

# 2025 College Free Speech Rankings **Pennsylvania State University**

228

OVERALL  
RANK

BELOW  
AVERAGE

SPEECH  
CLIMATE

YELLOW

SPOTLIGHT  
RATING

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# Executive Summary

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

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

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

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

- A ranking of 228 overall, with an overall score of 33.18 and a “Below Average” speech climate.
- Among other ranked schools in Pennsylvania, Penn State was at the bottom, ranking ahead of only the University of Pennsylvania (248). Institutions in Pennsylvania that rank better than Penn State include Carnegie Mellon University (41), Swarthmore College (60), Temple University (65), Lehigh University (112), Franklin and Marshall College (118), Bucknell University (126), Drexel University (145), Villanova University (185), Gettysburg College (197), the University of Pittsburgh (208), Lafayette College (213), and Duquesne University (222).
- Other nearby public institutions also rank above Penn State include the University of Maryland (39), the University of Delaware (72), West Virginia University (97), the Ohio State University (174), and Rutgers University (198).
- A good performance on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers,” “Administrative Support,” “Mean Tolerance,” and “Tolerance Difference,” ranking 25, 38, 42, and 42 respectively.
- A decent performance on “Disruptive Conduct,” “Comfort Expressing Ideas,” and “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers,” ranking 92, 102, and 113 respectively.
- A poor performance on “Openness” and “Self-Censorship,” ranking 205 and 229 respectively.
- Penn State's overall score was penalized because of the outcomes of four different speech controversies that have occurred on campus since 2022.
- If Penn State modified its speech policies to obtain a “green light” rating, it would rank 120 in this year's College Free Speech Rankings with an overall score of 48.18.

# Full Report

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

This year FIRE and College Pulse surveyed 257 schools, ranking 251 of them.<sup>1</sup> Pennsylvania State University, with a score of 33.18, has a “Below Average” speech climate and ranks 228 overall in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings.

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

Penn State ranks 102 on the “Comfort Expressing Ideas” component.

Half or more of Penn State students are “very” or “somewhat” comfortable disagreeing with a professor on a controversial political topic in a written assignment (52%), expressing their views in a common campus space, like a lounge (51%), or during an in-class discussion (50%). Fewer Penn State students say they are “very” or “somewhat” comfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic (41%) or expressing an unpopular political opinion to fellow students on a social media account tied to their name (39%). In most contexts, Penn State students resemble students nationally, although slightly more Penn State students report being comfortable expressing an unpopular political opinion on social media than the one-third of students who feel this way nationally.

## HOW OFTEN ARE PENN STATE STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

Penn State ranks 229 on the “Self-Censorship” component.

Roughly 3 in 10 Penn State students say they self-censor “very” or “fairly” often in conversations with other students (30%), in conversations with their professors (29%), during classroom discussions (32%). Each of these percentages is greater than the percentage of Penn State students who said they self-censored “very” or “fairly” often last year, when 21% said they did so in conversations with other students, 25% in conversations with their professors, and 28% during classroom discussions. Additionally, roughly a quarter (24%) of Penn State students also say they hide their political beliefs from their professors in an attempt to get a better grade “very” or “fairly” often, compared to 17% of students nationally.

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

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

*“In a class where we had a discussion on the Israel’s massacre of Palestine, I found it hard to voice my opinion due to the opposition against anti-Zionism.”*

*“I support the current pro-Palestine protests on our college campus and college campuses nationwide, but I don’t want my college administration to know that I do because they have made it clear that they do not support those protests.”*

