nationwide Stand Up for Science rally at UC Berkeley's Sproul Plaza on Friday, March 7, 2025. Speakers defended the social and economic value of science against federal cuts to research institutions. (Ruth Dusseault/Bay City News)

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ON FRIDAY AT University of California Berkeley's Sproul Plaza, a spot famous for student activism, it was the professors' turn to protest. Nearly 2,000 scientists, Nobel laureates, student researchers and elected officials gathered to rally against the Trump administration's efforts to cut research funding, deny climate science and eliminate diversity programs in academics.

The rally was one of many nationwide Friday, including another across the Bay at San Francisco's Civic Center Plaza.

"We can't sit by as American science gets dismantled," Edward Miguel, a distinguished professor of economics, said at the Berkeley event, adding that President Donald Trump's administration is working to cut back on research at the National Institutes of Health, U.S. Agency for International Development and U.S. Department of Energy.



"We can't sit by as American science gets dismantled," said Edward Miguel, a distinguished professor of economics, during Friday's Stand Up for Science rally at UC Berkeley. Several speakers defended the social and economic value of science against federal cuts to research institutions. "If you weaken science, and you weaken alternative sources of truth, it strengthens them and their propaganda narratives," Miguel said. (Ruth Dusseault/Bay City News)

Miguel is also an Oxfam professor of environmental and resource economics, part of a confederation of international non-governmental organizations focused on alleviating global poverty.

“If you weaken science, and you weaken alternative sources of truth, it strengthens them and their propaganda narratives,” Miguel said. “And I think that’s part of why they’re doing it. I think scientists who talk about climate change and have data about climate change threaten their view that there’s no climate change. It pushes back against what they want to do in terms of fossil fuels.”

Capping indirect costs of research

On Feb. 7, the NIH, which operates under the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, announced that all new and existing awards would have to cap their indirect costs rate at 15%.

When a university wins a grant from the NIH, there is a research budget that goes to the principal scientist to cover the direct costs of the study. Then there is an additional percentage that goes to the university to pay for indirect costs like the laboratory, microscopes and graduate assistants.

The move was followed by a legal challenge by 22 state attorneys general, including California’s, and a federal judge issued a temporary order blocking the cut within those states. On Wednesday, a federal judge in Massachusetts blocked the cuts through a preliminary injunction, replacing the temporary restraining order.

The NIH is the world’s largest public funder of biomedical and behavioral science, with a research budget of nearly \$48 billion. In fiscal year 2023, the University of California system received over \$2 billion in NIH contract and grant funding. UC officials estimate the overall impact of the proposed cut to the university system would be more than \$600 million.



Computational physicist Fernando Perez, who developed the IPython data analysis tool, speaks to the audience at the Stand Up for Science movement in

UC Berkeley's Sproul Plaza in Berkeley on Friday. "Scientists seek answers where the evidence will lead them, regardless of what politicians want," he said. (Ruth Dusseault/Bay City News)

At Friday's rally, computational physicist Fernando Perez, who developed the IPython data analysis tool, spoke about leaving his native Medellin, Colombia to find intellectual freedom in the U.S. He compared the Trump administration to fascists.

"Why do they attack science? Fascists can't tolerate science because it is independent," said Perez. "While imperfect, scientists seek answers where the evidence will lead them, regardless of what politicians want. Fascists demand obedience and control, and science strives to follow nature where it leads."

Reinforcing the moral foundation

Perez spoke about the reasons scientists must stand up for the rights of small and vulnerable minorities, like the transgender community.

"Fascists are betting that the rest of society will abandon them," he said. "We can't. If we abandon the rights of trans people to live with dignity, we abandoned the very humanity at the heart of science. The fascists want to crack the moral foundation we stand on so that we can't fight back with the power of science, the power that lets us edit genomes or make images of black holes. So, let's fight back with science, but with humanity too."

Nobel Laureate Jennifer Doudna is the Li Ka Shing chancellor's chair in biomedical and health sciences and professor of biochemistry, biophysics and structural biology. She pioneered CRISPR gene editing, which allows researchers to model and study the genetic causes of diseases like cancer.

"I would not be here without support from the National Institutes of Health," said Doudna, who attended college with the help of an NIH grant. She said the National Science Foundation gave her the lab at UC Berkeley where she began her research.

"We need to be very active in speaking out, whether it's to our families, our friends, our kids, our grandparents, our neighbors. They need to know why we do science and why it's so incredibly important to support it with taxpayer funding in this country," she said.

The post **[Changing the climate on science: Nationwide movement pushes back on cuts for research](https://localnewsmatters.org/2025/03/09/changing-the-climate-on-science-nationwide-movement-pushes-back-on-cuts-for-research/)**

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Nobel Laureate in Chemistry Jennifer Doudna addresses a crowd during the Stand Up for Science rally at UC Berkeley on Friday. “We need to be very active in speaking out,”

she said. “They need to know why we do science and why it’s so incredibly important to support it with taxpayer funding in this country.” (Ruth Dusseault/Bay City News)
