2022–2023
College Free Speech Rankings

What Is the State of Free Speech on America's College Campuses?

COLLEGE PULSE

FIRE

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Executive Summary

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), a nonprofit organization committed to defending and sustaining the individual rights of all Americans to free speech and free thought, commissioned College Pulse to survey students at 208 colleges about their perceptions and experiences regarding free speech on their campuses.[1] Fielded from January 13 to May 31, 2022, via the College Pulse mobile app and web portal, the survey includes 44,847 student respondents who were then enrolled in four-year degree programs.

This report expands the 2021 pool to more than 200 schools. The College Free Speech Rankings are available online and are presented in an interactive dashboard (**rankings.thefire.org**) that allows for easy comparison between institutions.

Key findings include:

1. Alarming proportions of students self-censor, report worry or discomfort about expressing their ideas in a variety of contexts, find controversial ideas hard to discuss, show intolerance for controversial speakers, find their administrations unclear or worse regarding support for free speech, and even report that disruption of events or violence are, to some degree, acceptable tactics for shutting down the speech of others.

2. The University of Chicago was the top-ranked school in the College Free Speech Rankings for the second time in three years. Kansas State University, Purdue University, Mississippi State University, and Oklahoma State University round out the top five.

1 Colleges whose speech policies received a Warning rating from FIRE were not ranked (see Methodology). We do, however, present their overall scores in this report. These scores were standardized separately from non-Warning schools so that the overall scores of Warning schools were computed only in comparison to each other. As a result, 203 schools received a ranking in 2022.

3. Columbia University had, by far, the lowest score in the 2022 College Free Speech Rankings, with a Speech Climate rating of "Abysmal." The University of Pennsylvania, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Georgetown University, and Skidmore College are also ranked in the bottom five.

4. The key factors differentiating high performing schools (the top five) from poorly performing ones (the bottom five) are the subcomponents: "Comfort Expressing Ideas," "Administrative Support," "Administrative Behavior," and the "Tolerance Difference" between allowing liberal or conservative speakers on campus.

5. More than three-in-five students (63%) expressed worry about damaging their reputation because of someone misunderstanding what they have said or done, and just over one-in-five (21%) reported that they feel a lot of pressure to avoid discussing controversial topics in their classes. Twenty-two percent reported that they often self-censor.

6. Roughly three-in-five students reported they would feel discomfort publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial topic or expressing an unpopular opinion to their peers on a social media account tied to their name. Just under half of students (48%) reported they would feel discomfort expressing their views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion.

7. Almost half of the students surveyed (49%) said that abortion was difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus. Also identified as difficult topics to discuss by a notable portion of students were the following subjects: racial inequality (48%), COVID-19 vaccine mandates (45%), transgender issues (44%), gun control (43%), mask mandates (43%), and police misconduct (43%).

8. More than three-in-five students (62%) said that students shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus was acceptable to some degree, down from 66% in 2021, and one-in-five (20%) said this about using violence to stop a campus speech, down from 23% in 2021.

9. More than one-in-four students (27%) reported that their college administration's stance on free speech on campus is not clear, and almost one-in-three (30%) reported that it is unlikely the administration would defend a speaker's right to express his or her views if a controversy occurred on campus.

10. Opposition to allowing controversial conservative speakers on campus ranged from 59% to 73% of the students surveyed, depending on the speaker. In contrast, opposition to controversial liberal speakers ranged from 24% to 41%, depending on the speaker.

About Us

About College Pulse

College Pulse is a survey research and analytics company dedicated to understanding the attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of today's college students. College Pulse delivers custom data-driven marketing and research solutions, utilizing its unique American College Student Panel™ that includes over 650,000 college students and recent alumni from more than 1,500 two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states.

For more information, visit **collegepulse.com** or **@CollegeInsights** on Twitter.

About FIRE

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to defending and sustaining the individual rights of all Americans to free speech and free thought. These rights include freedom of speech, freedom of association, due process, legal equality, religious liberty, and sanctity of conscience — the most essential qualities of liberty. FIRE also recognizes that colleges and universities play a vital role in preserving free thought within a free society. To this end, we place a special emphasis on defending these rights of students and faculty members on our nation's campuses.

For more information, visit thefire.org or **@thefireorg** on Twitter.

Acknowledgments

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Greg Lukianoff
President and CEO, FIRE

Methodology

The College Free Speech Survey was developed by FIRE. College Pulse administered the survey. No donors to the project took part in the design or conduct of the survey. The survey was fielded from January 13 to May 31, 2022. These data come from a sample of 44,847 undergraduates who were then enrolled full-time in four-year degree programs at 208 colleges and universities in the United States. The margin of error for the U.S. undergraduate population is +/- 1 percentage point, and the margin of error for college student sub-demographics ranges from 2 to 5 percentage points.

The initial sample was drawn from College Pulse's American College Student Panel™, which includes more than 650,000 verified undergraduate students and recent alumni at more than 1,500 two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states. Panel members are recruited by a number of methods to help ensure student diversity in the panel population, including web advertising, permission-based email campaigns, and partnerships with university-affiliated organizations. To ensure the panel reflects the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the American college population, College Pulse recruits panelists from a wide variety of institutions. The panel includes students attending large public universities, small private colleges, online universities, historically Black colleges such as Howard University, women's colleges such as Smith College, and religiously-affiliated colleges such as Brigham Young University.

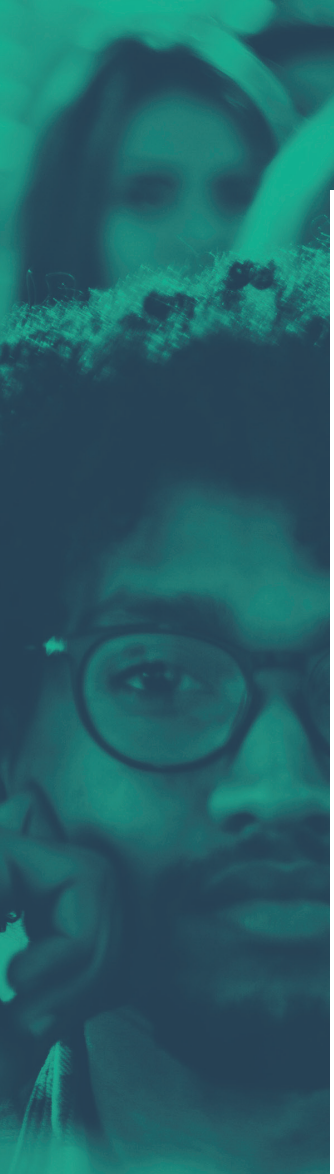
College Pulse uses a two-stage validation process to ensure that all its surveys include only students currently enrolled in two or four-year colleges or universities. Students are required to provide a ".edu" email address to join the panel and, for this survey, to acknowledge that they were currently enrolled full-time in a four-year degree program. All invitations to complete surveys are sent using the student's .edu email address or through notification in the College Pulse app that is available on iOS and Android platforms.

College Pulse applies a post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from multiple data sources, including the 2017 Current Population Survey (CPS), the 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the 2019–20 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The post-stratification weight rebalances the sample based on a number of important benchmark attributes, such as race, gender, class year, voter registration status, and financial aid status. The sample weighting is accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting (IFP) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables. Weights are trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results.

The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the target populations. Even with these adjustments, surveys may be subject to error or bias due to question wording, context, and order effects. For further information, please see: https://collegepulse.com/methodology.

Free Speech Rankings

The College Free Speech Rankings are based on a composite score of 10 subcomponents, six of which assess student perceptions of different aspects of the speech climate on their campus. The other four assess administrative behavior regarding free expression on campus. Higher scores indicate a better campus climate for free speech and expression.



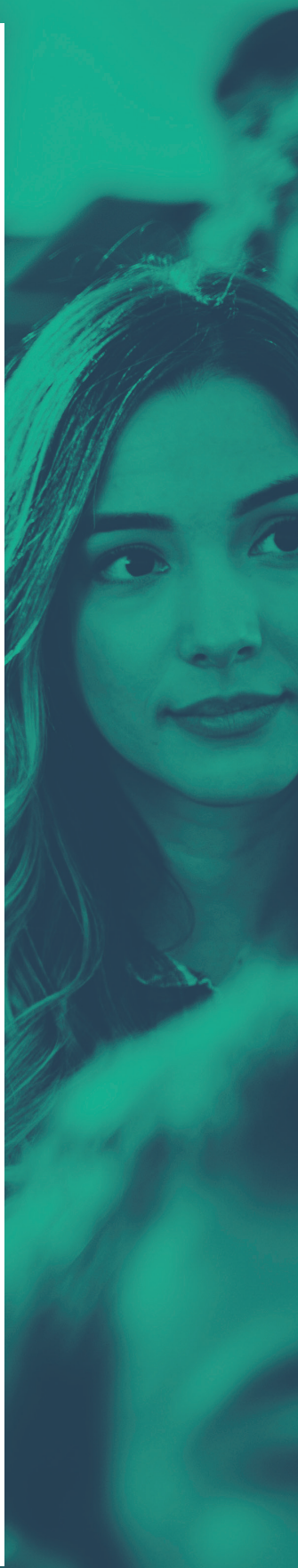
STUDENT PERCEPTIONS

The student perception subcomponents include:

- **Comfort Expressing Ideas:** Students were asked how comfortable they felt expressing their views on controversial topics in five different campus settings (e.g., in class or in the dining hall). Options ranged from "very uncomfortable" to "very comfortable." They were also asked how often they felt they could not express their opinion because of how other students, faculty, or the administration would respond (options ranged from "never" to "very often"); if they were worried about damaging their reputation because of someone misunderstanding something they have said or done (options ranged from "worried a lot" to "not at all worried"); and if they felt pressure to avoid discussing controversial topics in their classes (options ranged from "no pressure at all" to "a great deal of pressure," with "a lot of pressure" referring to the sum of "a good deal of pressure" and "a great deal of pressure"). Responses were coded so that higher scores indicated greater comfort expressing ideas. The maximum number of points was 34.

- **Tolerance for Liberal Speakers:** Students were asked whether four speakers espousing views potentially offensive to conservatives (e.g., "Undocumented immigrants should be given the right to vote") should be allowed on campus, regardless of whether they personally agreed with the speaker's message. Options ranged from "definitely should not allow this speaker" to "definitely should allow this speaker" and were coded so that higher scores indicated more tolerance of the speaker (i.e., they should be allowed on campus). The maximum number of points was 16.

- **Tolerance for Conservative Speakers:** Students were also asked whether four speakers espousing views potentially offensive to liberals (e.g., "Black Lives Matter is a hate group") should be allowed on campus, regardless of whether they personally agreed with the speaker's message. Scoring was performed in the same manner as in the "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" subcomponent, and the maximum number of points was 16.



- **Disruptive Conduct:** Students were asked how acceptable or unacceptable it is to engage in different methods of protest against a campus speaker, including "Shouting down a speaker or trying to prevent them from speaking on campus," "Blocking other students from attending a campus speech," and "Using violence to stop a campus speech." Options ranged from "always acceptable" to "never acceptable" and were coded so that higher scores indicated less acceptance of disruptive conduct. The maximum number of points was 12.

- **Administrative Support:** Students were asked how clear their campus administration's stance on free speech is and how likely the administration would be to defend a speaker's right to express their views if a controversy over speech occurred on campus. For the administrative stance question, options ranged from "not at all clear" to "extremely clear"; for the administrative controversy question, options ranged from "not at all likely" to "extremely likely." Options were coded so that higher scores indicated greater clarity and greater likelihood of defending a speaker's rights. The maximum number of points was 10.