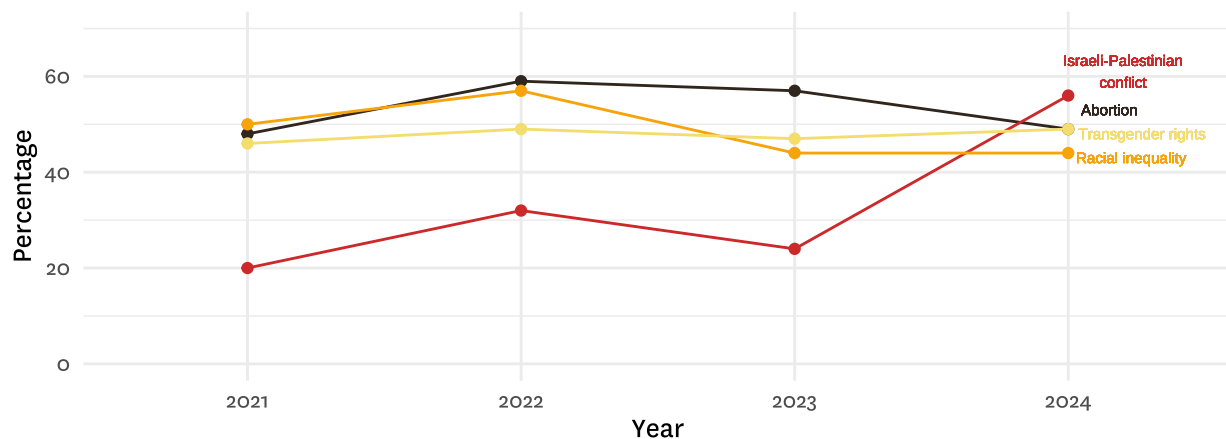
*“Have a pretty in-between view on abortion but feels like most students on campus are pro-choice. Difficult to bring up my side in discussions.”*

Penn State ranks 205 on the “Openness” component.

More than half (56%) of Penn State students, like students at most other schools surveyed this year, say that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus. This is a record high for Penn State. In the previous three years, the percentage of Penn State students that identified the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as difficult to discuss fluctuated between 20% and 32%.

Roughly half (49%) of Penn State students also identify abortion or transgender rights as topics that are difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus, and another 44% of Penn State students say this about racial inequality. All three of these topics were identified by a notable portion of Penn State students as difficult to discuss on campus in each of the previous three years.

**FIGURE 1** Students Who Find These Topics Difficult to Talk About (%)

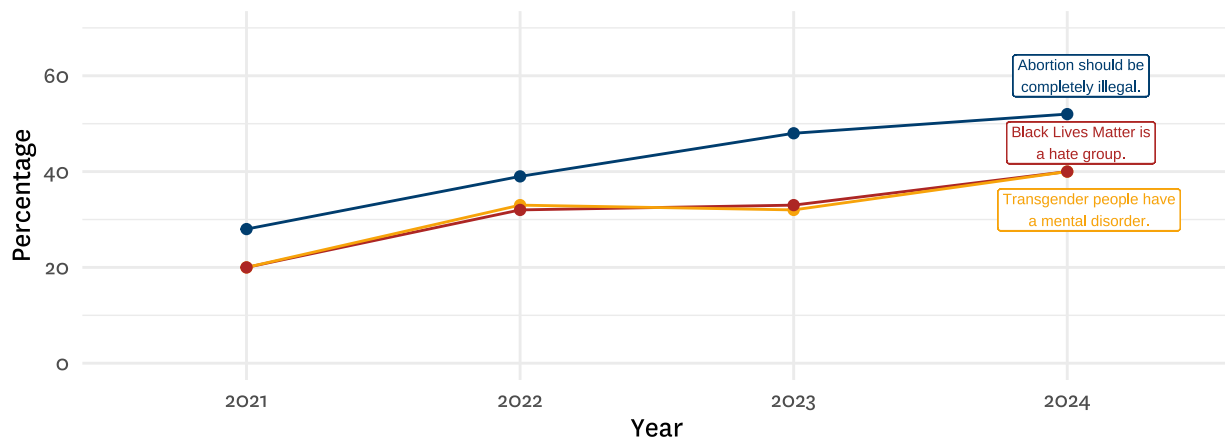


## WHICH SPEAKERS DO PENN STATE STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

Penn State ranks 25 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers,” 42 on “Mean Tolerance,” 42 on “Tolerance Difference,” and 113 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers.”

