

# 2025 College Free Speech Rankings

## Duke University

27

OVERALL  
RANK

SLIGHTLY  
ABOVE  
AVERAGE

SPEECH  
CLIMATE

GREEN

SPOTLIGHT  
RATING



**FIRE**  
Foundation for Individual  
Rights and Expression

Executive Summary **1**

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Full Report **2**

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**How Comfortable Are Duke Students Expressing Their Views on Controversial Topics?** **2**

**How Often Are Duke Students Self-Censoring on Campus?** **3**

**What Topics Are Difficult for Duke Students to Have Conversations About?** **3**

**Which Speakers Do Duke Students Consider Controversial?** **4**

**What Kinds of Disruptive Conduct Do Duke Students Consider Acceptable?** **5**

**How Is Duke’s Administrative Stance on Freedom of Speech Perceived?** **6**

**A ‘Green Light’ School with Some Controversy** **6**

**How Can Duke Improve?** **7**

Methodology **8**

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**Free Speech Rankings** **9**

**Student Perceptions** **9**

**Campus Behavioral Metrics** **10**

**Overall Score** **12**

Topline Results **14**

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# Executive Summary

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**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](https://rankings.thefire.org)) that allows for easy comparison between institutions.

Duke University was one of the 257 schools surveyed. Key findings from this school include:

- A ranking of 27 overall, with an overall score of 59.72 and a “Slightly Above Average” speech climate.
- Among other private institutions Duke ranks ahead of Vanderbilt University (140), Tufts University (182), Dartmouth College (224), Brown University (229), Georgetown University (240), and the University of Pennsylvania (248).
- Among other schools in North Carolina, Duke sits in the middle of the pack, ranking ahead of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (62), Wake Forest University (78), and Davidson College (127), but ranking behind North Carolina State University (7), University of North Carolina at Charlotte (9), East Carolina University (13), the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (22), and Appalachian State University (24).
- A good performance on “Self-Censorship” (53), “Openness” (61), “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers” (70), and “Mean Tolerance” (79).
- A decent performance on “Tolerance Difference” (100) and “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” (109).
- A below average performance on “Administrative Support” (144).
- A poor performance on “Comfort Expressing Ideas” (182) and “Disruptive Conduct” (195).
- Maintaining speech policies that earn it a “green light” rating from FIRE.
- Experiencing a handful of speech controversies that negatively impact its ranking, most of which occurred in 2021.

# Full Report

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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 College Free Speech Rankings. The response to the rankings report and corresponding online tool was overwhelmingly positive.

This past year FIRE and College Pulse surveyed 257 schools, ranking 251 of them.<sup>1</sup> Duke University, with a score of 59.72, has a “Slightly Above Average” speech climate and ranks 27 overall in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings. This is a considerable improvement over last year, when Duke ranked 124 with an overall score of 46.58.

Among its peer private universities, Duke ranks well ahead of Vanderbilt University (140), Tufts University (182), Dartmouth College (224), Brown University (229), Georgetown University (240), and the University of Pennsylvania (248).

Among other schools in North Carolina however, Duke sits in the middle of the pack. It ranks ahead of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (62), Wake Forest University (78), and Davidson College (127); but behind North Carolina State University (7), University of North Carolina at Charlotte (9), East Carolina University (13), the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (22), and Appalachian State University (24).

## HOW COMFORTABLE ARE DUKE STUDENTS EXPRESSING THEIR VIEWS ON CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS?

Duke ranks 182 on the “Comfort Expressing Ideas” component, similar to last year’s ranking of 176.

Roughly two fifths (39%) of Duke students say they feel “very” or “somewhat” comfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic, a considerable improvement on the 28% of Duke students who said this last year.

However, there was little to no improvement in feeling comfortable in the other campus contexts:

- 45% of Duke students feel “very” or “somewhat” comfortable expressing disagreement with one of their professors about a controversial political topic in a written assignment compared to 42% last year.
- 39% of Duke students feel “very” or “somewhat” comfortable expressing their views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion compared to 41% last year.