- **Openness:** Finally, students were asked which of 17 issues (e.g., abortion, freedom of speech, gun control, or racial inequality) are difficult to have open conversations about on campus. Students could also select an option stating that none of these issues are difficult to discuss. Responses were coded so that higher scores indicated fewer issues being selected. The maximum number of points was 17.

Two additional constructs, "Mean Tolerance" and "Tolerance Difference," were computed from the "Tolerance for Liberal/Conservative Speaker" subcomponents. "Tolerance Difference" was calculated by subtracting "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" from "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" and then taking the absolute value (so that a bias on either side would be treated the same).

ADMINISTRATIVE BEHAVIOR

The administrative behavior subcomponents include:

- **Supported Scholars, 2019-22:** The number of scholars whose speech rights were supported by the administration at a school during a free expression controversy over a four-year period, as recorded in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire Database.[2] This support had to be unequivocal to be counted. That is, if an administration condemned the speech, apologized for the scholar's expression, or sanctioned the scholar, despite issuing a statement of support, it was not included in the school's total.

- **Sanctioned Scholars, 2019-22:** The number of scholars sanctioned (e.g., placed under investigation, suspended, or terminated) at a school over a four-year period, as recorded in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire Database.

- **Successful Disinvitations, 2019-22:** The number of successful disinvitations that occurred at a school over a four-year period, as recorded in FIRE's Campus Disinvitation Database.[3]

- **FIRE Speech Code Rating:** FIRE rates the written policies governing student speech at more than 475 institutions of higher education in the United States. Three substantive ratings are possible: "Red," "Yellow," and "Green" (termed "red light," "yellow light," and "green light," respectively). A "red light" rating indicates that the institution has at least one policy that both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech. Colleges with "yellow light" ratings have policies that restrict a more limited amount of protected expression or, by virtue of their vague wording, could too easily be used to restrict protected expression. The policies of an institution with a "green light" rating do not seriously threaten speech, although this rating does not indicate whether a college actively supports free expression. Finally, a fourth rating, "warning," is assigned to a private college or university when its policies clearly and consistently state that it prioritizes other values over a commitment to freedom of speech. "Warning" schools, therefore, were not ranked, and their overall scores are presented separately in this report.[4]

2 The Scholars Under Fire Database is on FIRE's website at https://www.thefire.org/research/publications/miscellaneous-publications/scholars-under-fire/. For 2022, the cutoff date for inclusion was July 1, 2022.

3 The Campus Disinvitation Database is on FIRE's website at https://www.thefire.org/research/disinvitation-database/. For 2022, the cutoff date was July 1, 2022.

4 The Spotlight Database is on FIRE's website at https://www.thefire.org/resources/spotlight/.

OVERALL SCORE

To create an overall score for each college, we first summed the student subcomponents of "Comfort Expressing Ideas," "Mean Tolerance," "Disruptive Conduct," "Administrative Support," and "Openness." Then, we subtracted the "Tolerance Difference." By including "Mean Tolerance" (as opposed to including "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" and "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" separately) and subtracting "Tolerance Difference," the score accounted for the possibility that ideologically homogeneous student bodies may result in a campus that *appears* to have a strong culture of free expression but is actually hostile to the views of an ideological minority — whose views students may almost never encounter on campus.

Then, to account for how the administration handles campus speech controversies, we incorporated three administrative behavior subcomponents. A school earned up to one bonus point each time it successfully supported (e.g., did not sanction or release a conflicting message about) a scholar during a free expression controversy. We decreased this bonus by one-quarter of a point each year, awarding a full point for support in 2022, three-quarters of a point for support in 2021, half a point for support in 2020, and one-quarter of a point for support in 2019.

We also applied penalties when an administration sanctioned a scholar or when a speaker was disinvited from campus. A school lost up to three points each time a scholar was sanctioned (e.g., investigated, suspended, or terminated). The baseline penalty was one point, but if the administration terminated the scholar, we subtracted two points, and if that scholar was tenured, we subtracted three points. When the sanction did not result in termination, we decreased the penalty by a quarter of a point each year, following the same pattern as for the bonus points above. Also, for each successful disinvitation, a school was penalized one point. These latter penalties were not set to decrease over time.[5]

After we applied bonuses and penalties, we standardized each school's score in each group — Warning schools and other schools — so that the average score in each group was 50.00 and the standard deviation was 10.00. Following standardization, we added one standard deviation to the final score of colleges whose speech codes received a "Green" rating, we subtracted half a standard deviation from the final score of colleges that received a "Yellow" rating, and we subtracted one standard deviation from the final score of schools that received a "Red" or "Warning" rating.

$$Overall\ Score = (50 + (Z_{Raw\ Overall\ Score})(10)) + FIRE\ Rating$$

5 After four years – that is, beginning with the 2023 College Free Speech Rankings – terminations and successful disinvitations will decrease by a quarter of a point each year.

Overview

In 2020, FIRE, in collaboration with College Pulse and RealClearEducation, launched a first-of-its-kind tool to help high school students and their parents identify which colleges promote and protect the free exchange of ideas. The response to the College Free Speech Rankings and online tool was overwhelmingly positive.

We heard from prospective students how helpful it was to see what a large number of current students reported about the actual campus climate for open discussion and inquiry, allowing for comparisons between colleges. We also heard from colleges and universities that the rankings helped them better understand their campus climate in order to improve it. Similarly, professors and staff became better able to understand which topics students on their campus found difficult to discuss.

The 2020 survey includes 55 colleges, and the 2021 survey includes 159 colleges. This year's survey includes 208 colleges.

As in previous years, the College Free Speech Rankings dashboard (**rankings.thefire.org**) is available on the College Pulse and FIRE websites. The dashboard offers a unique tool to compare schools' free speech rankings and to explore a set of other factors that students find important in a college or university, such as cost and proximity to home.

The body of this report contains three following sections. First, it presents the College Free Speech Rankings. Next, it compares the top five and bottom five schools in the College Free Speech Rankings in detail. Finally, it presents analyses of the free speech attitudes and experiences of the college students surveyed at the national level.

2022–2023
College Free Speech Rankings

The data described above provide a wealth of information about current college students' attitudes about free speech and the current state of free speech on college campuses across America. For students trying to determine what kind of campus is best for them, the College Free Speech Rankings may provide even deeper insight into the campus climate for expression at colleges they are considering, and the College Free Speech Rankings dashboard can help them balance different considerations about the kind of college experience they want.

Do they already feel comfortable, for example, speaking out about topics they are passionate about, even when they have a minority viewpoint, or do they prefer to be surrounded by students who think similarly? Do they mind if their ideas are challenged in the classroom? Are they open to hearing from different and sometimes controversial speakers, or, are they at least open to an environment in which speakers are allowed to visit and speak without facing a heckler's veto or something worse? Do they want to attend a college with a more politically diverse student body?

The College Free Speech Rankings offer students, parents, professors, administrators, and any other interested constituents an unrivaled capability to compare colleges' culture of free expression. Prospective students and their parents, as well as students considering transferring to another college, can use the rankings to assess and compare the climates at the different schools they are considering. Current college students, professors, and administrators can use these rankings to better understand the climate on their campus and see how it compares to that of others across the country.

We introduced two new features this year. First, an "Administrative Behavior" subcomponent consisting of four factors: "Supported Scholars," "Sanctioned Scholars," "Successful Disinvitations," and a school's FIRE Speech Code rating (see Methodology above). Second, a Speech Climate rating for each campus, based on how far a school's score is from 50.00. For instance, the speech climate of any school whose score was four or more standard deviations above the mean would be rated "Exceptional" — but no school met this criterion in 2022. Likewise, the speech climate at a school whose score was four or more standard deviations below the mean was rated "Abysmal." The table below presents each of the speech climate ratings and their respective cut points.

Table 1: Speech Climate Ratings

Overall Score	Speech Climate
Over 90.00	Exceptional
80.00 to 89.99	Very Good
70.00 to 79.99	Good
60.00 to 69.99	Above Average
55.00 to 59.99	Slightly Above Average
45.00 to 54.99	Average
40.00 to 44.99	Slightly Below Average
30.00 to 39.99	Below Average
20.00 to 29.99	Poor
10.00 to 19.99	Very Poor
Below 10.00	Abysmal

What Are the Top-Ranked Colleges for Freedom of Speech?

The University of Chicago reclaimed the top spot in the College Free Speech Rankings with an overall score of 77.92. Kansas State University (76.20), Purdue University (75.81), Mississippi State University (74.72), and Oklahoma State University (74.35) rounded out the top five. The speech climate at all of these schools was rated "Good."

At the other end of the rankings, Columbia University ranked lowest with an overall score of 9.91, more than four standard deviations below the mean. The University of Pennsylvania (14.32), Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (18.60), Georgetown University (20.48), and Skidmore College (21.51) were also ranked in the bottom five. The speech climate at these five schools was rated "Poor" (Georgetown and Skidmore), "Very Poor" (RPI and University of Pennsylvania), or "Abysmal" (Columbia).

The rankings, overall score, and overall speech climate for the top 25 colleges are presented below. The top 25 include 20 schools rated "Green" by FIRE (including four of the top five and eight of the top 10), three rated "Yellow," and two rated "Red."

The full rankings for all 203 schools are available in the Appendix as well as on the College Free Speech Rankings dashboard on the College Pulse and FIRE websites.

Table 2: Top 25 Schools

	School	Overall Score	Speech Climate
1	University of Chicago	77.92	Good
2	Kansas State University	76.20	Good
3	Purdue University	75.81	Good
4	Mississippi State University	74.72	Good
5	Oklahoma State University	74.35	Good
6	Claremont McKenna College	72.65	Good
7	University of North Carolina, Greensboro	68.72	Above Average
8	Northern Arizona University	68.50	Above Average
9	North Carolina State University	67.93	Above Average
10	Oregon State University	67.42	Above Average
11	University of Memphis	66.50	Above Average
12	College of William and Mary	66.24	Above Average
13	University of North Carolina, Charlotte	65.78	Above Average
14	Arkansas State University	65.73	Above Average
15	Florida State University	65.54	Above Average
16	University of New Hampshire	65.19	Above Average
17	George Mason University	64.79	Above Average
18	University of Arizona	64.47	Above Average
19	California State University, Fresno	64.13	Above Average
20	University of Maryland	62.75	Above Average
21	Western Michigan University	62.47	Above Average
22	Auburn University	62.46	Above Average
23	University of Mississippi	62.45	Above Average
24	University of Virginia	62.38	Above Average
25	University of Tennessee	61.91	Above Average

Warning Colleges

Hillsdale College, with an overall score of 57.45, outperformed the other "Warning" schools. Overall scores at the four other "Warning" schools ranged from 32.48 (Saint Louis University) to 38.26 (Baylor University). The table below presents their overall scores.

Table 3: Warning Colleges

School	Overall Score
Hillsdale College	57.45
Baylor University	38.26
Pepperdine University	36.99
Brigham Young University	34.83
Saint Louis University	32.48

The Best and Worst Colleges for Free Speech in 2022

For the top five schools, the average overall score was 75.80, compared to 16.96 for the bottom five. The rest of this section groups the top five schools together and compares their student survey responses to those of the bottom five schools.