Penn State students are more tolerant of allowing conservative speakers on campus than students at most other schools in the country. A majority (52%) say they would “definitely” or “probably” allow a speaker on campus who said “abortion should be completely illegal” and 2 in 5 say this about a speaker who said “transgender people have a mental disorder” or about a speaker who said “Black Lives Matter is a hate group.” Each of these percentages are record highs for Penn State and suggest that Penn State students have become more tolerant of conservatives speaking on campus over the past four years.

**FIGURE 2** Students Who Support Allowing Each Controversial Speaker on Campus (%)



Penn State’s performance on “Mean Tolerance” is a result of its students’ tolerance for conservative speakers. When it comes to “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers,” Penn State students are average:

- A majority of Penn State students say they would “definitely” or “probably” allow a speaker on campus who said “children should be able to transition without parental consent” (54%), or a speaker who said “the Catholic church is a pedophilic institution” (51%) compared to 56% and 48%, respectively, of students nationally.
- 45% of Penn State students say they would “definitely” or “probably” allow a speaker on campus who said “the police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan” compared to 47% of students nationally.

Penn State’s average performance on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” is primarily due to its students having less tolerance for the speaker who said “children should be able to transition without parental consent” compared to other schools. In fact, despite being ranked lower on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” than on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers,” students at Penn State are *more* tolerant of controversial liberal speakers, though Penn State’s ranking on “Tolerance Difference” indicates that there is not much bias in favor of liberal speakers over conservative ones among its students. The ideological

makeup of the student body likely has something to do with this. Of the 513 Penn State students surveyed, a roughly equal number identified as liberal or conservative.<sup>2</sup>

## WHAT KINDS OF DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT DO PENN STATE STUDENTS CONSIDER ACCEPTABLE?

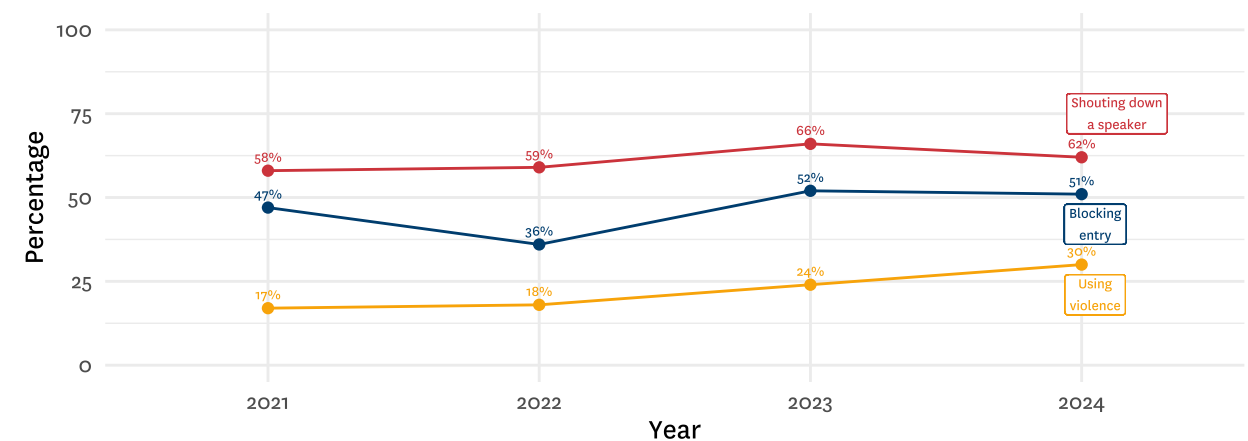
Penn State ranks 92 on the “Disruptive Conduct” component.

Penn State students are similar to students nationally when considering what kinds of disruptive conduct they consider acceptable:

- Roughly three-fifths (62%) of Penn State students say it is at least “rarely” acceptable for college students to shout down a speaker on campus compared to 68% of students nationally.
- About half (51%) of Penn State students say it is at least “rarely” acceptable for college students to block other students from attending a campus speech compared to 52% of students nationally.
- About 30% of Penn State students say it is at least “rarely” acceptable for college students to use violence to stop a campus speech, the same percentage of students nationally who say that the use of violence is at least “rarely” acceptable.

