

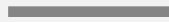
2025 College Free Speech Rankings

Bucknell University

126

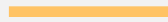
OVERALL
RANK

AVERAGE



SPEECH
CLIMATE

YELLOW



SPOTLIGHT
RATING



FIRE
Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

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Executive Summary

FOR THE FIFTH YEAR IN A ROW, 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, and College Pulse surveyed college undergraduates about their perceptions and experiences regarding free speech on their campuses.

This year's survey includes 58,807 student respondents from 257 colleges and universities. Students who were enrolled in four-year degree programs were surveyed via the College Pulse mobile app and web portal from January 25 through June 17, 2024.

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 from Bucknell University:

- Bucknell ranks 126 with an overall score of 47.38, and an “Average” speech climate. The university’s ranking worsened for the second consecutive year, from 48 in 2023 to 104 last year.
- Bucknell University places in the top half among other ranked schools in Pennsylvania, coming in behind Carnegie Mellon (41), Swarthmore College (60), Temple University (65), Lehigh University (112), and Franklin and Marshall College (118), but ahead of Drexel University (145), Villanova University (185), Haverford College (190), Gettysburg College (197), Lafayette College (213), Duquesne University (222), Pennsylvania State University (228), and the University of Pennsylvania (248).
- Bucknell performs well on “Disruptive Conduct,” ranking 65.
- However, compared to last year, Bucknell worsened in its tolerance for both conservative and liberal — but especially liberal — speakers. “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers” is a middling 172 (down from 158 last year) while “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” is near the bottom at 233 (down from 185 last year), giving Bucknell a “Mean Tolerance” ranking of 226.
- Bucknell comes in at 130 on “Self-Censorship” but ranks near the bottom for both “Administrative Support” (203) and “Openness” (208, down from 166 last year).
- As far as FIRE is aware, Bucknell has not publicly sanctioned any scholars, students, or invited speakers.
- 30% of students identified freedom of speech as a topic difficult to have an open and honest conversation on campus, and 63% say the same about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- Bucknell continues to maintain speech policies that earn it a “yellow light” rating from FIRE. If Bucknell had revised these policies and earned a “green light” rating, it would have ranked 21 overall.

Full Report

IN 2020, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), College Pulse, and RealClearEducation published the first-ever comprehensive student assessment of free speech on 55 American college campuses: the College Free Speech Rankings. For the first time, prospective college students and their parents could systematically compare current students’ understandings of the level of tolerance for free speech on campus.

This year FIRE and College Pulse surveyed 257 schools, ranking 251 of them.¹ Bucknell University, with a score of 47.38, has an “Average” speech climate and ranks 126 overall in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings. This represents a drop for the second consecutive year, from 104 last year and from 48 the year before.

HOW OFTEN ARE BUCKNELL STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

Bucknell earned a middling rank of 130 overall in the “Self-Censorship” component.

Nearly one-quarter (24%) of students self-censor “very” or “fairly” often during conversations with other students on campus. This is in line with students nationally.

Nearly one-quarter (24%) of students self-censor “very” or “fairly” often during classroom discussions.

A greater percentage (29%) of students self-censor “very” or “fairly” often during conversations with their professors. This is an increase of six percentage points from last year and is six percentage points higher than students nationally.

WHAT TOPICS ARE DIFFICULT FOR BUCKNELL STUDENTS TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT?

Bucknell dropped from 166 last year to 208 this year in “Openness.”

Students were given a list of 20 topics and asked to select the ones they feel are “difficult to have an open and honest conversation about” on their campus. Because the list of topics has changed over the years, this year’s results can be compared to 2023’s for 18 topics, 2022’s for 15 topics, and 2021’s for only 12 topics. While Bucknell improved on 11 of 18 topics since 2023, 10 of 15 topics since 2022, and 10 of 12 since 2021, this year’s results still aren’t good compared to the national results, and they are even worse compared to the results among private institutions.

¹ Six of the schools surveyed received a “warning” rating from FIRE for their speech policies. An overall score was calculated separately for these schools, comparing them only to each other.

Compared to private college and university students nationally, Bucknell students more frequently identified 17 of 20 topics this year as difficult to discuss (and identified two of the three remaining topics as frequently). Crime is the only topic Bucknell students identified less frequently (four percentage points lower) than private college students nationally. Bucknell students identified 17 topics more frequently than private college students nationally, with a difference of at least nine percentage points for eight topics: abortion, + nine percentage points; immigration, + nine percentage points; the presidential election, + nine percentage points; police misconduct, + nine percentage points; climate change, +10 percentage points; gay rights, +11 percentage points; gun control, +12 percentage points; and racial inequality, +12 percentage points.