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

- 53% of Duke students feel “very” or “somewhat” comfortable expressing their 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 compared to 48% last year.
- 26% of Duke students feel “very” or “somewhat” comfortable expressing an unpopular political opinion to their fellow students on a social media account tied to their name compared to 24% last year.

## HOW OFTEN ARE DUKE STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

Duke ranks 53 on the “Self-Censorship” component.<sup>2</sup>

Duke students self-censor more often in conversations with their peers — 25% say they do so “very” or “fairly” often — compared to when they talk to their professors (17%) or during classroom discussions (15%). Fourteen percent of Duke students also say they hide their political beliefs from their professors to get a better grade.

Nationally, about a quarter of students say they self-censor “very” or “fairly” often in conversations with other students (24%), in conversations with their professors (25%), or during classroom discussions (26%). And 17% of students nationally say that they hide their political beliefs from their professors in order to get a better grade.

## WHAT TOPICS ARE DIFFICULT FOR DUKE STUDENTS TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT?

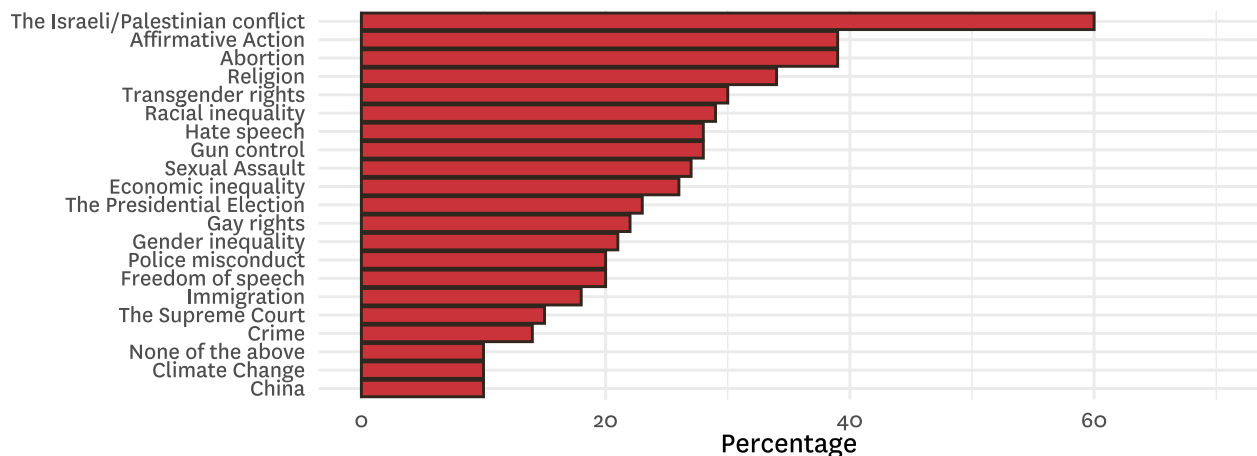
Duke ranks 61 on the “Openness” component, similar to last year’s ranking of 59.

The majority of Duke students (60%), like most students at colleges across the country, identified the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as difficult to discuss on campus. Notable portions of Duke students also identified abortion (39%), affirmative action (39%), and religion (34%) as difficult to discuss. No other topic was identified by more than 30% of Duke students.

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<sup>2</sup> We provide a definition of self-censorship before presenting students with the 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.”