What is troubling is that over the past four years Penn State students have become more accepting of other students on campus using violent tactics — blocking other students from entering an event — or actual violence.

**FIGURE 3** Students Who Say a Disruptive Conduct is at Least Rarely Acceptable (%)



<sup>2</sup> At Penn State, we surveyed slightly more conservative students than liberal ones, and the conservative to liberal student ratio was 1.05:1.

## HOW IS PENN STATE'S ADMINISTRATIVE STANCE ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH PERCEIVED?

Penn State ranks 38 on the “Administrative Support” component.

2 in 5 Penn State students say it is “extremely” or “very” clear that their administration protects free speech on campus while just 17% say it is “not at all” or “not very” clear. Further, one-third of Penn State students say it is “extremely” or “very” likely that their administration would defend a speaker’s rights to express their views during a controversy over offensive speech. About a quarter (23%) say this is “not at all” or “not very” likely.

## A ‘YELLOW LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH SOME CONTROVERSY

FIRE awards Penn State’s regulations on student expression a “yellow light” rating, flagging two policies that earn that rating for posing either impermissibly vague or clear but narrow restrictions on protected speech. Both of these yellow lights are related to harassment policies that fail to sufficiently track the legal standard for peer harassment in an educational setting. Penn State must revise each of these policies to reduce the chilling effect they impose on the campus speech climate.

If Penn State modified its speech policies to obtain a “green light” rating, it would rank 120 in this year’s College Free Speech Rankings with an overall score of 48.18.

Penn State’s ranking and overall score are also negatively impacted by the outcomes of four different speech controversies. In April 2022, Uncensored America held an on-campus debate at Penn State between conservative reporter Elijah Schaffer and liberal political commentator Steven “Destiny” Bonnell that proceeded without disruption. After the debate, the university sent the group an invoice for more than \$1,800 for the cost of five police officers who attended despite the university’s lack of mentioning any specific security requirements ahead of the event.

In the same year, members of the Penn State community petitioned Penn State to disinvite Alex Stein and Gavin McInnes, who had been invited by Uncensored America to a comedy event on campus, because of their alleged affiliation with white supremacy. The university initially agreed to hold the event but, after a pre-event protest turned violent, the university canceled the event, claiming security concerns.

Then in 2023, the campus chapter of Turning Point USA tried to schedule a speaking event featuring Riley Gaines, a former swimmer for the University of Kentucky and now a conservative political activist, but university administrators said the event was not booked properly — a claim the sponsoring group disputed — and did not approve the event. After the university informed Gaines that her appearance was not booked properly, student organizers held a “Free Speech Rally” outside where Gaines spoke amid protester cries that she is transphobic. Before Gaines’ arrival, two protesters were arrested for knocking over a table set up by Turning Point USA, the student group that invited Gaines to campus.



## HOW CAN PENN STATE IMPROVE?

The easiest thing Penn State can do to improve its rating in next year's College Free Speech Rankings is revising its "yellow light" speech policies. Doing this publicly, with a push to make students aware of these changes, might signal that Penn State is starting a new chapter, one where it unequivocally supports freedom of speech and is poised to defend it when controversy arises. Such revisions might also be a helpful way to communicate what activities and behaviors are acceptable for protest and which are not.

Obtaining a "green light" rating does not 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 quickly change year-to-year due to the turnover in undergraduate students. The proof of whether a school truly supports free expression as a core value is revealed when that core value is inevitably tested by controversy.

Recent speech controversies on campus suggest that Penn State's students' confidence in their administration to protect free speech on campus, relative to students at other schools, might not be warranted. Multiple invited speakers have had their events canceled or rejected by Penn State's administration. When students exercised their First Amendment rights to host one of these speakers on campus anyway there was a violent attempt to disrupt it.