Another concern is that 30% of Bucknell students identified freedom of speech as difficult to discuss, up from 19% last year.

Unsurprisingly, among the topics, Bucknell students most frequently identified the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus, at 63%. Many Bucknell students also identified racial inequality (46%), abortion (45%), transgender rights (44%) and gun control (39%) as difficult topics to discuss on campus.

Only 8% of Bucknell students selected the “none of the above” option.

WHICH SPEAKERS DO BUCKNELL STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

To assess speaker tolerance, we provided students with the following prompt:

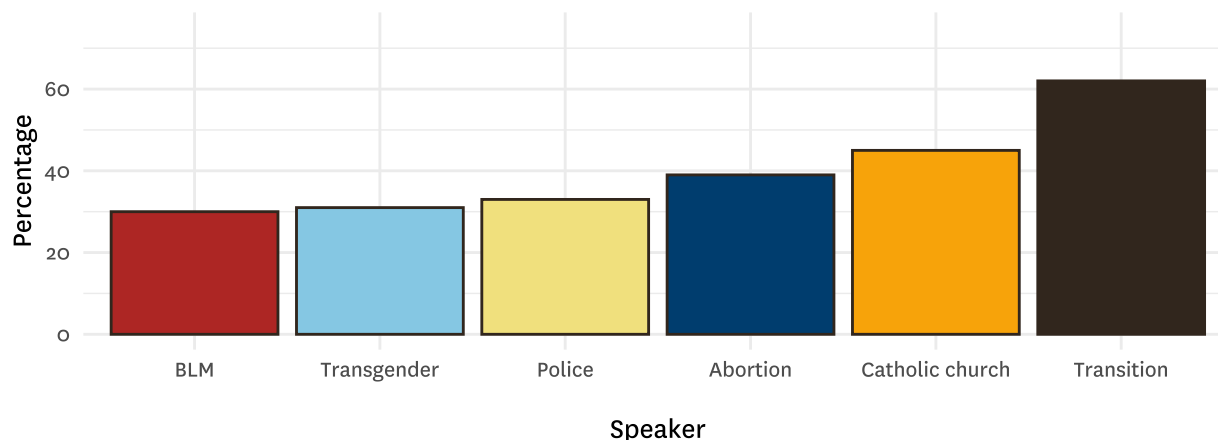
Student groups often invite speakers to campus to express their views on a range of topics. Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school ALLOW or NOT ALLOW a speaker on campus who has previously expressed the following idea?

We then presented students with six different hypothetical speakers who promote a controversial idea (three liberal, three conservative) in random order. The majority of students only supported one of the six speakers — a liberal.

Since last year, Bucknell’s ranking worsened on a number of components. This year, it ranks 172 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers” (compared to 158 last year), 223 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” (compared to 185 last year), 73 on “Tolerance Difference” (compared to 122 last year), and 226 on “Mean Tolerance” (compared to 178 last year). However, while the three conservative speakers listed in this year’s survey are the same as last year’s, all three of this year’s liberal speakers are new.

Since last year, Bucknell students also reported less tolerance for both conservative and, especially, liberal speakers. These changes, along with an overall better rank in tolerance for conservative than liberal speakers, might give an initial impression that Bucknell welcomes conservative speakers more than liberal speakers. However, a side-by-side comparison shows that Bucknell students still exhibit greater tolerance for liberal speakers than for conservative speakers. The percentage of students who said a conservative speaker should “definitely” or “probably” be allowed to speak on campus ranges from 30% (“Black Lives Matter is a hate group”) to 39% (“Abortion should be completely illegal”), whereas the percentage of students who said the same about the liberal speakers ranged from 33% (“The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan”) to 52% (“Children should be able to transition without parental consent”).

FIGURE 1 Students Who Support Allowing Each Controversial Speaker on Campus (%)



This finding can likely be attributed to the fact that this year’s survey includes new liberal speakers and that this year’s Bucknell student body is more ideologically balanced than last year’s. Last year Bucknell’s liberal-to-conservative student ratio was 1.9:1. This year it’s 1.2:1.

Bucknell’s student body as a whole is more opposed than students nationally to all six speakers.

This year’s survey also asked students about two speakers with views related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though student responses did not affect a school’s ranking. At Bucknell, 64% of students opposed bringing a speaker to campus who said, “Collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security,” whereas only 39% opposed a speaker who said, “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

WHAT KINDS OF DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT DO BUCKNELL STUDENTS CONSIDER ACCEPTABLE?

