

2025 College Free Speech Rankings

Georgetown University

240

OVERALL
RANK

POOR

SPEECH
CLIMATE

RED

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.

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

- A ranking of 240 overall, with an overall score of 25.96 and a “Poor” speech climate.
- Among other ranked schools in Washington D.C., Georgetown is at the bottom, ranked behind George Washington University (161), Howard University (236), and American University (237).
- Other nearby institutions also rank above Georgetown include the University of Virginia (1), the College of William & Mary (12), University of Maryland (39), Towson University (53), the University of Delaware (72), and Johns Hopkins University (119).
- A very strong performance on “Comfort Expressing Ideas” (7) and a good performance on “Openness” (48).
- An average performance on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” (120).
- A slightly below average performance on “Self-Censorship” (146).
- A poor performance on the remaining survey components: “Disruptive Conduct” (224); “Administrative Support” (230); “Mean Tolerance” (235); “Tolerance Difference” (235); and “Tolerance for Controversial Conservative Speakers” (243).
- Georgetown's overall score was penalized because of the outcomes of nine different speech controversies that have occurred since 2020.
- Maintaining speech policies that earn it a “red light” rating from FIRE.
- If Georgetown had “green light” speech policies, it would rank 140 in this year's College Free Speech Rankings with a score of 45.96.
- We're optimistic about future improvements following the administration making pro-free speech statements to incoming freshmen and inquiring with FIRE regarding reforming speech policies.

Full Report

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.

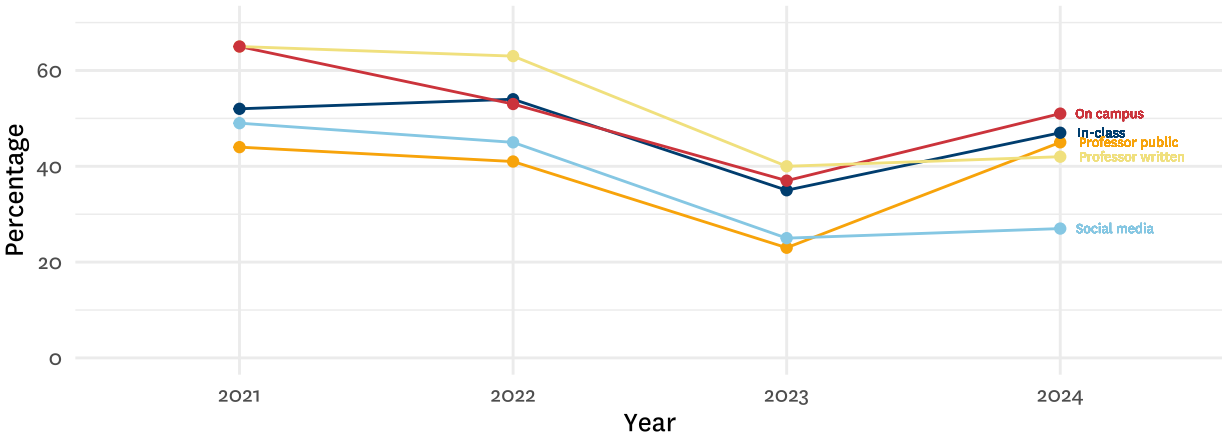
This year FIRE and College Pulse surveyed 257 schools, ranking 251 of them.¹ Georgetown University, with a score of 25.96, has a “Poor” speech climate and ranks 240 overall in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings.

HOW COMFORTABLE ARE GEORGETOWN STUDENTS EXPRESSING THEIR VIEWS ON CONTROVERSIAL TOPICS?

Georgetown University ranks 7 on the “Comfort Expressing Ideas” component.

Georgetown’s ranking on “Comfort Expressing Ideas” this year is a dramatic improvement on last year’s ranking of 86. This is driven by more Georgetown students reporting comfort publicly disagreeing with a professor on a controversial political topic, expressing their views on a controversial topic during an in-class discussion, and expressing their views on a controversial topic to other students during a discussion in a common campus space such as the quad. Georgetown students’ comfort disagreeing with a professor in a written assignment and their comfort expressing an unpopular political opinion to their peers on a social media account linked to their name remained unchanged from last year.

FIGURE 1 Students Who Feel “Very” or “Somewhat” Comfortable Expressing Views by Context (%)



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.

HOW OFTEN ARE GEORGETOWN STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

Georgetown University ranks 146 on the “Self-Censorship” component.

Students were provided with a clear definition of self-censorship before we asked how often they did so in three different settings on campus: “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.”