**FIGURE 1** Students Identifying Each Topic as Difficult to Discuss on Campus (%)



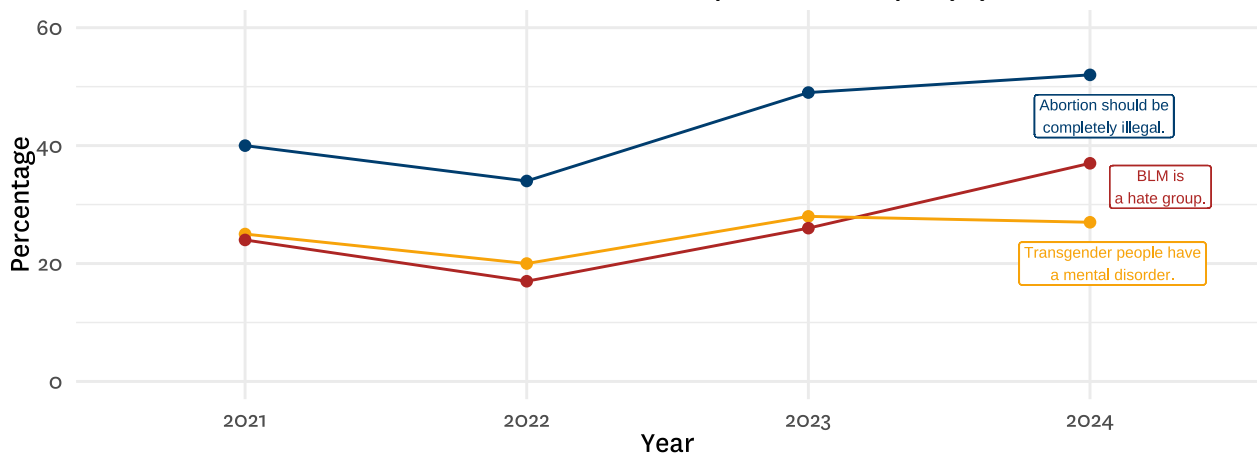
## WHICH SPEAKERS DO DUKE STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

Duke ranks 70 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers,” 79 on “Mean Tolerance,” 100 on “Tolerance Difference,” and 109 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers.” Last year, Duke ranked 82, 37, 175, and 35, respectively on these components.

When it comes to allowing controversial speakers on campus, Duke students are not very tolerant. More than half would allow a speaker who said that “Children should be able to transition without parental consent” (60%) or a speaker who said that “Abortion should be completely illegal” (52%) on campus.

However, less than half of them would allow a speaker who said that “The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan” (48%) or one who said that “The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution” (47%) on campus; less than two fifths (37%) would allow one who said that “Black Lives Matter is a hate group” on campus; and, 27% would allow one who said that “Transgender people have a mental disorder” on campus.

**FIGURE 2** Students Who Would Allow Each Conservative Speaker on Campus (%)



Additionally, this year’s survey asked about two speakers relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though responses did not affect rankings. A majority of Duke students support allowing both speakers on campus — 57% would allow a speaker who said “From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” to speak on campus and 56% say that someone who said that “Collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security” should be allowed to speak on campus. Nationally, 71% of students say they would allow a speaker who said “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” to speak on their campus, and 40% say that a speaker who said “Collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security” should be allowed to speak on their campus.

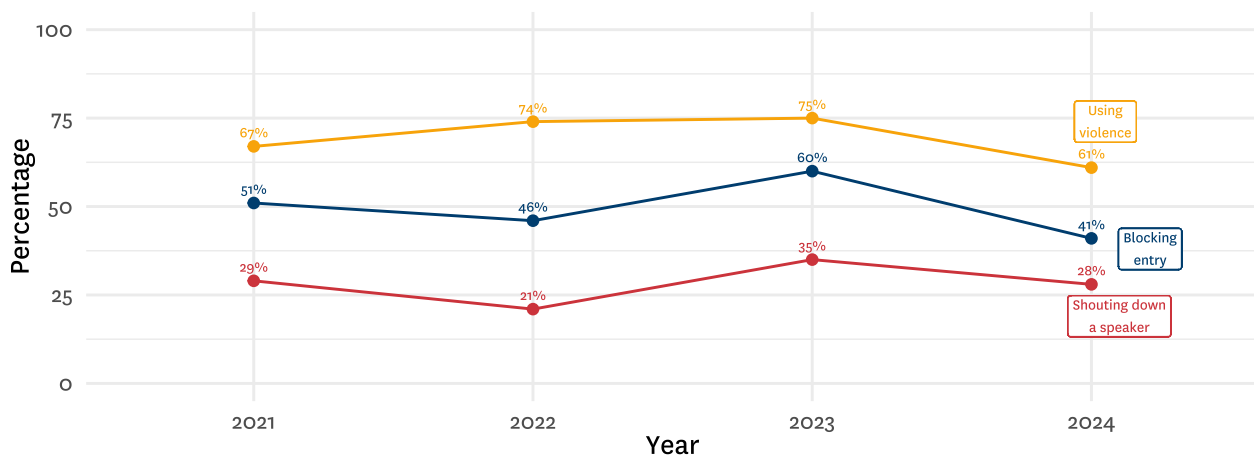
## WHAT KINDS OF DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT DO DUKE STUDENTS CONSIDER ACCEPTABLE?