For this component, we asked students how acceptable it is to engage in three acts of illiberal protest: shouting down a speaker on campus, blocking students from attending a campus speech, and using violence to stop a campus speech.

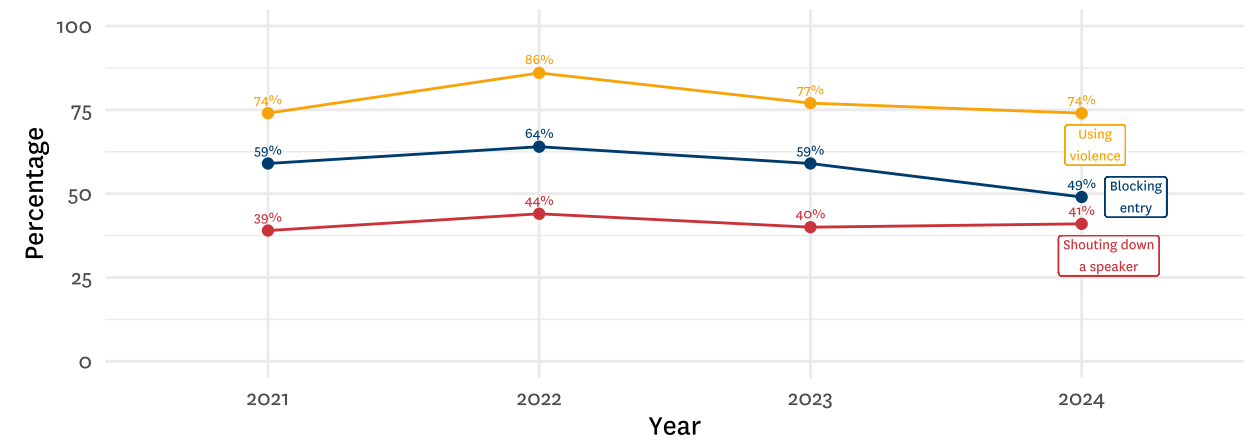
Bucknell University ranks a respectable 65 on “Disruptive Conduct,” with its student body supporting each form of illiberal protest less than students nationally.

Forty-one percent of Bucknell students said it is “never” acceptable to shout down a speaker; only 32% of students nationally said the same.

When it comes to blocking other students from attending a speech, nearly half of Bucknell students (49%) said it is “never” acceptable to do so. While in line with students nationally, this is 10 percentage points lower than last year and 15 percentage points lower than the year before.

As for using violence to stop a campus speech, nearly three-quarters of Bucknell students (74%) said it is “never” acceptable, whereas only 68% of students nationally said the same. However, this is a marked decrease from the 86% of Bucknell students who said the same in 2023.

FIGURE 2 Students Who Say Disruptive Conduct is Never Acceptable (%)



HOW DO BUCKNELL STUDENTS PERCEIVE THE ADMINISTRATION’S SUPPORT FOR FREE SPEECH?

Bucknell placed near the bottom on “Administrative Support” with a ranking of 203, a slight improvement from last year’s ranking of 224.

Twenty-eight percent of Bucknell students said it is either “very” or “extremely” clear that their administration protects free speech on campus, while 29% said it is either “not very” or “not at all” clear. The percentage of students who said it is “not at all” clear has doubled since last year, from 4% to 8%.

1 in 5 students said it is either “very” or “extremely” likely that Bucknell’s administration would defend a controversial speaker’s right to express their views, while more than one-third (35%) said it is “not very” or “not at all” likely to do so. The percentage of students who said Bucknell is “not at all” likely to do so has more than doubled since last year, from 5% to 13%.

A ‘YELLOW LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH LITTLE CONTROVERSY

A “green light” rating would have taken Bucknell’s score up from 47.38 to 62.38, which would have vaulted its overall ranking from 126 to 21.

FIRE awards Bucknell’s regulations on student expression a “yellow light” rating, flagging four policies that pose either impermissibly vague or clear-but-narrow restrictions on protected speech. These include two harassment policies that fail to sufficiently track the legal standard for peer harassment in an educational setting and an overbroad bias incident policy. Perhaps of greatest concern is a bullying policy in the

student code of conduct that defines bullying as generally involving “an imbalance of power, with an intent to... cause emotional... harm.” The policy fails to clarify what exactly constitutes emotional harm. What’s more, it does not even require that emotional harm occur, only that the student intends to cause it. Such a vague, broad policy is ripe for administrative abuse. Bucknell must revise these policies to reduce the chilling effect they impose on the campus speech climate.

FIRE has not documented any controversies involving students, student groups, scholars, or invited speakers that impacted Bucknell’s score.

HOW CAN BUCKNELL IMPROVE?