Table 4: Best and Worst Colleges

Best Colleges for Free Speech	Speech Climate
University of Chicago	Good
Kansas State University	Good
Purdue University	Good
Mississippi State University	Good
Oklahoma State University	Good

Worst Colleges for Free Speech	Speech Climate
Columbia University	Abysmal
University of Pennsylvania	Very Poor
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute	Very Poor
Georgetown University	Poor
Skidmore College	Poor

COMFORT EXPRESSING IDEAS

In every context surveyed (such as the classroom, or on social media), the percentage of students at schools in the top five who reported that they would feel comfortable expressing their ideas was greater than the percentage of students at schools in the bottom five. With regard to expressing an unpopular opinion on a social media account tied to one's name, this difference was fairly large, with 44% of students at the top five schools saying they would feel comfortable doing so compared to 30% of students at the bottom five schools.

Regarding self-censorship, 20% of students at the top five schools reported self-censoring often, compared to 27% at schools in the bottom five. Students at schools in the top five were also not as worried about damaging their reputation because of someone misunderstanding what they have done or said, with 60% reporting worry compared to 69% reporting the same at schools in the bottom five.

A contrast deserving further study is that *fewer* students at schools in the bottom five (19%) than those in the top five (23%) reported feeling a lot of pressure to avoid discussing controversial topics in their classes. One possible explanation is that while the administration and student body at the bottom five schools are hostile to free expression on campus, faculty members recognize this oppressive culture and intentionally establish more hospitable space for free speech in their classrooms. Another possibility is that these schools are more politically homogeneous, so the students who attend them naturally feel comfortable expressing their views on otherwise controversial topics because most of their peers are like-minded.

Broadly, the average ranking for schools in the top five on "Comfort Expressing Ideas" is 44, with Oklahoma State ranking the highest (2) and Mississippi State the lowest (81). In contrast, the average ranking for schools in the bottom five on "Comfort Expressing Ideas" was 170. On this measure, Skidmore College ranked highest (150), while RPI ranked lowest (194).

TOLERANCE OF CONTROVERSIAL SPEAKERS

Students at schools ranked in the top five expressed more tolerance of controversial conservative speakers, compared to those at the bottom five. Specifically, the percentage of students who supported allowing each conservative speaker on campus was at least 10 percentage points higher among students at top-five schools than those at bottom-five schools, and a majority of students at schools ranked in the top five supported allowing six of the nine controversial speakers on campus.

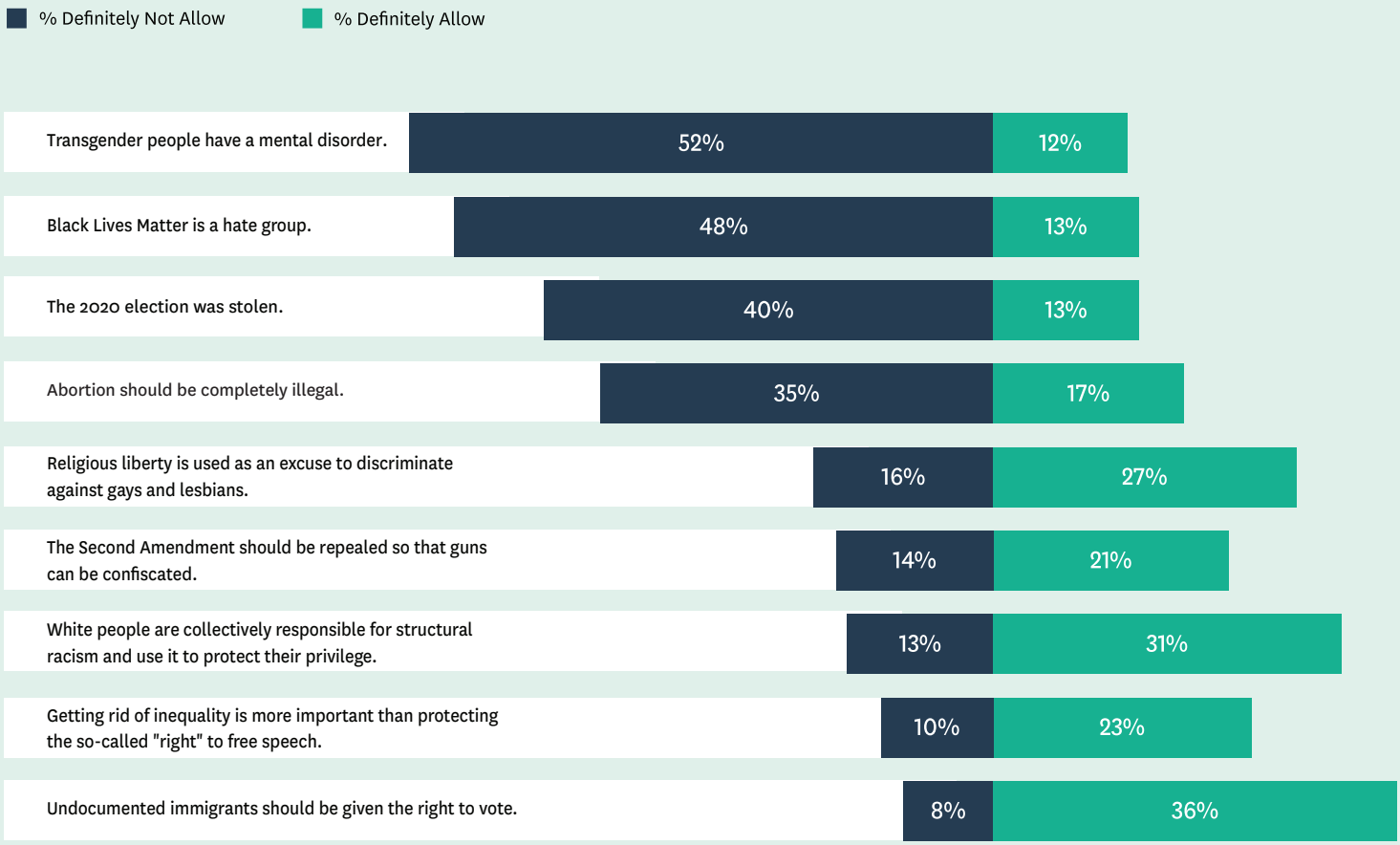
Yet, while the University of Chicago ranked highly on both "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" (5) and "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" (1), the remaining schools in the top five displayed a much different pattern. Kansas State, Purdue, Mississippi State, and Oklahoma State ranked 5, 27, 39, and 3, respectively, on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers." They nevertheless ranked 162, 175, 203 (last), and 169, respectively, on "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers". As a result, these schools had a lower overall mean tolerance, despite a fairly small tolerance difference overall.

In contrast, three of the schools ranked in the bottom five overall were ranked in the top 30 on "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers": Columbia (14), Georgetown (2), and Skidmore (28). Two of these were also ranked in the top 50 on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers": Georgetown (31) and Columbia (28). The remaining schools in the bottom five, however, ranked poorly on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers": RPI (134), University of Pennsylvania (151), and Skidmore (185).[6]

6 A comparison of Mean Tolerance between the top five schools (mean = 9.92, S.D. = 0.95) and the bottom five (mean = 10.04, S.D. = 0.69) was not statistically significant, $t(8) = -0.23$, $p = 0.82$. In contrast, a comparison of Tolerance Difference between the top and bottom five was statistically significant, $t(8) = -4.42$, $p = 0.002$. The top five schools (mean = 1.73, S.D. = 1.06) had a smaller Tolerance Difference than the bottom five (mean = 4.30, S.D. = 0.76).

Tolerance for Controversial Speakers

Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school ALLOW or NOT ALLOW a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea?



DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT

The percentage of students at schools ranked in the top five who said it was never acceptable for students to shout down speakers, block entry to a campus speech, or use violence to stop a campus speech was at least nine percentage points greater than the percentage of students at schools ranked in the bottom five. The average ranking on "Disruptive Conduct" for schools in the top five is 49, compared to an average ranking of 139 for schools in the bottom five.

Table 5: Which Disruptive Conduct to Stop a Campus Speech Is "Never Acceptable"

Ranking	Shouting down a speaker	Blocking other students from entering	Using violence
Top Five Schools	41%	72%	85%
Bottom Five Schools	32%	59%	76%

Interestingly, the University of Chicago ranked 91 on "Disruptive Conduct." This was not only the lowest ranking it obtained on any subcomponent, but also one of the few subcomponents for which it was not ranked in the top 10.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

Eight-in-10 students at schools ranked in the top five overall reported that their administration's stance on free speech is clear and that it is likely their administration would defend a speaker's rights during a controversy on campus. At schools ranked in the bottom five overall, 64% reported the administration's stance on free speech is clear, and 63% reported that their administration would defend a speaker's rights during a controversy.

The average ranking on "Administrative Support" for schools ranked in the top five overall is 14. The University of Chicago ranked first overall on "Administrative Support," Purdue ranked fourth, and Oklahoma State ranked fifth. Kansas State, however, with a ranking of 40, is the only school in the top five overall that was not also ranked in the top 20 overall for "Administrative Support." In contrast, four of the bottom five schools ranked 100 or lower on "Administrative Support" (while Columbia ranked 43), and the average ranking of these schools in this area is relatively low (122).

OPENNESS

Schools in the top five did not have a high average ranking on "Openness" (107), and this average was not far above the average for schools ranked in the bottom five (132). The range for all ten schools ranged from 70 (Oklahoma State) to 177 (RPI).

Even among schools in the top five, a notable percentage of students found it difficult to have an open and honest conversation on campus about several topics: abortion (56%), COVID-19 vaccine mandates (53%), racial inequality (53%), transgender issues (50%), mask mandates (49%), and police misconduct (44%). It is possible that these levels reflect cultures of more vigorous debate and diversity of views such that many students experience debate as challenging.

In contrast, students at schools in the bottom five expressed somewhat lower levels of difficulty having open and honest conversations, while the topics with the highest levels of difficulty differed: racial inequality (53%), abortion (45%), the Israeli/Palestinian conflict (45%), police misconduct (44%), sexual assault (44%), transgender issues (42%), mask mandates (40%), and affirmative action (40%). It is possible that the bottom five schools are more politically homogeneous with more students having identical majority viewpoints, leading to fewer students experiencing difficulty having these discussions.

There was substantial similarity between students at schools in the top and bottom five regarding the difficulty of discussing abortion, gun control, police misconduct, racial inequality, and transgender issues. The groups diverged greatly, however, on discussing COVID-19 vaccine mandates, the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, affirmative action, sexual assault, and abortion.

Table 6: Topics Difficult to Discuss on Campus

Topic	Top Five Schools	Bottom Five Schools	Difference (Top Minus Bottom)
Abortion	**56%**	**45%**	**11%**
Affirmative action	**21%**	**40%**	**-19%**
China	18%	24%	-6%
Climate change	18%	16%	2%
COVID-19 vaccine mandates	**53%**	**36%**	**17%**
Economic inequality	27%	34%	-7%
Freedom of speech	25%	31%	-6%
Gender inequality	40%	35%	5%
Gun control	43%	38%	5%
Immigration	33%	32%	1%
The Israeli/Palestinian conflict	**22%**	**45%**	**-23%**
Mask mandates	49%	40%	9%
Police misconduct	44%	44%	0%
Racial inequality	53%	53%	0%
Religion	37%	35%	2%
Sexual assault	**31%**	**44%**	**-13%**
Transgender issues	50%	42%	8%
None of the above	11%	7%	4%

ADMINISTRATIVE BEHAVIOR

The speech codes at four of the top five schools are rated "Green," and one is rated "Yellow." In contrast, the speech codes at the bottom five are rated either "Yellow" (Columbia, University of Pennsylvania) or "Red" (Georgetown, RPI, Skidmore).