Once asked, Georgetown students say they self-censor considerably less often than students nationally:

- Just 7% of Georgetown students say they self-censor “very” or “fairly” often in conversations with other students compared to 24% of students nationally. This percentage is also a considerable decline from the 21% of Georgetown students who said they self-censored this often in conversations with their peers last year.
- 1 in 10 Georgetown students say they self-censor “very” or “fairly” often during conversations with their professors compared to 25% of students nationally. This percentage is also lower than the 20% of Georgetown students who said they self-censored this often in conversations with their professors last year.
- Roughly 1 in 10 (12%) Georgetown students say they self-censor “very” or “fairly” often during classroom discussions compared to 26% of students nationally. This percentage is also lower than the 22% of Georgetown students who said they self-censored this often during classroom discussions last year.

Georgetown’s somewhat poor performance on this component is largely a result of the percentage of students who say they self-censor “occasionally, at least once or twice or month.” Half of Georgetown students say they self-censor this frequently during conversations with their peers, 40% say they self-censor this often in conversations with their professors, and 43% say they self-censor this often during classroom discussions.

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

Georgetown University ranks 48 on the “Openness” component.

Roughly two-thirds (65%) of Georgetown students identify the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a topic that is difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus. Last year, only 39% of Georgetown students said this. Roughly a third (35%) of Georgetown students also identify abortion as a difficult topic to discuss, a considerable decline from the 60% of Georgetown students who said this last year and the 61% who said this in 2022. The percentage of Georgetown students that identify gun control as a difficult topic to discuss also declined. In 2022, 38% of Georgetown students said gun control was a difficult topic

to discuss and last year 37% of Georgetown students said this. This year, just 29% of Georgetown students say that gun control is difficult to discuss.

WHICH SPEAKERS DO GEORGETOWN STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

Georgetown University ranked 120 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers,” 235 on “Mean Tolerance,” 235 on “Tolerance Difference,” and 243 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers.”

At least half of Georgetown students say they would “probably” or “definitely” allow two of the three controversial liberal speakers on campus — 62% say this about a speaker who said “Children should be able to transition without parental consent,” and 52% say this about someone who said “The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan.”

A majority of Georgetown students opposed allowing the other four controversial speakers on campus, one liberal and three conservatives:

- 49% of Georgetown students say they would “definitely” or “probably” allow a speaker on campus who said “Abortion should be completely illegal.”
- 44% of Georgetown students say they would “definitely” or “probably” allow a speaker on campus who said “The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.”
- 26% of Georgetown students say they would “definitely” or “probably” allow a speaker on campus who said “Black Lives Matter is a hate group.”
- 22% of Georgetown students say they would “definitely” or “probably” allow a speaker on campus who said “Transgender people have a mental disorder.”

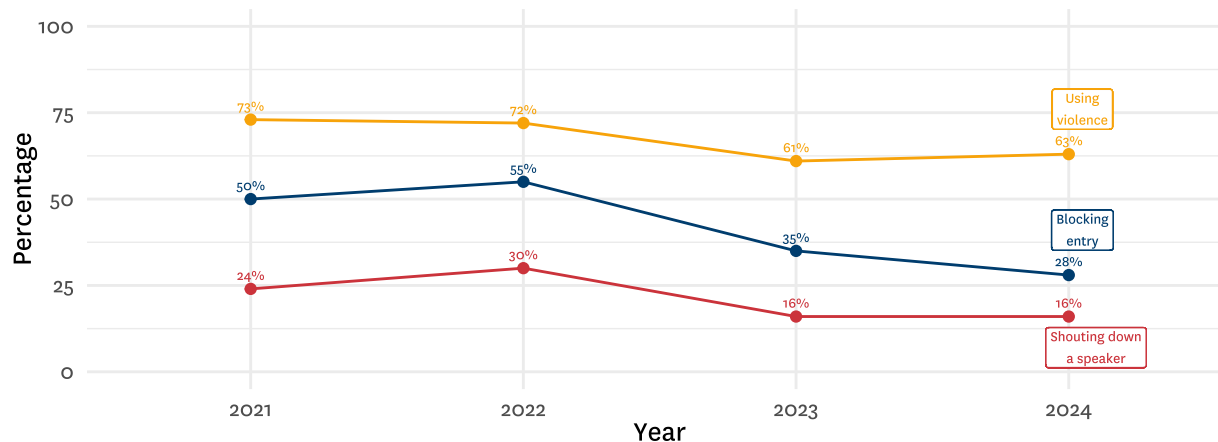
The opposition to allowing the third controversial liberal speaker is understandable because Georgetown is a Catholic university.