Bucknell can improve its ranking by creating a more open and tolerant campus climate. It can achieve this by demonstrating staunch support for freedom of speech before a campus controversy arises.

A majority of Bucknell’s students oppose five of the six speakers asked about in this year’s survey, with the sixth still opposed by 47% of students. Additionally, the percentage of students who think the administration is unlikely to defend a speaker’s free speech rights (35%) is greater than the percentage of those who think the administration is likely to do so (20%). Moreover, 29% of students think it is unclear that Bucknell’s administration protects free speech on campus.

Though FIRE did not document any speech controversies that resulted in the sanctioning of scholars, students, or invited speakers on Bucknell’s campus, the university’s student body clearly believes that their administration would not defend a speaker’s free speech rights should such a controversy arise, as demonstrated by the school’s ranking of 203 for “Administrative Support.” Administrators should not wait for a controversy but instead proactively signal their support for free speech. They can start by improving Bucknell’s policies.

A green light rating would have skyrocketed Bucknell up to 21 in this year’s rankings. Adopting speech-protective policies might help boost Bucknell’s “Administrative Support” score by showing students that the administration does indeed support freedom of speech.

Bucknell could further improve its climate by adopting both the pro-free speech “Chicago Statement” and the pro-institutional neutrality “Kalven Report.” These strong public commitments might signal to students that they need not fear administrative consequences for conversing with one another, even about difficult topics.

Bucknell ranks near the bottom (208) on “Openness,” with its students more frequently identifying 17 of 20 topics as difficult to discuss than students at private institutions (with an average difference in frequency of plus eight percentage points per topic). Additionally, despite a moderate ranking of 130 for “Self-Censorship,” about 1 in 4 Bucknell students (between 24% and 29%, depending on the setting) reported self-censoring either “fairly” or “very” often. Were students to know that their administration actively supports free speech and viewpoint neutrality, they might feel empowered to speak openly and honestly about these complex and important topics and ultimately tolerate invited speakers more.

If Bucknell were to make these three changes (adopting green light policies, the Chicago Principles, and the Kalven Report), next year it could find itself closer to two of this year’s top-ranked institutions, Claremont McKenna College and Purdue University. These institutions have taken all three measures and rank extremely well overall (6 and 30, respectively), as well as for “Administrative Support” (9 and 10, respectively).

Methodology

THE COLLEGE FREE SPEECH RANKINGS SURVEY was developed by FIRE and administered by College Pulse. No donors to the project took part in designing or conducting the survey. The survey was fielded from January 25 through June 17, 2024. These data come from a sample of 58,807 undergraduates who were then enrolled full-time in four-year degree programs at one of a list of 258 colleges and universities in the United States. The margin of error for the U.S. undergraduate population is +/- 0.4 of a percentage point, and the margin of error for college student sub-demographics ranges from 2-5 percentage points.

The initial sample was drawn from College Pulse’s American College Student Panel™, which includes more than 850,000 verified undergraduate students and recent alumni from schools within a range of more than 1,500 two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states. Panel members were recruited by a number of methods to help ensure student diversity in the panel population. These methods include 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 recruited 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-year or four-year colleges or universities. Students are required to provide an “.edu” email address to join the panel and, for this survey, had to acknowledge that they are currently enrolled full-time in a four-year degree program. All invitations to complete surveys were sent using the student’s “.edu” email address or through a notification in the College Pulse app, available on iOS and Android platforms.

College Pulse applies a post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from multiple data sources, including the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The “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 to produce a representative sample of four year undergraduate students in the United States.

This year College Pulse introduced a similar post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from multiple data sources, including the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The “school universe 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 to produce a representative sample of four year undergraduate students from the 257 colleges and universities surveyed.

College Pulse also applies a post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). This “school weight” rebalances the sample from each individual school surveyed 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 (IPF) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables to produce a representative sample of students at each individual school.

All weights are trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results and to ensure over-sampled population groups do not completely lose their voice.

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 14 components, seven of which assess student perceptions of different aspects of the speech climate on their campus. The other seven assess behavior by administrators, faculty, and students regarding free expression on campus. Higher scores indicate a better campus climate for free speech and expression.

