

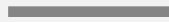
2025 College Free Speech Rankings

Harvard University

251

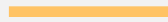
OVERALL
RANK

ABYSMAL



SPEECH
CLIMATE

YELLOW



SPOTLIGHT
RATING



FIRE
Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

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Executive Summary

FOR THE FIFTH YEAR IN A ROW, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), a nonprofit organization committed to defending and sustaining the individual rights of all Americans to free speech and free thought, and College Pulse surveyed college undergraduates about their perceptions and experiences regarding free speech on their campuses.

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

The College Free Speech Rankings are available online and are presented in an interactive dashboard (rankings.thefire.org) that allows for easy comparison between institutions.

Harvard University was one of the 257 schools ranked and was surveyed from January 25 to June 14, 2024. Key findings include:

- A ranking of 251 overall, an “Abysmal” speech climate, and the lowest overall score possible of 0.00.
- A decent performance on most of the tolerance components — ranking 71 on “Mean Tolerance,” 86 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers,” and 92 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers.”
- A poor performance on “Comfort Expressing Ideas,” ranking 235, and a terrible performance on “Administrative Support,” ranking 250, or second to last.
- The frequency of self-censorship among Harvard students has increased every year since 2021 when 16% of students said they did so “very” or “fairly” often. This year, 28% say this.
- Maintaining speech policies that earn it a “yellow light” rating from FIRE.
- A dismal record of supporting expression during a controversy, with four deplatformings of invited speakers, four attempted disruptions of speaking events, six incidents in which scholars were sanctioned, and six incidents in which students or student groups were sanctioned.

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 Harvard University, with a score of 0.00, has an “Abysmal” speech climate and ranks 251 overall in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings.²

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

Harvard University ranked 235 on the “Comfort Expressing Ideas” component, a decline from last year’s ranking of 193.

Harvard students report being more uncomfortable expressing their views on a controversial political topic, except publicly disagreeing with a professor, compared to students nationally. Harvard students also report more discomfort expressing controversial political views than they did last year in most of these campus settings.

TABLE 1 Percentage of students who report being “very” or “somewhat” uncomfortable expressing their views on a controversial political topic in each campus setting.

QUESTION	STUDENTS NATIONALLY (2024)	HARVARD STUDENTS (2024)	HARVARD STUDENTS (2023)
Publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic.	61%	57%	74%
Expressing disagreement with one of your professors about a controversial political topic in a written assignment.	50%	57%	56%
Expressing your views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion.	53%	67%	61%

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.

2 We denote Harvard’s score as zero but the actual value was -21.58.

QUESTION	STUDENTS NATIONALLY (2024)	HARVARD STUDENTS (2024)	HARVARD STUDENTS (2023)
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.	50%	62%	48%
Expressing an unpopular political opinion to your fellow students on a social media account tied to your name.	66%	81%	73%

HOW OFTEN ARE HARVARD STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

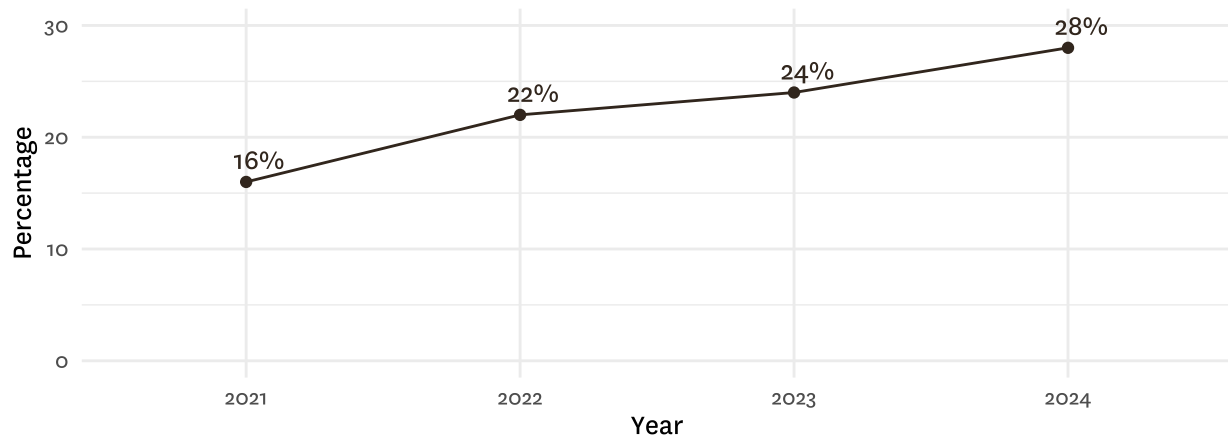
Harvard University ranked 185 on the “Self-Censorship” component.