Only one of these schools, the University of Chicago, received bonus points — in two cases — for supporting a scholar under attack.

In 2020, more than 100 undergraduate students and postdoctoral fellows at the University of Chicago issued a list of demands in response to geophysics professor Dorian Abbot's video about diversity, equity, and inclusion. In response, the Free Speech Union, a national membership organization, came to Abbot's defense, circulating a petition that garnered more than 13,600 signatures urging the university to uphold its principles. University of Chicago President Robert J. Zimmer issued a statement upholding the Chicago Principles, the university's detailed articulation of its commitment of free speech. The statement explained that "the University does not limit the comments of faculty members, mandate apologies, or impose other disciplinary consequences for such comments, unless there has been a violation of University policy or the law."[7]

7 The Chicago Principles can be found online at the University of Chicago's Free Expression website: https://freeexpression.uchicago.edu/; See the record of the incident in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire Database. Available online: https://www.thefire.org/research/scholars-under-fire-database/#home/targeting-incident-details/60f700672006280021259ef5/

In 2022, the University of Chicago again came to the defense of a scholar facing sanction demands. In this incident, undergraduate students wrote to University of Chicago President Paul Alivisatos with a list of demands after political science professor John Mearsheimer told the Committee for the Republic that he believed the West, rather than Russia, "bears primary responsibility for what is happening [in Ukraine] today." In response, the university again cited its Chicago Principles.[8]

The University of Chicago did, however, along with all of the bottom five schools, incur penalties for sanctioning a scholar or having a speaker disinvited from campus.[9] Columbia was the most egregious offender, with seven instances of sanctioning a scholar (see the appendix below). These sanctions included two terminations, including one firing of a tenured faculty member. The University of Pennsylvania saw a successful disinvitation in 2019 plus five attempts to sanction scholars, three of which involved law professor Amy Wax (see the appendix below).[10]

8 See the record of the incident in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire Database. Available online: https://www.thefire.org/research/scholars-under-fire-database/#home/targeting-incident-details/622942497d1da0001ebd0d48/

9 The University of Chicago investigated and suspended Harold Uhlig in 2020 after a former student tagged him in a post online, writing: "I sat in your class in Winter 2014: (1) You talked about scheduling a class on MLK Day (2) You made fun of Dr. King and people honoring him (3) You sarcastically asked me in front of everyone whether I was offended." Uhlig was reinstated. Additionally, in 2019 Davidi Krupa was disinvited by the College Republicans because of allegations of sexual misconduct.

10 See the records of these incidents in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire Database. Available online: https://www.thefire.org/research/scholars-under-fire-database/#home/targeting-incident-details/60f739b754a540001e825b02/; https://www.thefire.org/research/scholars-under-fire-database/#home/targeting-incident-details/620597d25f31dd001fa5bb3f/; https://www.thefire.org/research/scholars-under-fire-database/#home/targeting-incident-details/6262e35282497e001e504bde/.

WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS DIFFERENTIATING THE TOP FIVE AND BOTTOM FIVE?

The primary differentiating factors between the top five and bottom five schools are in the areas of "Comfort Expressing Ideas," "Administrative Support," "Administrative Behavior," and "Tolerance Difference." In particular, RPI and the University of Pennsylvania score poorly overall because they ranked poorly on most of the subcomponents that make up the overall score. Columbia University's poor ranking is due primarily to its scores on "Administrative Behavior" and "Disruptive Conduct."

These results are clear: A school's administration has a large impact on the culture of free speech on campus. Schools where the administration has taken a clear and firm stance in favor of freedom of speech did well in the rankings. Schools where the administration was not so clear or not expected to defend free speech rights during a controversy did poorly.

National Data

As we noted in last year's report, the 2020-21 academic year was unlike any in modern history. Responses to the COVID-19 pandemic led to most students learning remotely. Indeed, 80% of students surveyed last year reported that most of their instruction was virtual, while only 2% reported having exclusively in-person instruction.[11] This year's survey demonstrates that, for most students, campus life has returned. Just under three-in-four students (73%) reported that their courses were mostly in person compared to just 15% who said their courses were mostly online.

Regarding politics, the predominant viewpoint with which the students surveyed identified was liberal, with 53% identifying this way, 19% identifying as conservative and 14% identifying as moderate. Not surprisingly, 193 of the 208 schools surveyed had a predominantly liberal student body, while just 14 had a predominantly conservative one. This latter group includes three of the "Warning" schools surveyed: Baylor University, Brigham Young University, and Hillsdale College. Montana State University's student body was uniquely mixed: The survey of its student body revealed the same number of liberal and conservative students.

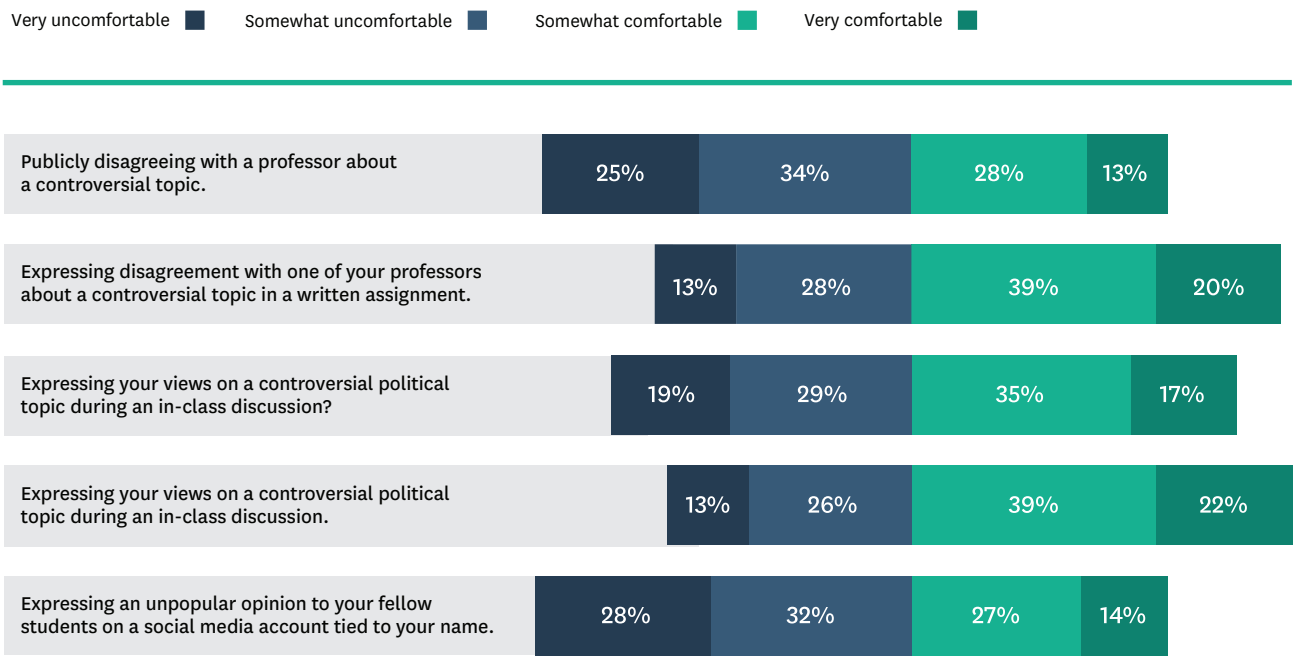
The average liberal-to-conservative student ratio on the 193 liberal campuses was 5.75:1, with an extremely unbalanced maximum of 66:1 at Smith College. In contrast, the average conservative-to-liberal student ratio on the 14 conservative campuses was 2.14:1, with a maximum of 10.25:1 at Hillsdale College.

11 Stevens, S., & Schwictenberg, A. (2021). 2021 College Free Speech Rankings: What's the Climate for Free Speech on America's College Campuses?

HOW COMFORTABLE ARE STUDENTS EXPRESSING THEIR VIEWS ON CAMPUS?

Less than one-in-four students (22%) reported that they felt "very comfortable" expressing their views on a controversial political topic in a discussion with other students in a common campus space. Even fewer (20%) reported feeling "very comfortable" expressing disagreement with one of their professors about a controversial topic in a written assignment; 17% said the same about expressing their views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion; 14%, about expressing an unpopular opinion to their peers on a social media account tied to their name; and 13%, about publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic.

How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus:



Students' responses in some areas differed significantly by race, sex, and political orientation.[12] Male students, for example, reported much more comfort disagreeing with a professor on a controversial topic than female students (46% and 36%, respectively), and male students reported more comfort than female students (62% and 57%, respectively) disagreeing with their professors on a controversial topic in a written assignment. Female and male students showed almost no difference in expressing comfort in other contexts, such as on a common campus space (60%), on social media (40%), and during in-class discussion (52%).

Students identifying as Black or Hispanic reported more comfort expressing themselves than those identifying as White or Asian. This pattern held across all contexts surveyed, and, in some cases, the differences were large. For instance, 48% of White students and 50% of Asian students reported more comfort expressing their views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion, compared to 63% of Black students and 55% of Hispanic students. Black and Hispanic students also tended to report more comfort expressing their views than students identifying as multiracial, but in most contexts the differences were not as large as those revealed by a comparison with White and Asian students.

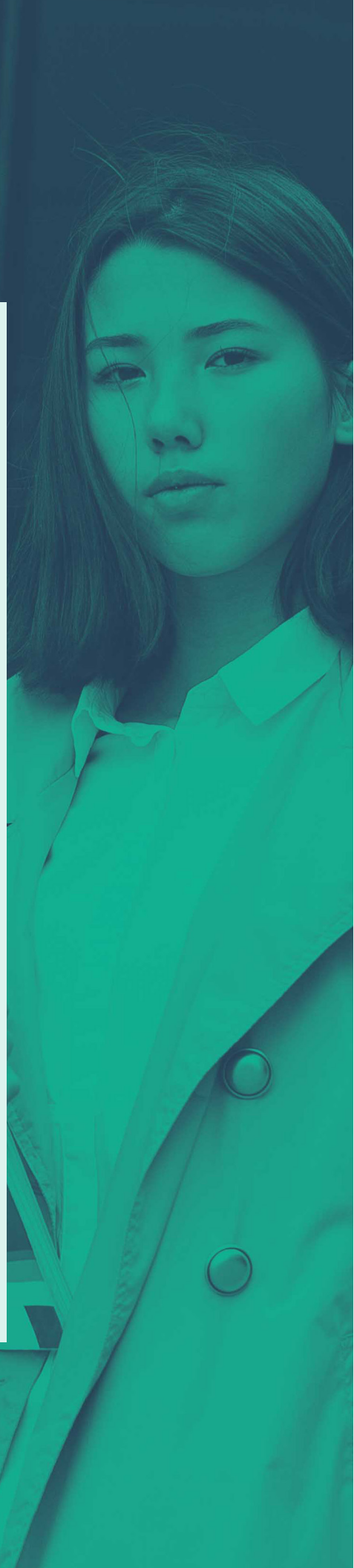
Regarding political identity, liberal students reported more comfort expressing themselves than moderate or conservative students across all contexts. This finding could result from the fact that 53% of college students in the survey self-identified as politically left-of-center, while only 20% of students self-identified as politically right-of-center.