Student Perceptions

The student perception components include:

- **Comfort Expressing Ideas:** Students were asked how comfortable they feel 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.” Responses were coded so that higher scores indicate greater comfort expressing ideas. The maximum number of points is 20.
- **Self-Censorship:** Students were provided with a definition of self-censorship and then asked how often they self-censored in three different settings on campus (e.g., “in a classroom discussion”). Responses were coded so that higher scores indicate self-censoring less often. The maximum number of points is 15.²
- **Tolerance for Liberal Speakers:** Students were asked whether three speakers espousing views potentially offensive to conservatives (e.g., “The police are just as racist as the Klu[sic] Klux Klan.”) should be allowed on campus, regardless of whether they personally agree with the speaker’s message. Options ranged from “definitely should not allow this speaker” to “definitely should allow

² The self-censorship component was introduced this year and is a composite score of responses to the three questions that are presented after self-censorship is defined. In previous years other questions were used to measure self-censorship and they were factored into the “Comfort Expressing Ideas” component.

this speaker” and were coded so that higher scores indicate more tolerance of the speaker (i.e., more support for allowing the speaker on campus). The maximum number of points is 12.

- **Tolerance for Conservative Speakers:** Students were also asked whether three 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 agree with the speaker’s message. Scoring was performed in the same manner as it was for the “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” subcomponent, and the maximum number of points is 12.
- **Disruptive Conduct:** Students were asked how acceptable 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 indicate less acceptance of disruptive conduct. The maximum number of points is 12.
- **Administrative Support:** Students were asked how clear it is their administration protects free speech on campus 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 clarity question, options range from “not at all clear” to “extremely clear,” and for the administrative controversy question, options range from “not at all likely” to “extremely likely.” Options were coded so that higher scores indicate greater clarity and a greater likelihood of defending a speaker’s rights. The maximum number of points is 10.
- **Openness:** Finally, students were asked which of 20 issues (e.g., “abortion,” “freedom of speech,” “gun control,” and “racial inequality”), if any, are difficult to have open conversations about on campus. Responses were coded so that higher scores indicate fewer issues being selected. The maximum number of points is 20.

Two additional constructs, “Mean Tolerance” and “Tolerance Difference,” were computed from the “Tolerance for Liberal/Conservative Speaker” components. “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 in favor of either side would be treated the same).

Campus Behavioral Metrics

Schools received bonus points — described in more detail below — for unequivocally supporting free expression in response to speech controversies by taking the following actions indicative of a positive campus climate for free speech:

- Supporting free expression during a deplatforming campaign, as recorded in FIRE’s Campus Deplatforming database.³

³ A full list of all the deplatforming incidents that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ish8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj10Oa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=1964386004#gid=1964386004>. The full Campus Deplatforming database is available on FIRE’s website at <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/campus-deplatforming-database>.

- Supporting a scholar whose speech rights were threatened during a free speech controversy, as recorded in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire database.⁴
- Supporting students and student groups, as recorded in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings behavioral metrics documentation that is available online.⁵

Schools were penalized — described in more detail below — for taking the following actions indicative of poor campus climate for free speech:

- Successfully deplatforming a speaker, as recorded in FIRE's Campus Deplatforming database.
- Sanctioning a scholar (e.g., placing under investigation, suspending, or terminating a scholar), as recorded in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire database.
- Sanctioning a student or student groups, as recorded in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings behavioral metrics documentation that is available online.

To be included in this year's rankings, an incident that resulted in a bonus or penalty had to have been recorded by June 15, 2024, and had to have been fully assessed by FIRE's research staff, who determined whether the incident warranted inclusion.

In response to the encampment protests, FIRE and College Pulse reopened the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings survey on any campus with an encampment. This allowed us to collect survey data from students while the encampments were taking place.⁶ That means that this year's College Free Speech Rankings provide a treasure trove of data on the evolving state of free expression at American colleges and universities.

FIRE's Spotlight ratings — our ratings of the written policies governing student speech at nearly 500 institutions of higher education in the United States — also factored into each school's overall score. Three substantive ratings are possible: “red light,” “yellow light,” and “green light.” A “red light” rating indicates that the institution has at least one policy that both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech. A “yellow light” rating indicates that an institution maintains at least one policy that places a clear restriction on a more limited amount of protected expression, or one that, by virtue of vague wording, could too easily be used to restrict protected expression. A “green light” rating indicates that an institution maintains no policies that seriously threaten speech, although this rating does not indicate whether a college actively supports free expression.⁷

4 A full list of all the scholar sanction attempts that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6LLZqHj1oOa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=1204583933#gid=1204583933>. The full Scholars Under Fire database is available on FIRE's website at <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/scholars-under-fire>.

5 All data reported in this section reflect the Students Under Fire database as of June 15, 2024. A full list of all the student sanction attempts that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6LLZqHj1oOa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=472255842#gid=472255842>. The full Students Under Fire database is currently internal to FIRE but will be released in full in early 2025.