WHAT KINDS OF DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT DO GEORGETOWN STUDENTS CONSIDER ACCEPTABLE?

Georgetown University ranked 224 on the “Disruptive Conduct” component.

For the third year in a row, Georgetown performs poorly on “Disruptive Conduct.” Two years ago, Georgetown ranked 170 on this component. Last year, it ranked 246. This year, the percentage of Georgetown students who say that each form of illiberal protest — shouting down a speaker, blocking other students from entering an event, or using violence to stop a campus speech — is “never” acceptable has declined precipitously since 2021.

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



To put these percentages from Georgetown in perspective, consider that:

- 32% of students nationally say it is “never” acceptable for students to shout down a speaker.
- 48% of students nationally say it is “never” acceptable for students to block their peers from entering a campus event.
- 68% of students nationally say it is “never” acceptable for students to use violence to stop a campus speech.

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

Georgetown University ranks 230 on the “Administrative Support” Component.

Roughly a third (34%) of Georgetown students say it is “extremely” or “very” clear that their administration clearly protects freedom of speech on campus. This is similar to the 38% who said this last year and the 30% who said this in 2022.

About 3 in 10 (29%) Georgetown students think it is “extremely” or “very” likely that their administration will defend a speaker’s rights during a controversy over offensive speech, about the same as the 31% who said this last year.

Georgetown’s performance on “Administrative Support” is similar to its performance on “Self-Censorship.” While only 16% of Georgetown students say it is “not at all” or “not very” clear that their administration clearly protects freedom of speech on campus, 51% say it is only “somewhat” clear. Similarly, one-fifth of Georgetown students say it is “not at all” or “not very” likely that their administration will defend a speaker’s rights during a controversy over offensive speech, while 52% say this is only “somewhat” likely.

It is possible that students feel this way because of Georgetown’s inconsistency in resolving past speech controversies.

A ‘RED LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH A HISTORY OF CONTROVERSY

FIRE awards Georgetown’s regulations on student expression our worst, “red light” rating, flagging one policy that clearly and substantially restricts student expression and two policies that earn a “yellow light” rating for posing either impermissibly vague or clear but narrow restrictions on protected speech. Georgetown earns a red light rating for maintaining a policy prohibiting “incivility,” defined as “behavior, either through language or actions, which disrespected another individual.” This sort of policy language is overly broad, implicating broad swaths of speech typically protected under First Amendment standards. Georgetown must revise this and their other policies to reduce the chilling effect they impose on the campus speech climate.

If Georgetown had “green light” speech policies, it would rank 140 in this year’s College Free Speech Rankings with a score of 45.96.

Georgetown’s ranking was also negatively impacted by four scholar sanctions, three student sanctions, a deplatforming, and an attempted disruption.

In 2021, Professor Sandra Sellers was terminated by the university after a video showing her and David Batson, a colleague, discussing the performance of Black students went viral. Batson also resigned. That same year, William Spruance, a law student, received a notification from administrators saying he had been “identified as non-compliant” with the school’s COVID-19 policies for “letting the mask fall beneath [the] nose.” After a meeting with an administrator, Spruance attended a meeting held by the Student Bar Association where he voiced his concerns over the school’s COVID-19 policies. Two days later, he was suspended from campus and ordered to submit to a psychiatric evaluation in which he had to “voluntarily” waive his right to medical confidentiality and attend a conduct hearing. After the school received negative press coverage, the suspension was lifted.

In 2022, Georgetown suspended law professor Ilya Shapiro after the Black Law Student Association issued a series of demands, including Shapiro’s termination, for controversial comments referring to the successor to Stephen Breyer on the Supreme Court. Georgetown required Professor Franz Werro to undergo mandatory training after the Asian Pacific American Law Students Association complained that he had referred to a student as “Mr. Chinaman.” Georgetown administrators blocked a funding request by the Graduate Student Government, which was attempting to organize a trip to Israel, because of opposition by anti-Israel students.

In 2023, members of the Georgetown Heckler, an undergraduate humor magazine, satirized Right to Life’s logo, which features a heart with half of it shaped like a foot. The Heckler set up a table on campus and members stuck their feet out below an overhanging banner that featured Right to Life’s logo accompanied by the words “Right to Feet.” Though Right to Life initially found the antics humorous, they subsequently filed a complaint and alleged that “The ‘Right to Feet’ tabling group was using our club logo and Georgetown’s name to advertise a QR code for donating to an organization [Planned Parenthood] that promotes and performs human dismemberment, which is against Georgetown’s Catholic Identity.” Administrators allowed the group to continue tabling but required them to cover up the logo on the banner and censor the school’s name with tape.