Harvard students report self-censoring in conversations with their professors and peers more often than students nationally:

- 30% of Harvard students say they self-censor “very” or “fairly” often in conversations with their professors compared to 25% of students nationally.
- 27% of Harvard students say they self-censor “very” or “fairly” often in “conversations with other students compared to 24% of students nationally.
- 27% of Harvard students say they self-censor “very” or “fairly” often during classroom discussions, similar to the 26% of students nationally who say this.

Self-censorship by Harvard students has increased every year since 2021. Three years ago, when asked how often they felt that they could not express their opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond, 16% of Harvard students felt that way “very” or “fairly” often. This percentage increased the next year to 22%, and then to 24% last year. This year, 28% of Harvard students say they self-censor “very” or “fairly” often. This increase contrasts with the trend in self-censorship among students nationally, which since 2021 hovered around 20%, before declining this year to 17%.

FIGURE 1 Students Who Self-Censor Fairly of Very Often (%)



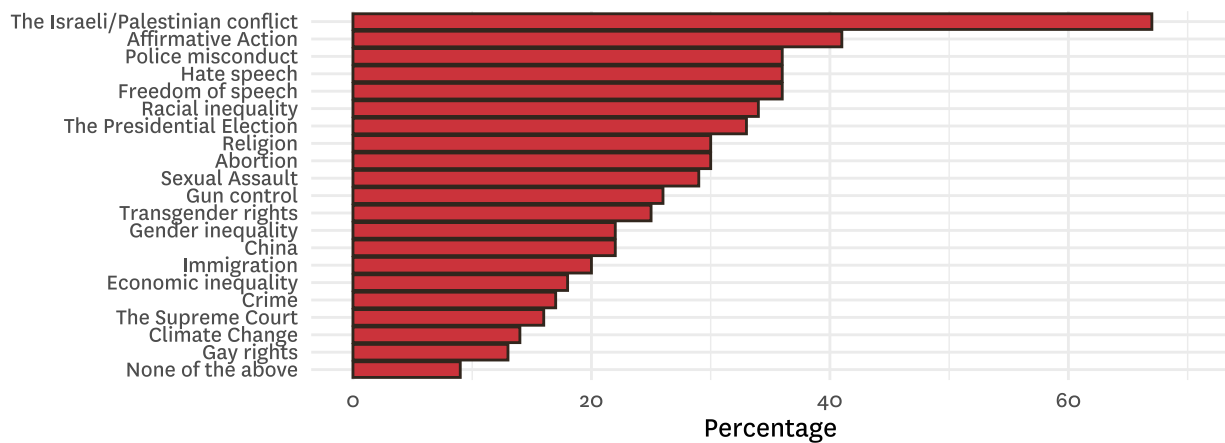
WHAT TOPICS ARE DIFFICULT FOR HARVARD STUDENTS TO HAVE CONVERSATIONS ABOUT?

Harvard University ranked 123 on the “Openness” component.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was identified most frequently as a topic that was difficult for students to have an open and honest conversation about on Harvard’s campus (67%). In 2021, 44% of Harvard students reported having difficulty having an open and honest conversation about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on their campus. This percentage increased to 60% in 2022 and dipped to 38% in 2023.

Harvard students reported less difficulty discussing other topics compared to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the lowest percentage (9%) of Harvard students reporting none of the topics being difficult to discuss. No other topic was identified by more than two-fifths of Harvard students:

FIGURE 2 Students Who Find These Topics Difficult to Talk About (%)



WHICH SPEAKERS DO HARVARD STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

Harvard ranked 71 on “Mean Tolerance,” 86 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers,” 92 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers,” and 131 on the “Tolerance Difference” component. Compared to last year, each of these rankings declined from 27, 59, 39, and 97, respectively.