Duke ranks 195 on the “Disruptive Conduct” component, a significant decline from last year’s ranking of 77.

Duke’s drop in the rankings on “Disruptive Conduct” is due to the number of Duke students who say that violent protest tactics are “never” acceptable declining significantly this year. Last year, 60% of Duke students said that blocking other students from attending a campus speech was “never” acceptable compared to just 41% this year. Worse, last year 75% of Duke students said that using violence to stop a campus speech was “never” acceptable compared to just 61% this year.

The percentage of Duke students who say that shouting down a speaker on campus is “never” acceptable also declined. Last year, 35% of Duke students said this. This year, 28% do.

**FIGURE 3** Students Who Say Each Protest Tactic Is “Never” Acceptable (%)



## HOW IS DUKE’S ADMINISTRATIVE STANCE ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH PERCEIVED?

Duke ranks 144 on the “Administrative Support” component, similar to last year’s ranking of 147.

Roughly a third (31%) of Duke students say it is “extremely” or “very” clear that their administration protects free speech on campus, while 21% say this is “not at all” or “not very” clear. This represents an improvement over last year when 24% of Duke students said it was “extremely” or “very” clear that their administration protects free speech on campus, while 22% said it was “not at all” or “not very” clear.

Roughly a fifth (22%) of Duke students say it is “extremely” or “very” likely that their administration would defend a speaker’s right to express their views during a speech controversy, while 28% say this is “not at all” or “not very” likely. And, in contrast to the improvement in the clarity of the administration’s stance on free speech, confidence in the administration to defend free speech declined this year. Last year 25% said it was “extremely” or “very” likely that their administration would defend a speaker’s rights, while 22% said it was “not at all” or “not very” likely.

## A ‘GREEN LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH SOME CONTROVERSY

FIRE awards Duke University our highest, “green light” rating for maintaining no regulations on student expression that seriously imperil speech. As Duke puts it in its policy on Pickets, Protests, and Demonstrations:

*Duke University respects the right of all members of the academic community to explore and to discuss questions which interest them, to express opinions publicly and privately, and to join together to demonstrate their concern by orderly means. It is the policy of the university to protect the right of voluntary assembly, to make its facilities available for peaceful assembly, to welcome guest speakers, to protect the exercise of these rights from disruption or interference.*

While we would encourage Duke to follow the lead of other green light institutions like the University of Virginia by adopting a free speech policy statement modeled after the University of Chicago’s “Report of the Committee on Freedom of Expression,” better known as the “Chicago Statement,” to further affirm their commitment to free expression, we commend Duke for its green light rating.

Since 2021, Duke has been involved in four separate speech controversies. In 2021, Duke launched an investigation after an unidentified student hung a copy of George Floyd’s toxicology report beside an image of his face on a campus dormitory bulletin board commemorating Black History Month. Administrators ordered a mandatory meeting for residents of the dorm to discuss the incident and removed the material amid the investigation.

Later that year, Eighth Circuit Judge David Stras’ speech entitled “What My Grandparents’ Experiences in the Holocaust Taught Me about the First Amendment” was interrupted by students who read prepared remarks critical of Stras’ decisions and statements related to LGBTQ+ anti-discrimination issues. Stras handled the situation by allowing the students to say their remarks and continuing with his speech, but the university did not involve itself after the attempted disruption. And in November 2021, Duke’s student government president vetoed the recognition of Students Supporting Israel, a pro-Israel club, because



the club posted on its Instagram page criticism of a student who said that Duke, by recognizing the club, promoted “settler colonialism.” The student senate affirmed the president’s veto of recognition against the urging of a U.S. Senator and multiple advocacy groups, including FIRE, which sent a letter to the student government. Three months later, the student senate approved the group.