This past year, administrators informed the Georgetown College Republicans of an additional \$4,000 security fee a few days before a scheduled event featuring Brandon Straka, Natalie Beisner, Shemeka Michelle, and Gothix. Administrators also informed the College Republicans that the first four rows of the auditorium would be roped off. The College Republicans and the speakers agreed to the administration’s

requests. A few days later the speakers were notified that the event had been canceled because there wasn't sufficient time to deal with security concerns.

Additionally, after Georgetown Law Zionists invited Rudy Rochman, an Israeli Defense Force reservist, to speak at a campus event titled "The Intersections of Judaism and Zionism," Pro-Palestinian groups wrote to the dean of the law school opposing Rochman's invitation and called on the university to denounce the event. Roughly five minutes into Rochman's talk, about a dozen protesters from Georgetown Law Students for Justice in Palestine stood up in an aisle on one side and the room holding signs that said "IDF Off Campus." A little over 10 minutes later, the protesters walked out of the event, joining other protesters outside in loud chants that were audible inside the event space. Rochman ultimately completed his speech successfully after the attempted disruption.

Georgetown earned bonuses for how it handled two other speech controversies. In 2020, students and student groups petitioned the university to prevent Miko Peled from speaking because of Peled's views on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Peled spoke successfully and a university spokesperson said:

Georgetown University is committed to the free and open exchanges of ideas, even if those ideas may be found difficult or objectionable by some . . . Faculty members and student groups with access to benefits may invite any outside speaker or guest to speak on campus or at a virtual event. An appearance of any speaker or guest on campus, or at a Georgetown virtual event, is not an endorsement by Georgetown University.

Two years later, an off-campus group called on the university to prevent Mohammed el-Kurd from speaking because of his alleged anti-Semitism. el-Kurd also spoke successfully and the dean of students said the following in a meeting with Jewish students objecting to el-Kurd's invitation:

We allow a huge amount of latitude even where speech is deeply offensive to some members of the community, some or even many. . . . Those are things that we think are important to educational values, to promoting free speech, to promoting a free discussion of ideas, even if those ideas are deeply, deeply offensive.

HOW CAN GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY IMPROVE?

Georgetown University can improve its rating by revising its red light speech policy prohibiting "incivility" and its two "yellow light" policies. Obtaining a better speech code rating, however, does not by itself guarantee that a school actively supports free speech. Student perceptions of an administration's support for free speech on campus are just that — perceptions — which are subject to their own idiosyncrasies and could change quickly simply due to student turnover. The proof of whether a school truly supports free expression as a core value comes when that core value is tested by controversy.

The decisions administrators make in response to campus speech controversies are likely to have a more lasting influence on an individual school's climate for free expression than its policies or its students' perceptions of "Administrative Support." When a decision is made unequivocally in defense of free speech, it sends one kind of message to a school's students and faculty. When a response is tepid or, worse, violates someone's speech rights, it sends a very different kind of message.

Georgetown's recent record defending speech is mixed. Consistently defending the speech rights of students, scholars, and invited speakers on campus would provide Georgetown with a boost, instead of a penalty, in the College Free Speech Rankings.

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	2	2
Not very clear	14	14
Somewhat clear	52	51
Very clear	31	31
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	8	8
Not very likely	12	12
Somewhat likely	53	52
Very likely	25	25
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	23	23
Somewhat uncomfortable	33	32
Somewhat comfortable	36	35
Very comfortable	10	10

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	19	19
Somewhat uncomfortable	40	39
Somewhat comfortable	38	38
Very comfortable	5	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	20	20
Somewhat uncomfortable	34	34
Somewhat comfortable	40	39
Very comfortable	8	8

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	25
Somewhat uncomfortable	25	24
Somewhat comfortable	39	39
Very comfortable	12	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	41
Somewhat uncomfortable	32	32
Somewhat comfortable	22	22
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	21	21
Rarely	29	29
Occasionally, once or twice a month	35	35
Fairly often, a couple times a week	11	11
Very often, nearly every day	5	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	9	9
Rarely	34	33
Occasionally, once or twice a month	51	50
Fairly often, a couple times a week	6	5
Very often, nearly every day	2	2