6 Schools were not penalized for how they handled the encampment protests. As this report demonstrates, the impact of the encampment protests on the campus speech climate is captured by responses to survey questions that ask students about their confidence in that their college administration protects speech rights on campus; their comfort expressing controversial political views; and, their frequency of self-censorship. Deplatformings that occurred during the encampment protests were also still included in the calculation of the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings.

7 See: Using FIRE's Spotlight Database. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/using-fires-spotlight-database>.

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 free speech. “Warning” schools, therefore, were not ranked, and their overall scores are presented separately in this report.⁸

For this year’s rankings, the cutoff date for assessing a school’s speech code policies was June 15, 2024. Any changes to a school’s Spotlight rating that occurred since then will be reflected in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings.

Overall Score

To create an overall score for each college, we first summed the following student subcomponents: “Comfort Expressing Ideas,” “Self-Censorship,” “Mean Tolerance,” “Disruptive Conduct,” “Administrative Support,” and “Openness.” Then, we subtracted the “Tolerance Difference.” By including the “Mean Tolerance” (as opposed to including “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” and “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers” separately) and subtracting the “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 further account for the speech climate on an individual campus, we incorporated behavioral components. A school earned two bonus points each time it unequivocally defended free expression during a campus speech controversy — a rating of “High Honors” for its public response to a speech controversy. For instance, when the student government at Arizona State University opposed a registered student group’s invitation to Mohammed el-Kurd to speak on campus, and other members of the campus community petitioned the university to disinvite el-Kurd, a university spokesperson responded:

The university is committed to a safe environment where the free exchange of ideas can take place . . . As a public university, ASU adheres to the First Amendment and strives to ensure the fullest degree of intellectual freedom and free expression. All individuals and groups on campus have the right to express their opinions, whatever those opinions may be, as long as they do not violate the student code of conduct, student organization policies, and do not infringe on another student’s individual rights.

el-Kurd spoke successfully on campus, and we awarded ASU two bonus points.

A school earned one bonus point for responding to a speech controversy by making a public statement that strongly defends the First Amendment but is not as full-throated a defense as a “High Honors” statement. These statements received the rating of “Honors.” For instance, at New York University, NYU Law Students for Palestine and Jewish Law Students for a Free Palestine called for the cancellation of an event featuring Robert Howse and Michal Cotler-Wunsh, because Cotler-Wunsh supports the occupation of Palestine. The event was co-sponsored by a student group, NYU’s Jewish Law Students Association, as well as the president’s office and the Bronfman Center for Jewish Life. NYU did not cancel the event, and protesters interrupted Cotler-Wunsh several times during his remarks before voluntarily leaving, allowing the event to resume and conclude successfully. The dean of the law school said the following in response:

⁸ The Spotlight Database is available on FIRE’s website: <https://www.thefire.org/resources/spotlight/>.

The principles of free speech and inquiry are complemented by debate, challenge and protest . . . While dissent may be vigorous, it must not interfere with the speaker’s ability to communicate — which is exactly why, should those interrupters not have left on their own accord, they would be subject to discipline.

We awarded one point for this response, which occurred in 2024, then we set this bonus to decrease by one-quarter of a point for each year that passes.

We also applied penalties when a school sanctioned a scholar, student, or student group, or deplatformed a speaker.

A school lost up to five points each time it sanctioned (e.g., investigated, suspended, or terminated) a scholar. When the sanction did not result in termination the school received a penalty of one point, which we set to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year: This meant penalizing a school a full point for sanctioning a scholar in 2024, three-quarters of a point for sanctioning a scholar in 2023, half a point for sanctioning a scholar in 2022, and one-quarter of a point for sanctioning a scholar in 2021. However, if the administration terminated the scholar, we subtracted three points, and if that scholar was tenured, we subtracted five points. We applied full penalties for termination for four years, then set them to decline by one-quarter of a point each year. So, a penalty for termination that occurred in 2020 has just now started to decay.

A school lost up to three points for sanctioning students or student groups. When the sanction did not result in expulsion, the revocation of acceptance, the denial or revoking of recognition, suspension, or termination of a student’s campus employment (e.g. as a resident assistant) the school received a penalty of one point. Like with scholar sanctions that did not result in termination, we set these penalties to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year. If a school suspended a student or terminated their campus employment, we penalized it two points. We also set these penalties to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year. However, if a school denied or revoked a student group’s recognition, expelled a student, or revoked their acceptance, it was penalized three points. We applied these penalties in full for four years, and then set them to decline by one-quarter of a point each year.