Last spring, administrators launched an investigation into pro-Palestinian counter-protesters who protested on the side of the quad opposite a rally organized by a Jewish student group calling for the release of Israeli hostages by Hamas. The university announced its investigation into the counter-protest on the grounds that it was not a pre-registered event and “included outside individuals who were not approved to be on campus.”

Duke was penalized for its responses to each of the four speech controversies because it failed to adequately defend the expressive rights of students or speakers.

## HOW CAN DUKE IMPROVE?

Although Duke has strong policies supporting free expression, it has not responded to free speech controversies in a speech-protective manner. One thing that Duke could do to improve its ranking and speech climate is defend free expression when speech controversies occur on campus. Properly defending free expression in the midst of controversy would improve Duke’s ranking rather than harm it.

Additionally, Duke has an average ranking for “Administrative Support,” but its policies suggest the university aims to support free expression. If the university were to publicize its strong policies and respond to speech controversies in a speech-protective manner, then that could build trust among students that the university supports free expression and, in turn, improve its “Administrative Support” ranking. Similarly, the university could improve its “Comfort Expressing Ideas” ranking — which is one of its worst — by displaying its support for free expression on campus and teaching students *why* free expression is important and valuable on campus.

On that note, Duke could improve its “Disruptive Conduct” ranking, which is its worst ranking, by teaching students the activities and behaviors that are acceptable and unacceptable forms of protest, which could both prevent disruptions and improve its ranking. By creating a stronger culture of free expression and thereby improving its survey-based components, Duke could both improve its ranking and its campus culture. The university could also teach students more directly that disruptions will not be tolerated or why disruptions are bad for free expression to improve its “Administrative Support” and “Disruptive Conduct” rankings.

# Methodology

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**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 (IPF) 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 (IPF) 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.<sup>3</sup>
- **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

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

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 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.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup>
- Supporting students and student groups, as recorded in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings behavioral metrics documentation that is available online.<sup>6</sup>

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.<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

5 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>.

6 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.

7 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.

8 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.<sup>9</sup>

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:

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<sup>9</sup> 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	2	2
Not very clear	20	19
Somewhat clear	52	48
Very clear	30	28
Extremely clear	3	3

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	5	5
Not very likely	25	23
Somewhat likely	55	51
Very likely	19	18
Extremely likely	4	4

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	22	20
Somewhat uncomfortable	44	40
Somewhat comfortable	33	31
Very comfortable	9	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	15	14
Somewhat uncomfortable	44	40
Somewhat comfortable	38	35
Very comfortable	11	10

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	23	21
Somewhat uncomfortable	43	40
Somewhat comfortable	28	26
Very comfortable	14	13



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	25	23
Somewhat uncomfortable	27	25
Somewhat comfortable	44	41
Very comfortable	13	12

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	42	39
Somewhat uncomfortable	38	35
Somewhat comfortable	23	21
Very comfortable	5	5

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	14	13
Rarely	41	38
Occasionally, once or twice a month	34	32
Fairly often, a couple times a week	17	16
Very often, nearly every day	2	2

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	6	6
Rarely	43	39
Occasionally, once or twice a month	32	30
Fairly often, a couple times a week	24	22
Very often, nearly every day	4	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	13	12
Rarely	39	36
Occasionally, once or twice a month	37	34
Fairly often, a couple times a week	13	12
Very often, nearly every day	5	5

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	13	12
Rarely	36	33
Occasionally, once or twice a month	43	39
Fairly often, a couple times a week	13	12
Very often, nearly every day	3	3

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	7	6
Sometimes acceptable	28	26
Rarely acceptable	43	40
Never acceptable	31	28

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	6	5
Sometimes acceptable	29	27
Rarely acceptable	29	27
Never acceptable	44	41

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	4	3
Sometimes acceptable	17	16
Rarely acceptable	21	20
Never acceptable	66	61