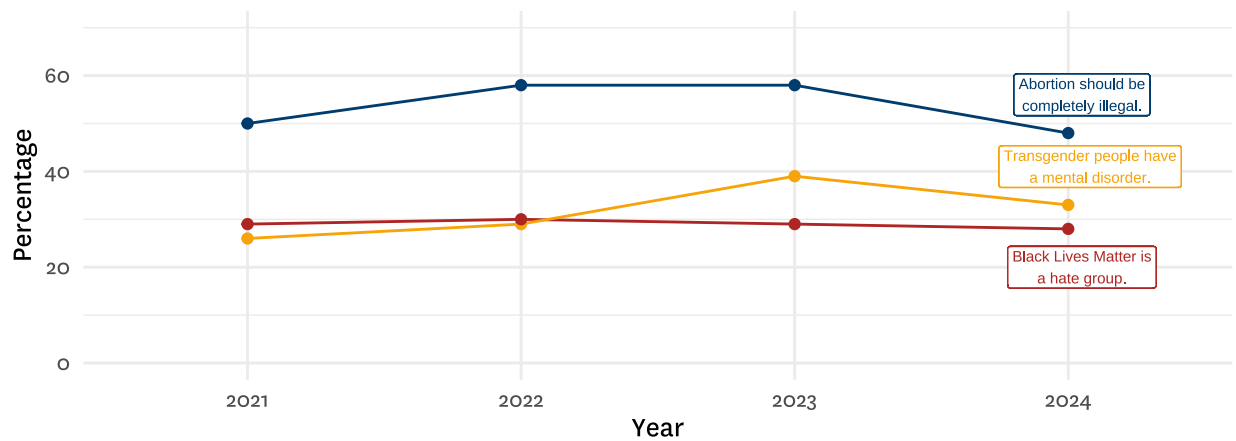
To assess speaker tolerance, students were asked the following question:

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

Students were then presented with six different speakers who had previously expressed a controversial idea (three liberal, three conservative) in random order.

For conservative speakers, 33% of Harvard students reported that a speaker who said, “Transgender people have a mental disorder” should be allowed on campus; 48% reported that a speaker who promotes the idea “abortion should be completely illegal” should be allowed on campus; and 28% reported that a speaker who promotes the idea that “Black Lives Matter is a hate group” should be allowed on campus.

FIGURE 3 Students Who Support Allowing Each Controversial Speaker on Campus (%)



For liberal speakers, on the other hand, Harvard students were more tolerant. Forty-eight percent reported that a speaker who said, “The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution” should be allowed on campus; 56% reported that a speaker who promotes the idea that “the police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan” should be allowed on campus; and 53% reported that a speaker who promotes the idea that “children should be able to transition without parental consent” should be allowed on campus.

Additionally, this year’s survey asked about two speakers relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though responses did not impact rankings. Forty-five percent of Harvard students reported that a speaker who promotes the idea that “collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security” should be

allowed on campus while 65% reported that a speaker who promotes the idea that “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free” should be allowed on campus.

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

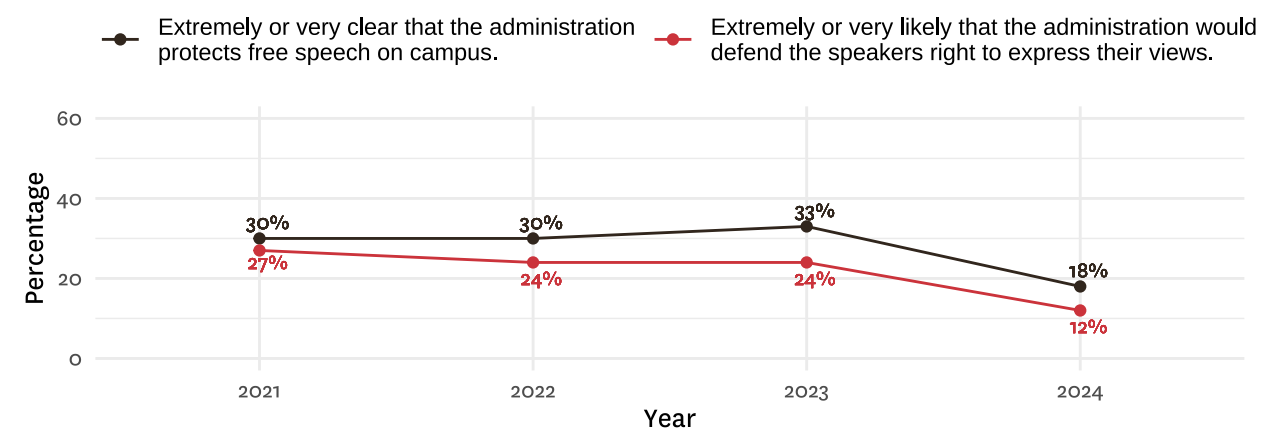
Harvard University ranks second to last on the “Administrative Support” component out of 251 schools. This is a decline from last year’s ranking of 183.