Regarding deplatforming attempts, a school was penalized one point if an invited speaker withdrew because of the controversy caused by their upcoming appearance on campus or if an event was postponed in response to a controversy. We set this penalty to decrease by a quarter of a point each year. Schools where an attempted disruption occurred received a penalty of two points. We applied this penalty for four years, then set it to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year. Schools with deplatforming attempts that resulted in event cancellations, preemptive rejections of speakers, removal of artwork on display, the revocation of a speaker’s invitation, or a substantial event disruption were penalized three points. We applied these penalties in full for four years, then set them to decline by one-quarter of a point each year.

After we applied bonuses and penalties, we standardized each school’s score by group — “Warning” schools and other schools — making the average score in each group 50.00 and the standard deviation 10.00. Following standardization, we added one standard deviation to the final score of colleges who received a “green light” rating for their speech codes. We also subtracted half a standard deviation from the final score of colleges that received a “yellow light” rating, one standard deviation from the final score of schools that received a “red light” rating, and two standard deviations from schools that received a “Warning” rating.

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

Topline Results

How clear is it to you that your college administration protects free speech on campus?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all clear	18	8
Not very clear	46	21
Somewhat clear	95	43
Very clear	50	23
Extremely clear	12	5

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?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all likely	28	13
Not very likely	49	22
Somewhat likely	99	45
Very likely	38	17
Extremely likely	6	3

How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? [Presented in randomized order]
Publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	78	36
Somewhat uncomfortable	62	28
Somewhat comfortable	56	25
Very comfortable	25	11

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	49	22
Somewhat uncomfortable	76	34
Somewhat comfortable	64	29
Very comfortable	31	14

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	54	25
Somewhat uncomfortable	71	32
Somewhat comfortable	70	32
Very comfortable	25	11

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.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	40	18
Somewhat uncomfortable	67	31
Somewhat comfortable	72	33
Very comfortable	40	18

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	87	40
Somewhat uncomfortable	70	32
Somewhat comfortable	46	21
Very comfortable	17	8

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?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	30	14
Rarely	64	29
Occasionally, once or twice a month	89	41
Fairly often, a couple times a week	26	12
Very often, nearly every day	11	5

This next series of questions asks you about self-censorship in different settings. For the purpose of these questions, self-censorship is defined as follows:

Refraining from sharing certain views because you fear social (e.g., exclusion from social events), professional (e.g., losing 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), and whether the consequences come from state or non-state sources. [Presented in randomized order]

How often do you self-censor during conversations with other students on campus?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	24	11
Rarely	81	37
Occasionally, once or twice a month	61	28
Fairly often, a couple times a week	38	17
Very often, nearly every day	15	7

How often do you self-censor during conversations with your professors?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	23	11
Rarely	82	37
Occasionally, once or twice a month	50	23
Fairly often, a couple times a week	47	21
Very often, nearly every day	19	8

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	18	8
Rarely	76	34
Occasionally, once or twice a month	71	32
Fairly often, a couple times a week	32	14
Very often, nearly every day	22	10

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.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	14	6
Sometimes acceptable	46	21
Rarely acceptable	69	32
Never acceptable	91	41

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	8	3
Sometimes acceptable	49	22
Rarely acceptable	54	25
Never acceptable	109	49

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	11	5
Sometimes acceptable	27	12
Rarely acceptable	20	9
Never acceptable	162	74

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.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	92	42
Probably should not allow this speaker	60	27
Probably should allow this speaker	48	22
Definitely should allow this speaker	20	9

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	67	30
Probably should not allow this speaker	67	31
Probably should allow this speaker	63	29
Definitely should allow this speaker	22	10

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	92	42
Probably should not allow this speaker	61	28
Probably should allow this speaker	49	22
Definitely should allow this speaker	18	8

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	44	20
Probably should not allow this speaker	78	35
Probably should allow this speaker	78	36
Definitely should allow this speaker	20	9

The police are just as racist as the Klu Klux Klan.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	78	35
Probably should not allow this speaker	70	32
Probably should allow this speaker	57	26
Definitely should allow this speaker	15	7

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	47	21
Probably should not allow this speaker	58	26
Probably should allow this speaker	88	40
Definitely should allow this speaker	27	12

Collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	62	28
Probably should not allow this speaker	80	36
Probably should allow this speaker	59	27
Definitely should allow this speaker	19	9

From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	33	15
Probably should not allow this speaker	52	24
Probably should allow this speaker	101	46
Definitely should allow this speaker	34	16

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? [Presented in randomized order with none of the above always listed last]