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	36	33
Probably should not allow this speaker	43	40
Probably should allow this speaker	19	18
Definitely should allow this speaker	10	9

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	16	15
Probably should not allow this speaker	35	32
Probably should allow this speaker	42	39
Definitely should allow this speaker	14	13

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	29	27
Probably should not allow this speaker	39	36
Probably should allow this speaker	28	26
Definitely should allow this speaker	12	11

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	8	7
Probably should not allow this speaker	50	46
Probably should allow this speaker	39	36
Definitely should allow this speaker	11	11

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	17	16
Probably should not allow this speaker	40	37
Probably should allow this speaker	38	35
Definitely should allow this speaker	14	13

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	16	15
Probably should not allow this speaker	28	26
Probably should allow this speaker	43	40
Definitely should allow this speaker	21	20

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	19	18
Probably should not allow this speaker	28	26
Probably should allow this speaker	42	39
Definitely should allow this speaker	18	17

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	14	13
Probably should not allow this speaker	33	30
Probably should allow this speaker	43	40
Definitely should allow this speaker	18	17

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	66	61
Yes	42	39

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	66	61
Yes	42	39

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	98	90
Yes	10	10

## Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	97	90
Yes	11	10

## Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	92	86
Yes	16	14

## Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	80	74
Yes	28	26

## Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	86	80
Yes	22	20

## Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	85	78
Yes	23	22

## Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	86	79
Yes	22	21

## Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	78	72
Yes	30	28

## Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	78	72
Yes	30	28

## Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	88	82
Yes	20	18

## The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	43	40
Yes	65	60

## The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	84	77
Yes	24	23

## Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	86	80
Yes	22	20

## Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	76	71
Yes	32	29

## Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	71	66
Yes	37	34

## Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	79	73
Yes	29	27

## The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	92	85
Yes	16	15

## Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	75	70
Yes	33	30

## None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	97	90
Yes	11	10

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	28	26
Yes	80	74

## Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	30	28
Yes	78	72

## Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	30	27
Yes	78	73

## Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	48	44
Yes	60	56

## LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	30	28
Yes	78	72

## Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	33	30
Yes	75	70

## Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	30	28
Yes	78	72

## Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	29	27
Yes	79	73

## Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	32	30
Yes	76	70

## Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	43	40
Yes	65	60



## Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	40	37
Yes	68	63

## Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	36	34
Yes	72	66

## Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	41	38
Yes	67	62

## Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	37	34
Yes	71	66

## Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	38	35
Yes	70	65

## Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	51	48
Yes	57	52

## Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	50	46
Yes	58	54

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	54	50
Yes	54	50

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	96	89
Yes	12	11

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	22	21
Rarely	52	48
Occasionally	18	17
Fairly often, a couple times a week	13	12
Very often, nearly every day	2	2

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	9	9
No	99	91

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	16	15
About right	43	40
Too harsh	49	45

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	22	20
Rarely	50	47
Occasionally	27	25
Fairly often, a couple times a week	6	5
Very often, nearly every day	3	3

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	28	26
Palestinians	44	41
Both equally	20	18
Neither	4	3
Don't know	12	11

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	25	23
Hamas	44	41
Both equally	15	14
Don't know	23	22

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	30	27
Less than once a year	9	8
Once or twice a year	15	14
Several times a year	17	16
Once a month	6	5
2-3 times a month	7	6
About weekly	11	10
Weekly	8	7
Several times a week	6	5

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	4	4
No	104	96

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	108	100	100

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	2	2	9
Less than half the time	3	3	17
About half the time	10	9	49
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	3	18
Always	1	1	7

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	11	10	35
Less than half the time	16	15	51
About half the time	4	4	13
Most of the time, nearly every day	0	0	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	3	3	13
Less than half the time	2	2	8
About half the time	8	7	36
Most of the time, nearly every day	8	7	36
Always	1	1	6

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	7	7	38
Less than half the time	9	8	47
About half the time	2	2	10
Most of the time, nearly every day	0	0	2
Always	1	1	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	1	1	9
Less than half the time	3	3	21
About half the time	8	8	50
Most of the time, nearly every day	3	3	18
Always	0	0	2



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