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	9	9
Rarely	42	41
Occasionally, once or twice a month	41	40
Fairly often, a couple times a week	8	8
Very often, nearly every day	2	2

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	8	8
Rarely	39	38
Occasionally, once or twice a month	43	43
Fairly often, a couple times a week	7	7
Very often, nearly every day	5	5

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	3	3
Sometimes acceptable	35	35
Rarely acceptable	47	46
Never acceptable	16	16

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	1	1
Sometimes acceptable	23	23
Rarely acceptable	49	48
Never acceptable	28	28

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Sometimes acceptable	12	12
Rarely acceptable	25	25
Never acceptable	64	63

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	47	46
Probably should not allow this speaker	32	32
Probably should allow this speaker	14	13
Definitely should allow this speaker	9	9

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	27	26
Probably should not allow this speaker	25	25
Probably should allow this speaker	38	37
Definitely should allow this speaker	12	12

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	40	40
Probably should not allow this speaker	35	34
Probably should allow this speaker	13	13
Definitely should allow this speaker	14	13

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	26	26
Probably should not allow this speaker	31	30
Probably should allow this speaker	33	32
Definitely should allow this speaker	12	12

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	13	13
Probably should not allow this speaker	36	35
Probably should allow this speaker	39	38
Definitely should allow this speaker	14	14

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	10	9
Probably should not allow this speaker	30	29
Probably should allow this speaker	43	42
Definitely should allow this speaker	20	20

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	31	30
Probably should not allow this speaker	29	29
Probably should allow this speaker	31	31
Definitely should allow this speaker	11	11

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	5	5
Probably should not allow this speaker	20	20
Probably should allow this speaker	42	41
Definitely should allow this speaker	35	34

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	65
Yes	36	35

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	70	68
Yes	32	32

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	91	90
Yes	10	10

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	93	91
Yes	9	9

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	87	85
Yes	15	15

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	80	79
Yes	22	21

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	80	78
Yes	22	22

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	73	71
Yes	29	29

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	78	76
Yes	24	24

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	72	71
Yes	30	29

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	74	73
Yes	27	27

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	78	77
Yes	24	23

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	35	35
Yes	66	65

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	82	80
Yes	20	20

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	70	69
Yes	32	31

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	70	69
Yes	32	31

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	67	66
Yes	35	34

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	76	74
Yes	26	26

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	97	95
Yes	5	5

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	65	64
Yes	37	36

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	93	92
Yes	9	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	16	16
Yes	84	82

Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	22	22
Yes	78	76

Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	25	24
Yes	75	74

Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	48	47
Yes	52	51

LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	20	20
Yes	80	78

Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	27	26
Yes	73	72

Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	28	27
Yes	72	71

Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	18	18
Yes	82	81

Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	26	25
Yes	74	73

Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	33	33
Yes	66	65

Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	22	22
Yes	78	76

Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	26	26
Yes	74	72

Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	34	34
Yes	66	65

Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	29	29
Yes	71	69

Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	34	33
Yes	66	65

Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	48	47
Yes	52	51

Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	39	38
Yes	61	60

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	46	45
Yes	54	53

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	96	94
Yes	4	4

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	23	22
Rarely	38	37
Occasionally	16	15
Fairly often, a couple times a week	19	18
Very often, nearly every day	5	5

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	19	19
No	80	79

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	24	24
About right	49	48
Too harsh	26	26

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	8	8
Rarely	45	44
Occasionally	32	31
Fairly often, a couple times a week	13	12
Very often, nearly every day	2	2

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	16	15
Palestinians	50	49
Both equally	12	12
Neither	8	8
Don't know	13	13

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	43	42
Hamas	22	21
Both equally	19	19
Don't know	16	16

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	26	26
Less than once a year	9	9
Once or twice a year	14	14
Several times a year	17	16
Once a month	13	13
2-3 times a month	8	7
About weekly	3	3
Weekly	6	6
Several times a week	3	3

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	2
No	97	96

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	2	2	2
No	97	96	98

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	2	2	9
Less than half the time	8	8	44
About half the time	5	5	28
Most of the time, nearly every day	3	3	17
Always	0	0	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	2	2	17
Less than half the time	3	3	27
About half the time	3	3	31
Most of the time, nearly every day	3	3	24

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than half the time	10	10	61
About half the time	3	3	17
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	4	22

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	7	7	24
Less than half the time	9	9	33
About half the time	9	9	34
Most of the time, nearly every day	2	2	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than half the time	7	7	30
About half the time	7	7	28
Most of the time, nearly every day	10	10	40
Always	0	0	1



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