12 Differences are significant at the .05 level.

SELF-CENSORSHIP

In recent years, concern about self-censorship among college students has increased.[13] This year, just over one-in-five (22%) reported that they often felt that they cannot express their opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond. One-in-four male students (25%) said they felt this way often, compared to 19% of female students. Differences among liberal, moderate, and conservative students (13%, 23%, and 42%, respectively) were even starker.[14]

Self-censorship among students of different races or ethnicities also differed, but these differences were generally not as large. Greater than one-in-five White, Black, and multiracial students (23%, 21%, and 24%, respectively) reported that they often felt that they could not express their opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond, while under one in five Hispanic and Asian students (19% and 17%, respectively) did.



13 Self-censorship is defined as the act of refraining from sharing certain views because you fear social (e.g., exclusion from social events), professional (e.g., losing a job or promotion), legal (e.g., prosecution or fine), or violent (e.g., assault) consequences, whether in-person or remotely (e.g., by phone or online), whether the feared consequences come from state or non-state sources.

14 Differences were significant at the .05 level.

This year, we asked two additional questions to assess why students may self-censor on campus.[15] Nearly two-in-three students (63%) expressed worry about damaging their reputation because someone misunderstood something they have said or done. This figure reflected 64% of men and 61% of women; 64% of White students, 61% of Hispanic students, and 60% of multiracial students; and 64% of liberals, 68% of moderates, and 67% of conservatives. Notably, many more Asian students (75%) and many fewer Black students (54%) reported they were worried about damaging their reputation.[16]

Students were also asked how much pressure they felt to avoid discussing controversial topics in class. Just over one-in-five students (21%) reported feeling a lot of such pressure. Once again, differences among liberal, moderate, and conservative students were starker than differences by sex or race. Greater than one-in-three conservative students (36%) reported feeling a lot of pressure to avoid discussing controversial topics, compared to 27% of moderate students and 13% of liberal students.[17]

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15 Given the large sample size (44,847), the correlations between these three items are rather large. The question we asked in 2021 was significantly correlated with concern about one's reputation, $r(44{,}845) = .21$, $p < .001$, and with feeling pressure to avoid controversial topics, $r(44{,}845) = .46$, $p < .001$. Concern about one's reputation and feeling pressure were also significantly correlated, $r(44{,}845) = .30$, $p < .001$.

16 Differences of Asian and Black students from Hispanic and White students are significant at the .05 level.

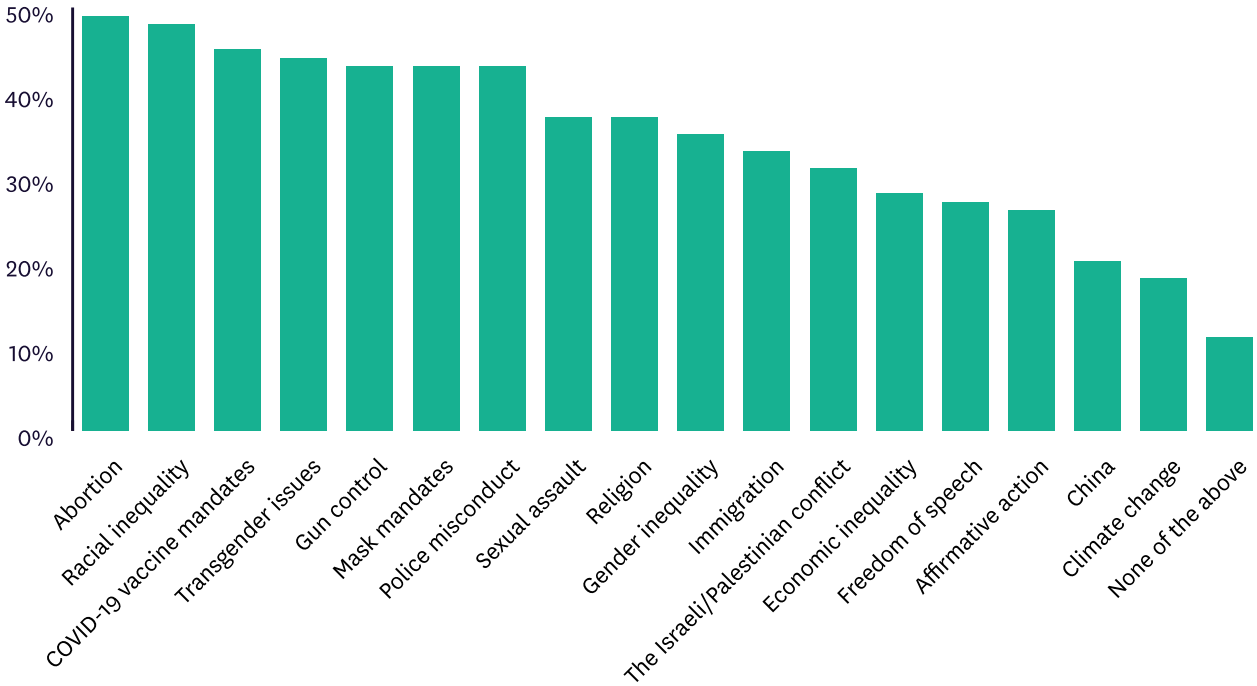
17 Differences are significant at the .05 level.

Which Topics Are Difficult to Discuss?

This year's survey presented students with 17 hot-button political issues and asked them to identify which ones are difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on their campus. The average number of topics students identified by campus was 6.02 (S.D. = 4.60).[18]

Of the topics presented, almost half of the students surveyed (49%) identified abortion as a difficult topic to discuss.[19] Notable proportions of students also identified racial inequality (48%), COVID-19 vaccine mandates (45%), transgender issues (44%), gun control (43%), mask mandates (43%), and police misconduct (43%) as difficult topics to discuss.

Some students say it can be difficult to have conversations about certain issues on campus. Which of the following issues, if any, would you say are difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on your campus?



18 "None of the above" was also an option, and 11% of students selected this option.

19 The draft decision of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* leaked on May 2, 2022, while the survey was active.

Students' responses differ significantly by sex and race.[20] For instance, female and non-binary students identified sexual assault (41% and 43%, respectively) more often than male students (32%). Female students also identified abortion (52%), gun control (46%) and police misconduct (45%) more frequently than male students (47%, 40%, and 40%, respectively). Black students identified racial inequality (54%) more often than White (49%), Hispanic (46%), and Asian (38%) students.

In contrast, male students identified affirmative action (30%), China (23%), free speech (30%), and transgender issues (48%) as harder to have a conversation about than female students did (24%, 18%, 25%, and 42% respectively). White students reported having a harder time than students of other races discussing the COVID-19 mandates (49% for the vaccine mandate and 48% for the mask mandate), while Hispanic students most frequently reported having difficulty talking about immigration (40%), and Asian students most frequently answered that way about discussing China (30%).

Responses also differed significantly by political identity.[21] A greater percentage of conservative students, compared to liberal and moderate students, identified abortion, affirmative action, climate change, COVID-19 vaccine mandates, freedom of speech, gender inequality, gun control, immigration, mask mandates, racial inequality, and transgender issues as topics that are difficult to have an open and honest conversation about. Liberal students, compared to moderate and conservative students, were more likely to answer that way about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and sexual assault.

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20 Differences are significant at the .05 level.

21 Differences are significant at the .05 level.

Tolerance of Controversial Speakers

Each year, thousands of lectures and talks are given on college campuses across the country without incident. Yet, many such events have led to controversy beyond mere disagreement: demands for silencing speakers and/or those who invited them, official disinvitations of invited guest speakers, disruption of events, and even violence have occurred on some campuses in response to speech. Political tolerance has long been assessed by asking people whether or not they would grant civil liberties — primarily freedom of speech — to nonconformists and controversial or offensive speakers.[22] Therefore, this survey asked students, regardless of their own views on the topic, if their schools should allow or not allow a speaker on campus who promotes each of the following nine ideas:[23]

- "Abortion should be completely illegal."
- "Black Lives Matter is a hate group."
- "The 2020 presidential election was stolen."
- "Transgender people have a mental disorder."
- "The Second Amendment should be repealed so that guns can be confiscated."
- "Undocumented immigrants should be given the right to vote."
- "Getting rid of inequality is more important than protecting the so-called 'right' to free speech."
- "White people are collectively responsible for structural racism and use it to protect their privilege."
- "Religious liberty is used as an excuse to discriminate against gays and lesbians."

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22 Gibson, J. (2006). Enigmas of intolerance: Fifty years after Stouffer's *Communism, Conformity, and Civil Liberties*. *Perspectives on Politics, 4*, 21–34; Stouffer, S. A. (1955). *Communism, conformity, and civil liberties: A cross-section of the nation speaks its mind*. Transaction Publishers; Sullivan, J. L.; Piereson, J.; & Marcus, G. E. (1979). An alternative conceptualization of political tolerance: Illusory increases 1950s–1970s. *American Political Science Review, 73*, 781–794; Sullivan, J. L.; Piereson, J.; & Marcus, G. E. (1982). *Political Tolerance and American Democracy*. University of Chicago Press.

23 The subject "getting rid of inequality is more important than protecting the so-called 'right' to free speech" was included for general interest but not included in the calculation of tolerance scores.

The speakers clustered clearly into two groups: speakers whose rights were primarily supported by conservative students and speakers whose rights were primarily supported by liberal students. Overall, a majority of students responded that each liberal speaker should be allowed on campus, ranging from a low of 59% to a high of 73%. The opposite was the case for each conservative speaker: Support for allowing them on campus ranged from a high of 41% to a low of 24%.

These responses are a cause for concern for supporters of free expression on campus. Allowing the most popular speaker on campus — one promoting the idea that "undocumented immigrants should be given the right to vote" — was still opposed by one-in-four students, and the numbers were worse for the other speakers.

Responses also demonstrate consistent differences by sex, race, and political identification.[24] A greater percentage of male students than female students would allow six of the nine speakers on campus, and, in most of the cases, these differences were stark.[25] For instance, 43% of male students responded that a speaker promoting the idea that "the 2020 presidential election was stolen" should be allowed on campus, compared to only 23% of female students, and 67% of male students versus 58% of female students would permit a speaker promoting the idea that "religious liberty is used as an excuse to discriminate against gays and lesbians."

White students in general, compared to Black, Hispanic, and Asian students, were more likely to respond that each of the conservative speakers should be allowed on campus. This pattern largely reversed for the liberal speakers, with the exception of a speaker promoting the idea that "religious liberty is used as an excuse to discriminate against gays and lesbians," for which there was no significant difference.

Naturally, conservative students were more likely to support allowing each conservative speaker on campus and not allowing each liberal speaker, while liberal students displayed the opposite pattern. Polarization overwhelmed toleration.

24 Differences are significant at the .05 level.

25 The differences for the remaining three speakers were not statistically significant.

How Acceptable Is Disruptive Conduct to Protest a Campus Speech?

Although most students opposed the use of disruptive tactics to stop a campus speech, disappointing proportions did find such tactics acceptable, to some degree (answering "Always," "Sometimes," or "Rarely"). Indeed, 37% of students reported it acceptable to block other students from attending a campus speech, while one-in-five (20%) reported that even using violence to stop a campus speech is at least rarely acceptable. While shouting down a speaker is non-violent but still disruptive and a threat to free expression, more than three-in-five students (62%) reported that this tactic is acceptable.

Differences in political identification corresponded with the largest differences in acceptability of disruptive conduct.[26] More than three-in-four liberal students (76%) reported that shouting down a speaker is acceptable, compared to 56% of moderate students and 44% of conservative students. Furthermore, almost half of liberal students (47%) reported that blocking entry to a campus speech is acceptable, compared to 31% of moderate students and 25% of conservative students. Finally, 25% of liberal students reported that using violence to stop a campus speech is at least rarely acceptable, compared to 18% of moderate students and 16% of conservative students.