Not a single Harvard student said that the university administration’s stance on freedom of speech was “extremely” clear and about one in five (18%) said that the administration’s stance on freedom of speech was “very” clear. For comparison, nationally, 34% of students say that their school’s administration stance on free speech is “extremely” (7%) or “very” (27%) clear.

Harvard students have even lower expectations when it comes to the university administration defending someone’s rights during a speech controversy on campus — 12% say this is “extremely” (1%) or “very” (11%) likely. Nationally, a quarter of students say that their school’s administration is “extremely” (5%) or “very” (20%) likely to do so.

Worse, the percentage of Harvard students who report that it is “extremely” or “very” clear that the administration protects free speech on campus plummeted to record lows. A similar drop occurred in the context of the perception of the likelihood that that administration will defend a speaker’s rights during a controversy over offensive speech.

FIGURE 4 Student Perceptions of the Administration



These findings indicate that most Harvard students do not trust the university administration to protect free speech on campus and that over the past year this trust has declined precipitously.

A CAMPUS RIFE WITH SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

Since 2020, FIRE has recorded four deplatformings of invited speakers, four attempted disruptions of speaking events, six incidents in which scholars were sanctioned, and six incidents in which students or student groups were sanctioned at Harvard. All of these incidents negatively affected Harvard's overall score, driving it below 0.00.

The successful speaker deplatformings include the revocation of campus invitations to Devin Buckley by the English department faculty in 2022 and of Democratic representatives Jake Auchincloss and Ro Khanna, who were scheduled to appear at the same event, by the administration in 2023. This latter revocation occurred two days after former President Claudine Gay's congressional testimony about campus antisemitism last December and Auchincloss's criticism of her for being inconsistent in protecting free speech on Harvard's campus.

The successful deplatformings include two substantial event disruptions. In one of these disruptions, protesters blocked the hallway outside a study room where Jason Greenblatt was engaged in a discussion session with a group of students. Greenblatt and the students hid until the protesters left and did not resume their discussion. In the other disruption, a professor organized a panel discussion titled "50 Years Since the 1973 Oil Embargo: Reflections and Perspectives" featuring multiple panelists. During the event, protesters entered the room, objecting to two of the speakers because of their ties to the fossil fuel industry. The demonstrators made it difficult for the audience to see or hear the speakers. Administrators in attendance said they could not interfere with the protesters' rights to free expression.

Three of the four attempted disruptions happened in 2024, targeting Senator Joe Manchin, interim Harvard University president Alan Garber, and Xie Feng, China's ambassador to the United States.

Harvard terminated professor David Kane in 2020 after student complaints over his blog posts on "Black Supremacy" and denied a fellowship to Kenneth Roth, the former head of Human Rights Watch, allegedly because of his speech critical of Israel and the alleged anti-Israel bias of Human Rights Watch. Two other incidents resulted in censorship of professors. One incident resulted in a mandatory training session and one resulted in an investigation.

Six controversies over expression at Harvard have also resulted in students or student groups being sanctioned. Five of these have occurred since October 7, 2023, and most of them have involved placing individual students or student groups under investigation for pro-Palestinian speech. The most egregious sanction occurred when administrators suspended the Harvard Undergraduate Palestine Solidarity Committee for co-organizing an outdoor rally with several unrecognized groups in support of student activists arrested at Columbia University, on the grounds that the rally violated a policy prohibiting such collaboration.