Abortion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	122	55
Yes	98	45

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	153	69
Yes	67	31

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	186	85
Yes	34	15

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	173	79
Yes	47	21

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	197	90
Yes	23	10

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	149	68
Yes	71	32

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	155	70
Yes	65	30

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	141	64
Yes	79	36

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	154	70
Yes	66	30

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	134	61
Yes	86	39

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	145	66
Yes	75	34

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	147	67
Yes	73	33

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	81	37
Yes	139	63

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	140	64
Yes	80	36

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	139	63
Yes	81	37

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	120	54
Yes	100	46

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	153	70
Yes	67	30

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	143	65
Yes	77	35

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	193	88
Yes	27	12

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	124	56
Yes	96	44

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	202	92
Yes	18	8

Which of the following groups on your campus should be able to register as student organizations and receive student activity fees? [Presented in randomized order with none of the above always listed last]

Asian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	82	37
Yes	135	61
(Missing)	3	1

Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	78	36
Yes	139	63
(Missing)	3	1

Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	83	38
Yes	134	61
(Missing)	3	1

Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	95	43
Yes	122	55
(Missing)	3	1

LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	81	37
Yes	135	62
(Missing)	3	1

Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	87	39
Yes	130	59
(Missing)	3	1

Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	89	40
Yes	128	58
(Missing)	3	1

Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	88	40
Yes	129	59
(Missing)	3	1

Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	93	42
Yes	124	56
(Missing)	3	1

Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	110	50
Yes	106	48
(Missing)	3	1

Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	112	51
Yes	105	48
(Missing)	3	1

Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	106	48
Yes	111	51
(Missing)	3	1

Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	116	53
Yes	101	46
(Missing)	3	1

Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	108	49
Yes	108	49
(Missing)	3	1

Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	88	40
Yes	128	58
(Missing)	3	1

Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	135	61
Yes	82	37
(Missing)	3	1

Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	119	54
Yes	98	45
(Missing)	3	1

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	114	52
Yes	103	47
(Missing)	3	1

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	179	81
Yes	38	17
(Missing)	3	1

How often, if at all, do you hide your political beliefs from your professors in an attempt to get a better grade?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	65	29
Rarely	52	24
Occasionally	46	21
Fairly often, a couple times a week	27	12
Very often, nearly every day	26	12
(Missing)	3	1

Have you ever been involved in publicly calling out, punishing, or “canceling” someone or a group for inappropriate statements or actions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	34	15
No	183	83
(Missing)	3	1

Thinking of the last incident where someone was publicly called out, punished, or “canceled” for their statements or actions, would you say the consequence or impact on the person was...

Response	Frequency	Percent
Too lenient	33	15
About right	117	53
Too harsh	67	30
(Missing)	3	1

How often, if ever, have you personally been offended by perspectives shared by peers or classmates when in the classroom?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	43	19
Rarely	83	38
Occasionally	67	31
Fairly often, a couple times a week	14	6
Very often, nearly every day	9	4
(Missing)	3	1

From what you know about the situation in the Middle East, do your sympathies lie more with the Israelis or more with the Palestinians?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Israelis	38	17
Palestinians	61	28
Both equally	45	21
Neither	14	7
Don't know	59	27
(Missing)	3	1

Regardless of your overall feelings toward the Israelis and the Palestinians, who do you think is more responsible for the 2023 outbreak of violence in the Middle East: Israel or Hamas?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Israel	34	15
Hamas	70	32
Both equally	32	15
Don't know	81	37
(Missing)	3	1

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	90	41
Less than once a year	23	11
Once or twice a year	36	16
Several times a year	33	15
Once a month	8	4
2-3 times a month	5	2
About weekly	11	5
Weekly	7	3
Several times a week	1	1
(Missing)	4	2

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	3	1
No	214	97
(Missing)	4	2

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	3	1	1
No	214	97	99
(Missing)	4	2	NA

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	8	4	17
Less than half the time	12	6	27
About half the time	15	7	32
Most of the time, nearly every day	5	2	11
Always	6	3	12
(Missing)	175	79	NA

How often would you say that you feel lonely or isolated?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	8	3	20
Less than half the time	19	9	50
About half the time	4	2	10
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	2	10
Always	4	2	10
(Missing)	182	83	NA

How often would you say that you feel like you have no time for yourself?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	2	8
Less than half the time	13	6	27
About half the time	15	7	31
Most of the time, nearly every day	14	7	30
Always	2	1	4
(Missing)	172	78	NA

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	16	7	37
Less than half the time	20	9	47
About half the time	7	3	16
Most of the time, nearly every day	0	0	1
(Missing)	176	80	NA

How often would you say that you feel stressed, frustrated, or overwhelmed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	2	10
Less than half the time	6	3	15
About half the time	19	9	46
Most of the time, nearly every day	5	2	11
Always	8	4	19
(Missing)	178	81	NA



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