Differences by sex were not as stark. For instance, two-thirds of female students reported that shouting down a speaker is acceptable to some degree, compared to 58% of male students. As for blocking entry to a campus speech, 39% of female students and 33% of male students, respectively, reported that this tactic was acceptable. As for using violence, equal percentages of male and female students (19%) reported it acceptable.

Racial and ethnic differences were also significant in this area. While one-in-three White students (34%) reported that blocking entry to a campus speech is acceptable, larger proportions of Asian (45%), Black (39%), Hispanic (38%), and multiracial (39%) students reported the same. As for using violence, a smaller percentage of White students (17%) reported that it was acceptable than Asian students (26%), Black students (24%), Hispanic students (23%), and multiracial students (22%).

26 Differences are significant at the .05 level.

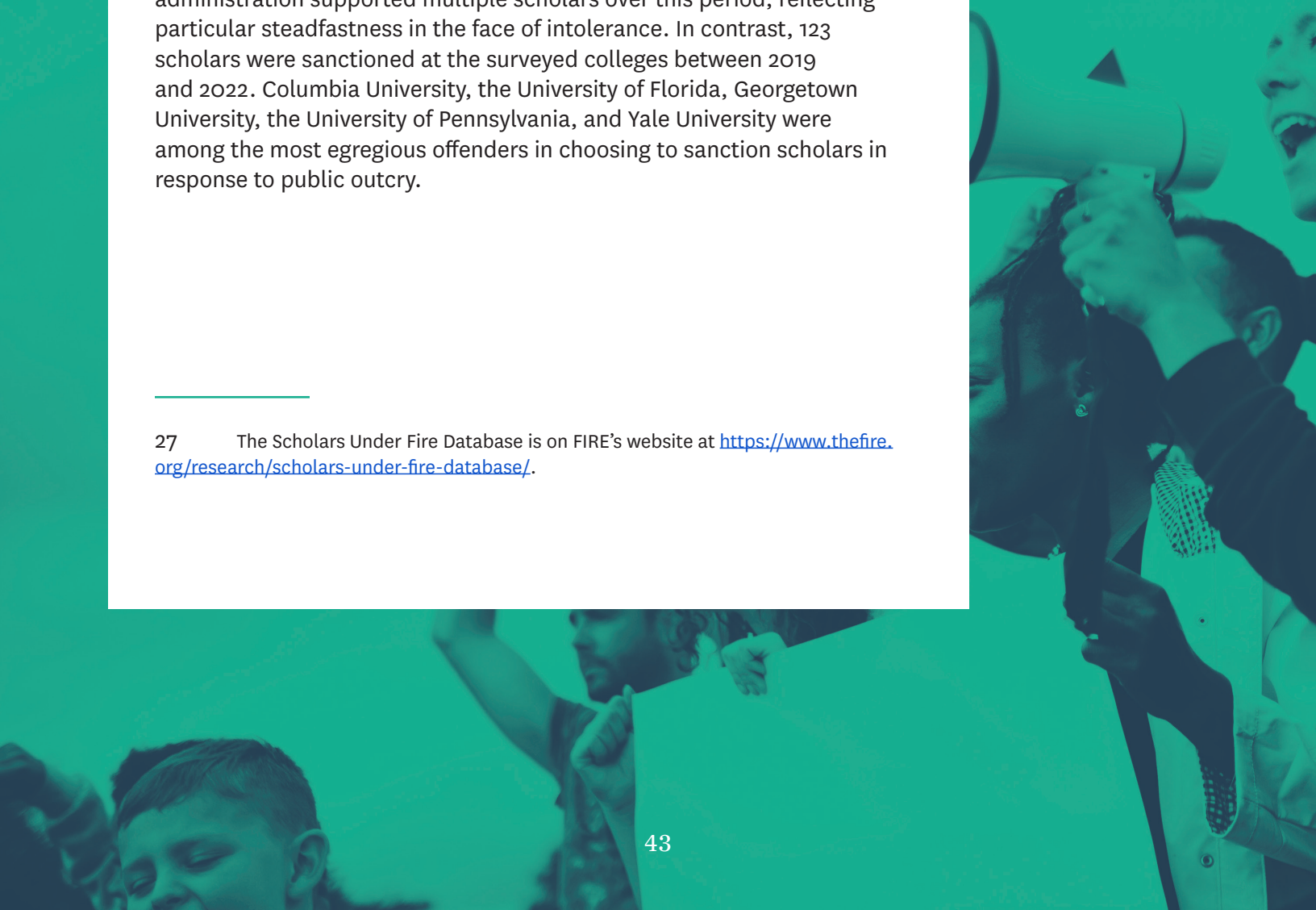
How Do Students Perceive the Administration's Support for Free Speech?

Students tended to report that their campus administration's stance on protecting free speech is unclear at best. More than two-in-five students (42%) reported that the administration's stance is only somewhat clear, while 27% reported that it is not clear. In particular, 47% reported that it is only somewhat likely that the administration would defend a speaker's right to express their views if a speech controversy occurred on campus, while another 30% reported that it is not likely.

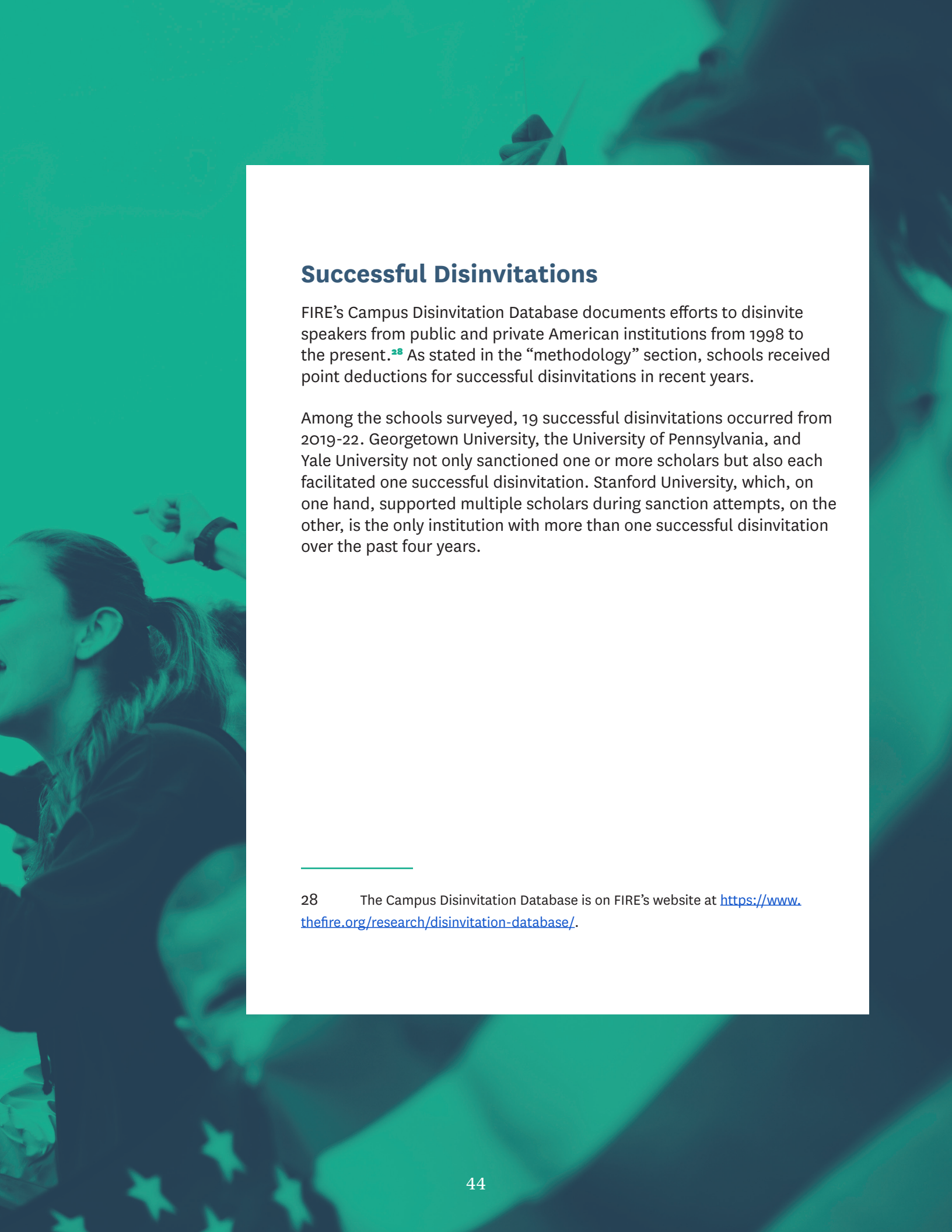
Attempts to Sanction Scholars

FIRE's Scholars Under Fire Database documents how and why scholars have faced calls for sanction, how scholars and institutional administrators have responded, and what (if any) sanctions scholars have experienced, covering incidents from 2015 to the present.[27] As stated in the methodology section, schools received point additions or deductions depending on their responses in recent years.

At the colleges surveyed, 28 scholars who faced a call for sanction were not sanctioned but instead supported by their administration between 2019 and 2022. Stanford University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Wisconsin were the three institutions where the administration supported multiple scholars over this period, reflecting particular steadfastness in the face of intolerance. In contrast, 123 scholars were sanctioned at the surveyed colleges between 2019 and 2022. Columbia University, the University of Florida, Georgetown University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University were among the most egregious offenders in choosing to sanction scholars in response to public outcry.



27 The Scholars Under Fire Database is on FIRE's website at https://www.thefire.org/research/scholars-under-fire-database/.



Successful Disinvitations

FIRE's Campus Disinvitation Database documents efforts to disinvite speakers from public and private American institutions from 1998 to the present.[28] As stated in the "methodology" section, schools received point deductions for successful disinvitations in recent years.

Among the schools surveyed, 19 successful disinvitations occurred from 2019-22. Georgetown University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Yale University not only sanctioned one or more scholars but also each facilitated one successful disinvitation. Stanford University, which, on one hand, supported multiple scholars during sanction attempts, on the other, is the only institution with more than one successful disinvitation over the past four years.

28 The Campus Disinvitation Database is on FIRE's website at https://www.thefire.org/research/disinvitation-database/.

Conclusions

This year's College Free Speech Rankings expanded to assess and rank the free expression environment at more than 200 colleges and universities in the United States — the most comprehensive look to-date. Through a multi-dimensional examination of students' perceptions and experiences, and with an even more comprehensive evaluation of administrative behavior than that of our previous rankings reports, the College Free Speech Rankings helps students, parents, professors, administrators, alumni, policymakers, and anyone else identify the best and worst campuses for free speech in the United States.

This report (with subsequent papers) adds tens of thousands of student voices and experiences to the discussion of free expression on America's college campuses. The data and findings on how current students experience their campuses, what they say about their ability to express themselves in a variety of contexts, and how their school administrations handle speech controversies are publicly available at the College Free Speech Rankings dashboard (**rankings.thefire.org**), which offers the ability to make additional comparisons. The raw data file is also available by email request to data@thefire.org.

Although a handful of colleges stand out from the pack, the free speech climate at even these campuses has room to improve. For instance, for all the plaudits their university receives, too many students at the University of Chicago accept disruptive conduct during a campus protest (the university ranked 91 on this subcomponent). Meanwhile, despite strong relative scores for their schools, students at Kansas State, Purdue, Mississippi State, and Oklahoma State were not as tolerant of controversial liberal speakers as many of their counterparts on other campuses.