The decisions administrators and other school leaders make in response to campus speech controversies are likely to have a more lasting influence on a school's expression climate than its policies. 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 expressive rights, it sends a very different kind of message — one that usually chills the campus speech climate. In recent years Penn State's reactions to campus speech controversies have involved substantially more of the latter than the former. Defending the speech rights of students, scholars, and invited speakers on campus would provide Penn State with a boost, instead of a penalty, in the College Free Speech Rankings.

# Methodology

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

The initial sample was drawn from College Pulse’s American College Student Panel™, which includes more than 850,000 verified undergraduate students and recent alumni from schools within a range of more than 1,500 two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states. Panel members were recruited by a number of methods to help ensure student diversity in the panel population. These methods include web advertising, permission-based email campaigns, and partnerships with university-affiliated organizations. To ensure the panel reflects the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the American college population, College Pulse recruited panelists from a wide variety of institutions. The panel includes students attending large public universities, small private colleges, online universities, historically Black colleges such as Howard University, women’s colleges such as Smith College, and religiously-affiliated colleges such as Brigham Young University.

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

College Pulse applies a post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from multiple data sources, including the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The “weight” rebalances the sample based on a number of important benchmark attributes, such as race, gender, class year, voter registration status, and financial aid status. The sample weighting is accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting (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.<sup>3</sup>
- **Tolerance for Liberal Speakers:** Students were asked whether three speakers espousing views potentially offensive to conservatives (e.g., “The police are just as racist as the Klu[sic] Klux Klan.”) should be allowed on campus, regardless of whether they personally agree with the speaker’s message. Options ranged from “definitely should not allow this speaker” to “definitely should allow

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<sup>3</sup> The self-censorship component was introduced this year and is a composite score of responses to the three questions that are presented after self-censorship is defined. In previous years other questions were used to measure self-censorship and they were factored into the “Comfort Expressing Ideas” component.

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

- **Tolerance for Conservative Speakers:** Students were also asked whether three speakers espousing views potentially offensive to liberals (e.g., “Black Lives Matter is a hate group”) should be allowed on campus, regardless of whether they personally agree with the speaker’s message. Scoring was performed in the same manner as it was for the “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” subcomponent, and the maximum number of points is 12.
- **Disruptive Conduct:** Students were asked how acceptable it is to engage in different methods of protest against a campus speaker, including “shouting down a speaker or trying to prevent them from speaking on campus,” “blocking other students from attending a campus speech,” and “using violence to stop a campus speech.” Options ranged from “always acceptable” to “never acceptable” and were coded so that higher scores indicate less acceptance of disruptive conduct. The maximum number of points is 12.
- **Administrative Support:** Students were asked how clear it is their administration protects free speech on campus and how likely the administration would be to defend a speaker’s right to express their views if a controversy over speech occurred on campus. For the administrative clarity question, options range from “not at all clear” to “extremely clear,” and for the administrative controversy question, options range from “not at all likely” to “extremely likely.” Options were coded so that higher scores indicate greater clarity and a greater likelihood of defending a speaker’s rights. The maximum number of points is 10.
- **Openness:** Finally, students were asked which of 20 issues (e.g., “abortion,” “freedom of speech,” “gun control,” and “racial inequality”), if any, are difficult to have open conversations about on campus. Responses were coded so that higher scores indicate fewer issues being selected. The maximum number of points is 20.

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

## Campus Behavioral Metrics

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

- Supporting free expression during a deplatforming campaign, as recorded in FIRE’s Campus Deplatforming database.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A full list of all the deplatforming incidents that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1ish8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj10Oa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=1964386004#gid=1964386004>. The full Campus Deplatforming database is available on FIRE’s website at <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/campus-deplatforming-database>.