A 'YELLOW LIGHT' SCHOOL

Harvard University speech policies received a "yellow light" rating from FIRE.

FIRE awards Harvard's regulations on student expression a yellow light rating, flagging ten policies that earn that rating for posing either impermissibly vague or clear but narrow restrictions on protected speech.

Six of these policies are regulations on harassment and bullying that fail to track the legal standard for peer hostile environment harassment in an education setting, putting protected speech that does not reach that legal standard at risk. FIRE also flags:

- a policy that requires students to obtain advance permission before handing out written materials anywhere on Harvard property,
- an events policy that seemingly requires advance permission before conducting any sort of event outdoors and,
- a policy that broadly solicits reports of “bias-related incidents” without defining that term, and
- a policy about the use of university computers and networks that states that students are expected to be “civil” in their use of such resources. Civility is a laudable goal for students to aspire to, but mandates on civility can easily be applied by administrators to punish disfavored speech.

Harvard must revise these policies to reduce the chilling effect they impose on the campus speech climate. If Harvard modified its speech policies to obtain a “green light” rating, it would still rank last in the College Free Speech Rankings and it would still have an overall score of 0.00. This is because Harvard’s record defending expression when controversy erupts on campus is dismal.

HOW CAN HARVARD IMPROVE?

In short, Harvard has had an “Abysmal” speech climate this year, receiving an overall score of 0.00,³ the same as last year’s score. Given that Harvard has not performed well in any of the FIRE’s College Free Speech Rankings since 2020, one would have hoped that the administration would have made an effort to improve its speech climate. Alas, that is not the case and Harvard has continued to harm its status in the rankings.

If Harvard wants to redeem itself, it must target the way the administration presents and defends its speech policies. It must revise, clarify, and protect those policies by not punishing students and student groups unjustly for their speech. A willingness to adhere to new policies as well as publicly announcing those changes may very well improve the “Administrative Support” score and show students the importance of developing and protecting a healthy speech climate.

If Harvard’s administration shows more respect for free speech, the quality of education might improve for students. Students might self-censor less and have more civilized conversations about difficult topics without engaging in disruptive behaviors. As such, Harvard will not only potentially improve their ranking and spotlight rating but also will create a generation of more open and peaceful students.

³ This score is rounded up from an actual score of -6.58.

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 15.⁴
- **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

⁴ 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.⁵

⁵ 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.⁶
- Supporting students and student groups, as recorded in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings behavioral metrics documentation that is available online.⁷

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.⁸ 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.⁹

6 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/i15h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6LLZqHj10Oa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/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>.

7 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/i15h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6LLZqHj10Oa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/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.

8 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.

9 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.¹⁰

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:

¹⁰ 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	16	16
Not very clear	30	30
Somewhat clear	35	35
Very clear	18	18
Extremely clear	0	0

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	14	14
Not very likely	32	32
Somewhat likely	42	42
Very likely	11	11
Extremely likely	1	1

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	24	24
Somewhat uncomfortable	33	33
Somewhat comfortable	37	37
Very comfortable	6	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	23	23
Somewhat uncomfortable	34	34
Somewhat comfortable	39	39
Very comfortable	4	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	18	18
Somewhat uncomfortable	49	49
Somewhat comfortable	27	27
Very comfortable	6	6

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	22	22
Somewhat uncomfortable	40	40
Somewhat comfortable	29	29
Very comfortable	9	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	42	42
Somewhat uncomfortable	39	39
Somewhat comfortable	19	19
Very comfortable	0	0

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	7	7
Rarely	39	39
Occasionally, once or twice a month	25	25
Fairly often, a couple times a week	22	22
Very often, nearly every day	6	6

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	24	24
Occasionally, once or twice a month	41	41
Fairly often, a couple times a week	25	25
Very often, nearly every day	2	2

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	10	10
Rarely	32	32
Occasionally, once or twice a month	27	27
Fairly often, a couple times a week	28	28
Very often, nearly every day	2	2