Meanwhile, notwithstanding some exceptions — for example, schools like Columbia and Georgetown — schools that ranked at the bottom did not score highly across the board when it comes to tolerance for both liberal and conservative speakers on campus, which is how their scores fell to the bottom. Furthermore, publicized speech controversies were far more common on low-ranked, than on high-ranked, campuses.

Nationally, across all schools surveyed, more than three-in-five students (63%) reported having worried about damaging their reputation because of someone misunderstanding something they have said or done, with notable proportions of students reporting that they often self-censor their views (22%) or that they have felt a lot of pressure to avoid discussing controversial topics in their classes (21%). Three-in-five students (60%) reported that they have felt uncomfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial topic or expressing an unpopular opinion to their peers on a social media account tied to their name, and nearly half of students (48%) reported that they have felt uncomfortable expressing their views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion. Additionally, at least 40% of students identified important societal topics — including abortion, COVID-19 vaccine and mask mandates, gun control, police misconduct, racial inequality, and transgender issues — as difficult topics to have an open and honest conversation about.

These findings about intolerant and disruptive conduct, self-censorship, and a pervasive national climate of worry and discomfort on American college campuses should concern anyone who supports a vision of higher education as a free marketplace of ideas, one that should produce graduates who are ready to join the vigorous debates within American society and beyond. Too many students are not ready, and too many of their colleges are not helping them but instead perpetuating an unclear or even hostile climate for free expression.

Appendices

2022 College Free Speech Rankings

Rank	School	Overall Score	Speech Climate
1	University of Chicago	77.92	Good
2	Kansas State University	76.20	Good
3	Purdue University	75.81	Good
4	Mississippi State University	74.72	Good
5	Oklahoma State University	74.35	Good
6	Claremont McKenna College	72.65	Good
7	University of North Carolina, Greensboro	68.72	Above Average
8	Northern Arizona University	68.50	Above Average
9	North Carolina State University	67.93	Above Average
10	Oregon State University	67.42	Above Average
11	University of Memphis	66.50	Above Average
12	College of William and Mary	66.24	Above Average
13	University of North Carolina, Charlotte	65.78	Above Average
14	Arkansas State University	65.73	Above Average
15	Florida State University	65.54	Above Average
16	University of New Hampshire	65.19	Above Average
17	George Mason University	64.79	Above Average
18	University of Arizona	64.47	Above Average
19	California State University, Fresno	64.13	Above Average
20	University of Maryland	62.75	Above Average
21	Western Michigan University	62.47	Above Average
22	Auburn University	62.46	Above Average
23	University of Mississippi	62.45	Above Average
24	University of Virginia	62.38	Above Average

25	University of Tennessee	61.91	Above Average
26	University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill	61.72	Above Average
27	University of Nevada, Las Vegas	60.30	Above Average
28	Florida International University	59.49	Slightly Above Average
29	University of Texas, El Paso	59.38	Slightly Above Average
30	University of Hawaii	58.12	Slightly Above Average
31	University of Notre Dame	57.88	Slightly Above Average
32	Montclair State University	57.30	Slightly Above Average
33	New Mexico State University	56.91	Slightly Above Average
34	University of Colorado	56.63	Slightly Above Average
35	University at Buffalo	56.40	Slightly Above Average
36	California State University, Los Angeles	56.33	Slightly Above Average
37	Georgia State University	56.16	Slightly Above Average
38	Ohio State University	55.96	Slightly Above Average
39	Boise State University	55.14	Slightly Above Average
40	Texas A&M University	54.59	Average
41	Clemson University	54.59	Average
42	University of California, Santa Cruz	54.22	Average
43	University of California, Irvine	54.22	Average
44	University of Illinois, Chicago	53.99	Average
45	North Dakota State University	53.91	Average
46	University of Maine	53.88	Average
47	University of Alaska	53.82	Average
48	Bucknell University	53.68	Average
49	Utah State University	53.56	Average
50	Iowa State University	53.39	Average
51	Towson University	53.12	Average
52	University of California, Riverside	52.99	Average
53	Montana State University	52.98	Average
54	Harvey Mudd College	52.65	Average

55	University of Wyoming	52.56	Average
56	University of Alabama, Birmingham	52.46	Average
57	Carnegie Mellon University	52.37	Average
58	Texas Tech University	52.05	Average
59	University of New Mexico	51.81	Average
60	University of Texas, Dallas	51.80	Average
61	DePaul University	51.71	Average
62	New York University	51.64	Average
63	University at Albany	51.52	Average
64	University of Kentucky	51.38	Average
65	University of Delaware	51.28	Average
66	Ohio University	51.27	Average
67	Rowan University	51.26	Average
68	Washington State University	51.01	Average
69	University of California, Berkeley	50.91	Average
70	Washington and Lee University	50.91	Average
71	University of South Florida	50.39	Average
72	Michigan State University	50.36	Average
73	University of Kansas	50.34	Average
74	Temple University	50.32	Average
75	Colorado School of Mines	50.20	Average
76	University of Nevada, Reno	50.09	Average
77	Stony Brook University	49.87	Average
78	University of Houston	49.75	Average
79	University of Idaho	49.65	Average
80	Indiana University	49.59	Average
81	University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa	49.50	Average
82	Emory University	49.03	Average
83	Dartmouth College	48.99	Average
84	University of California, Los Angeles	48.66	Average

85	University of Iowa	48.60	Average
86	University of Louisville	48.55	Average
87	University of Cincinnati	48.35	Average
88	Bard College	48.33	Average
89	Louisiana State University	48.18	Average
90	Georgia Institute of Technology	48.07	Average
91	University of Arkansas	47.76	Average
92	Southern Methodist University	47.57	Average
93	Howard University	47.55	Average
94	Arizona State University	47.39	Average
95	University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign	47.04	Average
96	West Virginia University	47.01	Average
97	University of Minnesota	46.90	Average
98	University of Wisconsin	46.88	Average
99	Washington University in St. Louis	46.86	Average
100	Colby College	46.67	Average
101	Miami University	46.57	Average
102	Colorado State University	46.52	Average
103	College of Charleston	46.48	Average
104	University of Florida	46.45	Average
105	University of Connecticut	46.16	Average
106	Stanford University	45.94	Average
107	Pennsylvania State University	45.56	Average
108	University of Pittsburgh	45.29	Average
109	Duke University	45.15	Average
110	University of Denver	45.03	Average
111	State University of New York, College at Geneseo	45.02	Average
112	Drexel University	45.02	Average
113	Rutgers University	44.98	Slightly Below Average
114	Brown University	44.87	Slightly Below Average

115	Smith College	44.57	Slightly Below Average
116	Davidson College	44.31	Slightly Below Average
117	University of California, San Diego	44.15	Slightly Below Average
118	Kent State University	44.09	Slightly Below Average
119	University of Massachusetts, Amherst	43.57	Slightly Below Average
120	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	43.44	Slightly Below Average
121	San Diego State University	43.43	Slightly Below Average
122	Vanderbilt University	43.32	Slightly Below Average
123	Binghamton University	42.68	Slightly Below Average
124	University of California, Davis	42.57	Slightly Below Average
125	Brandeis University	42.52	Slightly Below Average
126	Bowling Green State University	42.48	Slightly Below Average
127	Wesleyan University	42.38	Slightly Below Average
128	Kenyon College	41.96	Slightly Below Average
129	University of Miami	41.71	Slightly Below Average
130	University of Oregon	41.58	Slightly Below Average
131	Wake Forest University	41.48	Slightly Below Average
132	Syracuse University	40.81	Slightly Below Average
133	University of Utah	40.63	Slightly Below Average
134	University of Vermont	40.53	Slightly Below Average
135	Oberlin College	40.48	Slightly Below Average
136	University of Southern California	40.45	Slightly Below Average
137	Hamilton College	40.43	Slightly Below Average
138	Trinity College	40.32	Slightly Below Average
139	University of South Carolina	40.31	Slightly Below Average
140	Gettysburg College	39.85	Below Average
141	California Polytechnic State University	39.80	Below Average
142	University of Nebraska	39.45	Below Average
143	University of Missouri	39.42	Below Average
144	University of Tulsa	39.35	Below Average

145	University of Michigan	39.27	Below Average
146	Boston College	39.17	Below Average
147	Portland State University	39.00	Below Average
148	University of Rochester	38.98	Below Average
149	California Institute of Technology	38.52	Below Average
150	Virginia Polytechnic and State University	38.43	Below Average
151	Boston University	38.36	Below Average
152	Colgate University	37.82	Below Average
153	University of Oklahoma	37.78	Below Average
154	Cornell University	37.63	Below Average
155	Northeastern University	37.56	Below Average
156	Tulane University	37.33	Below Average
157	Knox College	37.29	Below Average
158	Central Michigan University	36.85	Below Average
159	Mount Holyoke College	36.70	Below Average
160	University of California, Santa Barbara	36.53	Below Average
161	Williams College	36.37	Below Average
162	University of Georgia	36.25	Below Average
163	Rice University	36.18	Below Average
164	Bowdoin College	36.16	Below Average
165	Fordham University	36.07	Below Average
166	University of North Texas	35.83	Below Average
167	Barnard College	35.77	Below Average
168	Colorado College	35.77	Below Average
169	Princeton University	35.32	Below Average
170	Harvard University	34.52	Below Average
171	George Washington University	34.38	Below Average
172	Wheaton College	34.32	Below Average
173	Illinois State University	34.29	Below Average

174	Bates College	34.18	Below Average
175	Case Western University	33.85	Below Average
176	Connecticut College	33.65	Below Average
177	University of Central Florida	33.64	Below Average
178	DePauw University	33.53	Below Average
179	University of Rhode Island	33.48	Below Average
180	University of Texas, Austin	32.75	Below Average
181	University of California, Merced	32.38	Below Average
182	Wellesley College	31.93	Below Average
183	Amherst College	31.33	Below Average
184	Marquette University	31.29	Below Average
185	Grinnell College	29.55	Poor
186	Tufts University	29.27	Poor
187	Vassar College	28.86	Poor
188	University of Washington	28.61	Poor
189	Middlebury College	27.33	Poor
190	Pomona College	27.31	Poor
191	Haverford College	27.04	Poor
192	Macalester College	26.92	Poor
193	Johns Hopkins University	26.90	Poor
194	Santa Clara University	26.50	Poor
195	Scripps College	26.35	Poor
196	Pitzer College	23.51	Poor
197	Northwestern University	23.09	Poor
198	Yale University	22.65	Poor
199	Skidmore College	21.51	Poor
200	Georgetown University	20.48	Poor
201	Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute	18.60	Very Poor
202	University of Pennsylvania	14.32	Very Poor
203	Columbia University	9.91	Abysmal

Sanctioned Scholars and Other Incidents at Bottom-Five Schools

Institution	Scholar(s)	Incident Description	Administrative Response
Columbia University (2022)	Jeffrey Lieberman	Lieberman posted a tweet about Nyakim Gatwech, an American model of South Sudanese descent: "Whether a work of art or a freak of nature she's a beautiful sight to behold." Upon discovering that his intended compliment sparked outrage, Lieberman apologized.	Chief medical officer Thomas Smith issued a statement condemning "the racism and sexism reflected in Dr. Lieberman's tweet." Lieberman was removed from his position as psychiatrist-in-chief and suspended from his position as the psychiatry department chair.
Columbia University (2022)	Joshua Mitts	An activist short seller submitted an ethical violation to the university against Mitts over academic papers in which he sought to create new laws that mitigate alleged malpractices of activist short sellers.	The university stated that it does not comment on allegations of ethical violations, but explained that it has "rigorous standards and policies about conflicts of interest."
Columbia University (2021)	Dinah PoKempner	Students filed complaints after PoKempner used the n-word more than 10 times in a class discussion on hate speech in legal proceedings.	The university investigated the complaints, and a school official oversaw the grading of final coursework. A university spokesperson explained that adjunct professors don't have continued employment after the semester ends.