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	8	8
Rarely	26	26
Occasionally, once or twice a month	40	40
Fairly often, a couple times a week	25	25
Very often, nearly every day	2	2

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	1	1
Sometimes acceptable	39	39
Rarely acceptable	30	30
Never acceptable	30	30

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	5	5
Sometimes acceptable	28	28
Rarely acceptable	23	23
Never acceptable	44	44

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	4	4
Sometimes acceptable	12	12
Rarely acceptable	7	7
Never acceptable	77	77

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	25	25
Probably should not allow this speaker	41	41
Probably should allow this speaker	23	23
Definitely should allow this speaker	10	10

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	25	25
Probably should not allow this speaker	28	28
Probably should allow this speaker	31	31
Definitely should allow this speaker	17	17

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	27	27
Probably should not allow this speaker	45	45
Probably should allow this speaker	19	19
Definitely should allow this speaker	9	9

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	15	15
Probably should not allow this speaker	37	37
Probably should allow this speaker	32	32
Definitely should allow this speaker	16	16

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	13	13
Probably should not allow this speaker	30	30
Probably should allow this speaker	42	42
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	3	3
Probably should not allow this speaker	43	43
Probably should allow this speaker	40	40
Definitely should allow this speaker	13	13

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	16	16
Probably should not allow this speaker	38	38
Probably should allow this speaker	30	30
Definitely should allow this speaker	15	15

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	4	4
Probably should not allow this speaker	31	31
Probably should allow this speaker	43	43
Definitely should allow this speaker	22	22

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	69	69
Yes	30	30

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	58	58
Yes	41	41

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	77	77
Yes	22	22

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	85	85
Yes	14	14

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	82	82
Yes	17	17

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	81	81
Yes	18	18

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	63	63
Yes	36	36

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	85	85
Yes	13	13

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	77	77
Yes	22	22

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	73	73
Yes	26	26

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	63	63
Yes	36	36

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	79	79
Yes	20	20

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	32	32
Yes	67	67

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	66	66
Yes	33	33

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	63	63
Yes	36	36

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	65	65
Yes	34	34

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	68	68
Yes	30	30

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	70	70
Yes	29	29

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	83	83
Yes	16	16

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	74	74
Yes	25	25

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	90	90
Yes	9	9

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	28
Yes	71	71

Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	31	31
Yes	68	68

Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	30	30
Yes	68	68

Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	48	48
Yes	51	51

LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	25	25
Yes	74	74

Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	34	34
Yes	65	65

Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	32	32
Yes	67	67

Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	32	32
Yes	67	67

Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	32	32
Yes	67	67

Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	35	35
Yes	63	63

Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	37	37
Yes	62	62

Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	37	37
Yes	62	62

Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	35	35
Yes	64	64

Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	40	40
Yes	59	59

Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	31	31
Yes	68	68

Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	43	43
Yes	56	56

Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	34	34
Yes	65	65

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	40	40
Yes	59	59

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	86	86
Yes	12	12

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	30	30
Rarely	31	31
Occasionally	30	30
Fairly often, a couple times a week	3	3
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	14	14
No	85	85

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	18	18
About right	43	43
Too harsh	37	37

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	17	17
Rarely	37	37
Occasionally	36	36
Fairly often, a couple times a week	9	9

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	24	24
Palestinians	32	32
Both equally	24	24
Neither	6	6
Don't know	11	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	21	21
Hamas	53	53
Both equally	12	12
Don't know	13	13

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	41	41
Less than once a year	10	10
Once or twice a year	14	14
Several times a year	11	11
Once a month	2	2
2-3 times a month	4	4
About weekly	2	2
Weekly	10	10
Several times a week	3	3

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	0	0
No	97	97

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	97	97	100

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	5	5	21
Less than half the time	11	11	48
About half the time	3	3	12
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	4	19

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	5	5	23
Less than half the time	12	12	55
About half the time	5	5	22

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	0	0	2
Less than half the time	6	6	32
About half the time	1	1	7
Most of the time, nearly every day	10	10	59

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	4	18
Less than half the time	8	8	32
About half the time	12	12	48
Most of the time, nearly every day	1	1	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than half the time	3	3	24
About half the time	6	6	44
Most of the time, nearly every day	3	3	22
Always	1	1	10



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