Columbia University (2021)	Lee Bollinger	Protestors interrupted Bollinger's course on freedom of speech and press to chant, "Bollinger in your ivory tower, we'll fight you with union power," and "Fuck you, Prezbo."	Bollinger dismissed his class and exited through a side door to avoid the protestors gathered outside the building.
Columbia University (2020)	Mitch Silber	Silber faced calls for his dismissal over his course, Modern Urban Terrorism, his co-authored article, Radicalization in the West: the Homegrown Threat, his prior role as director of intelligence at the New York Police Department, and his involvement in an intelligence and security firm, Guardian Group 745.	Columbia's Committee on Instruction investigated allegations of Islamophobia by reviewing Silber's course materials and interviewing students.
Columbia University (2020)	Elizabeth Lederer	Lederer was forced to resign amid backlash, including four separate petitions circulating to demand her termination/ resignation for serving as prosecutor for the Central Park Five trial.	Dean Gillian Lester sent a statement affirming her commitment to working with the Black Law Student Association on diversity and inclusion.
Columbia University (2020)	Teng Biao	Protestors with a Chinese student group demanded the cancellation of a panel focusing on human rights violations by the Chinese Communist Party.	Administrators canceled the event due to security concerns.

University of Pennsylvania (2022, 2022, 2019)	Amy Wax	Law students demanded sanctions against Wax after she said on "Tucker Carlson Today" that she believes non-Western people feel resentment and shame toward the achievements of Western people; said on Glenn Loury's podcast that she believes the U.S. is better off with fewer Asians; and said during a talk at the National Conservatism Conference that the country would be better off with people from the West.	Dean Ted Ruger issued a series of statements condemning Wax and ultimately announced the initiation of a university procedure to sanction her.
University of Pennsylvania (2021)	Robert Schuyler	Schuyler resigned amid calls for him to be terminated for sarcastically directing a Nazi phrase and gesture to a graduate student he thought was being authoritarian during a meeting.	Anthropology department chair Kathleen Morrison confirmed that Schuyler's scheduled course was canceled because "she felt that professor Schuyler should be kept away from students."
University of Pennsylvania (2021)	María Paula Romo	A petition and letter circulated demanding Romo's removal for her conduct as prior Minister of Government in Ecuador. In response, Romo asserted that "[n]either in Ecuador nor anywhere in the world do I face a single trial for any crime."	Center for Latin American and Latinx Studies Director Tulia Falleti announced that the program removed Romo's profile from the website and conducted an internal investigation in which they did not find grounds for terminating Romo.
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (2020)	Mohamed Aboul-Seoud	Students called for Aboul-Seoud's termination for his political tweets deemed "sexist, racist, islamophobic, and transphobic."	A spokesman for RPI said he could not comment on specific personnel matters. Aboul-Seoud's LinkedIn page states his service to RPI ended in June 2020.

Georgetown University (2022)	Ilya Shapiro	Shapiro was suspended from, reinstated to, and ultimately resigned from his position at Georgetown University over a tweet thread in which he opposed President Biden's pledge to nominate a black woman to the Supreme Court.	Dean William Treanor issued a statement (and a subsequent updated statement) denouncing the tweets and reiterating Georgetown's commitment to "inclusion, belonging, and respect for diversity."
Georgetown University (2021)	Sandra Sellers and David Batson	Sellers was terminated over a viral video in which she was unknowingly recorded commiserating with her colleague, Batson, about the relatively poor performance of black students in her class. Batson later resigned amid backlash.	Dean William Treanor issued a series of statements condemning Sellers and Batson, then pledged Georgetown's commitment to DEI.
Georgetown University (2019)	Timothy Wickham-Crowley	Letters circulated to demand sanction against Wickham-Crowley for making jokes in class that evoked racial stereotypes and for saying the n-word when reading aloud from a course textbook.	Wickham-Crowley was investigated by the Office of Institutional Diversity, Equity, and Affirmative Action. Even though the office found that his conduct was not "severe or pervasive," he was subsequently not listed as an instructor for any courses.
Skidmore College (2020)	Mark Vinci	Two petitions and a demand list circulated to remove/fire Vinci and hold him "accountable" for remarks deemed racially insensitive toward Asian students.	College spokeswoman Sara Miga said college President Marc Conner has "expressed his and the College's support for the right of students to protest peacefully" and that the college would address students' concerns through "ongoing community dialogue."

Survey Questions and Topline Results

Are your current courses all online, mostly online, mostly in person, all in person, or an equal mix of online and in person?

8% All online
8% Mostly online
33% Mostly in person
41% All in person
11% Equal mix of online and in-person

How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? [Presented in randomized order]

Publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial topic.

13% Very comfortable
28% Somewhat comfortable
34% Somewhat uncomfortable
25% Very uncomfortable

Expressing disagreement with one of your professors about a controversial topic in a written assignment.

20% Very comfortable
39% Somewhat comfortable
28% Somewhat uncomfortable
13% Very uncomfortable

Expressing your views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion.

17% Very comfortable
35% Somewhat comfortable
29% Somewhat uncomfortable
19% Very uncomfortable

Expressing your views on a controversial political topic to other students during a discussion in a common campus space such as a quad, dining hall, or lounge.

22% Very comfortable
39% Somewhat comfortable
26% Somewhat uncomfortable
13% Very uncomfortable

Expressing an unpopular opinion to your fellow students on a social media account tied to your name.

14% Very comfortable
27% Somewhat comfortable
32% Somewhat uncomfortable
28% Very uncomfortable

Student groups often invite speakers to campus to express their views on a range of topics. Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school ALLOW or NOT ALLOW a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea? [Presented in randomized order]

Transgender people have a mental disorder.

13% Definitely should allow this speaker
14% Probably should allow this this speaker
21% Probably should not allow this speaker
52% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Abortion should be completely illegal.

17% Definitely should allow this speaker
23% Probably should allow this this speaker
24% Probably should not allow this speaker
35% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

13% Definitely should allow this speaker
15% Probably should allow this this speaker
24% Probably should not allow this speaker
48% Definitely should not allow this speaker

The 2020 Presidential election was stolen.

13% Definitely should allow this speaker
19% Probably should allow this speaker
28% Probably should not allow this speaker
40% Definitely should not allow this speaker

The Second Amendment should be repealed so that guns can be confiscated.

21% Definitely should allow this speaker
39% Probably should allow this this speaker
27% Probably should not allow this speaker
14% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Undocumented immigrants should be given the right to vote.

36% Definitely should allow this speaker
41% Probably should allow this this speaker
16% Probably should not allow this speaker
8% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Getting rid of inequality is more important than protecting the so-called "right" to free speech.

23% Definitely should allow this speaker
44% Probably should allow this this speaker
22% Probably should not allow this speaker
10% Definitely should not allow this speaker

White people are collectively responsible for structural racism and use it to protect their privilege.

31% Definitely should allow this speaker
36% Probably should allow this this speaker
20% Probably should not allow this speaker
13% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Religious liberty is used as an excuse to discriminate against gays and lesbians.

27% Definitely should allow this speaker
36% Probably should allow this this speaker
21% Probably should not allow this speaker
16% Definitely should not allow this speaker

How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker? [Presented in randomized order]

Shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus.

5% Always acceptable
25% Sometimes acceptable
32% Rarely acceptable
38% Never acceptable

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

2% Always acceptable
10% Sometimes acceptable
25% Rarely acceptable
63% Never acceptable

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

1% Always acceptable
4% Sometimes acceptable
15% Rarely acceptable
80% Never acceptable
How clear is it to you that your college administration protects free speech on campus?
9% Extremely clear
22% Very clear
42% Somewhat clear
19% Not very clear
8% Not at all clear

If a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on your campus, how likely is it that the administration would defend the speaker's right to express their views?

6% Extremely likely
17% Very likely
47% Somewhat likely
22% Not very likely
7% Not at all likely

On your campus, how often have you felt that you could not express your opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond?

17% Never
29% Rarely
33% Occasionally
13% Fairly often
8% Very often

How worried are you about damaging your reputation because someone misunderstands something you have said or done?

21% Worried a lot
42% Worried a little
25% Not very worried
12% Not at all worried

How much pressure do you feel to avoid discussing controversial topics in your classes?

19% No pressure at all
31% Slight pressure
29% Some pressure
14% A good deal of pressure
7% A great deal of pressure

[Next two questions presented in random order] How would you describe the climate on your campus towards people *who do not share* your political beliefs?

13% Very supportive
39% Somewhat supportive
37% Somewhat hostile
10% Very hostile

How would you describe the climate on your campus towards people who share your political beliefs?

32% Very supportive
47% Somewhat supportive
16% Somewhat hostile
6% Very hostile

Where do you think the political views of the average student on campus are on the following scale?

18% Very liberal
30% Somewhat liberal
16% Slightly liberal
13% Moderate, middle-of-the-road
5% Slightly conservative
6% Somewhat conservative
2% Very conservative
8% Haven't thought much about this
2% Something else [write-in]

Where do you think the political views of the average faculty member on campus are on the following scale?

14% Very liberal
27% Somewhat liberal
19% Slightly liberal
17% Moderate, middle-of-the-road
6% Slightly conservative
4% Somewhat conservative
2% Very conservative
10% Haven't thought much about this
1% Something else [write-in]

Some students say it can be difficult to have conversations about certain issues on campus. Which of the following issues, if any, would you say are difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on your campus? [Percentage selecting each option]

49% Abortion
26% Affirmative action
20% China
18% Climate change
45% COVID-19 vaccine mandates
28% Economic inequality
27% Freedom of speech
35% Gender inequality
43% Gun control
33% Immigration
31% The Israeli/Palestinian conflict
43% Mask mandates
43% Police misconduct
48% Racial inequality
37% Religion
37% Sexual assault
44% Transgender issues
11% None of the above

What campus changes would make you feel that you can express yourself? [Percentage selecting each option]

20% If there were more people of my **race**.
23% If there were more people of **different races** than me.
8% If there were more people of my **gender**.
7% If there were more people of a **different gender** than me.
11% If there were more people of my **religion**.
13% If there were more people of **different religions** than me.
25% If there were more people with my **political views**.
10% If there were more people with **different political views** from me.
26% If there were **more tolerance** of views that some consider hateful.
24% If there were **less tolerance** for views that some consider hateful.
24% None of the above

In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or something else?

18% Strong Democrat
16% Weak Democrat
20% Independent, lean Democrat
15% Independent
9% Independent, lean Republican
6% Weak Republican
6% Strong Republican
10% Something else [write-in]

Using the following scale, how would you describe your political beliefs?

21% Very liberal
21% Somewhat liberal
11% Slightly liberal
14% Moderate, middle-of-the-road
7% Slightly conservative
8% Somewhat conservative
5% Very conservative
8% I do not identify as a liberal or a conservative
5% Haven't thought much about this

[If "I do not identify as a liberal or a conservative" is selected]: Which of the following best describes your political beliefs?

2% Democratic Socialist
2% Libertarian
4% Something else [write-in]

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