- Supporting a scholar whose speech rights were threatened during a free speech controversy, as recorded in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire database.<sup>5</sup>
- Supporting students and student groups, as recorded in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings behavioral metrics documentation that is available online.<sup>6</sup>

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

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

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

In response to the encampment protests, FIRE and College Pulse reopened the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings survey on any campus with an encampment. This allowed us to collect survey data from students while the encampments were taking place.<sup>7</sup> That means that this year's College Free Speech Rankings provide a treasure trove of data on the evolving state of free expression at American colleges and universities.

FIRE's Spotlight ratings — our ratings of the written policies governing student speech at nearly 500 institutions of higher education in the United States — also factored into each school's overall score. Three substantive ratings are possible: “red light,” “yellow light,” and “green light.” A “red light” rating indicates that the institution has at least one policy that both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech. A “yellow light” rating indicates that an institution maintains at least one policy that places a clear restriction on a more limited amount of protected expression, or one that, by virtue of vague wording, could too easily be used to restrict protected expression. A “green light” rating indicates that an institution maintains no policies that seriously threaten speech, although this rating does not indicate whether a college actively supports free expression.<sup>8</sup>

5 A full list of all the scholar sanction attempts that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6LZqHj1oOa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=1204583933#gid=1204583933>. The full Scholars Under Fire database is available on FIRE's website at <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/scholars-under-fire>.

6 All data reported in this section reflect the Students Under Fire database as of June 15, 2024. A full list of all the student sanction attempts that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: <https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6LZqHj1oOa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=472255842#gid=472255842>. The full Students Under Fire database is currently internal to FIRE but will be released in full in early 2025.

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

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

Finally, a fourth rating, “Warning,” is assigned to a private college or university when its policies clearly and consistently state that it prioritizes other values over a commitment to free speech. “Warning” schools, therefore, were not ranked, and their overall scores are presented separately in this report.<sup>9</sup>

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

## Overall Score

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

Then, to further account for the speech climate on an individual campus, we incorporated behavioral components. A school earned two bonus points each time it unequivocally defended free expression during a campus speech controversy — a rating of “High Honors” for its public response to a speech controversy. For instance, when the student government at Arizona State University opposed a registered student group’s invitation to Mohammed el-Kurd to speak on campus, and other members of the campus community petitioned the university to disinvite el-Kurd, a university spokesperson responded:

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

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

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

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9 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	19	4
Not very clear	66	13
Somewhat clear	223	43
Very clear	159	31
Extremely clear	46	9

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	31	6
Not very likely	90	17
Somewhat likely	222	43
Very likely	115	22
Extremely likely	55	11

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	131	26
Somewhat uncomfortable	167	33
Somewhat comfortable	156	30
Very comfortable	59	11

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	104	20
Somewhat uncomfortable	141	28
Somewhat comfortable	181	35
Very comfortable	86	17

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	103	20
Somewhat uncomfortable	151	29
Somewhat comfortable	207	40
Very comfortable	52	10



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	93	18
Somewhat uncomfortable	161	31
Somewhat comfortable	198	39
Very comfortable	61	12

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	153	30
Somewhat uncomfortable	157	31
Somewhat comfortable	150	29
Very comfortable	53	10

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	101	20
Rarely	185	36
Occasionally, once or twice a month	146	29
Fairly often, a couple times a week	64	12
Very often, nearly every day	18	3

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	59	11
Rarely	154	30
Occasionally, once or twice a month	143	28
Fairly often, a couple times a week	115	22
Very often, nearly every day	43	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	54	11
Rarely	142	28
Occasionally, once or twice a month	165	32
Fairly often, a couple times a week	98	19
Very often, nearly every day	53	10

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	42	8
Rarely	147	29
Occasionally, once or twice a month	156	30
Fairly often, a couple times a week	105	20
Very often, nearly every day	63	12

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	32	6
Sometimes acceptable	147	29
Rarely acceptable	139	27
Never acceptable	195	38

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	19	4
Sometimes acceptable	92	18
Rarely acceptable	150	29
Never acceptable	252	49

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	12	2
Sometimes acceptable	69	13
Rarely acceptable	75	15
Never acceptable	357	70

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	131	26
Probably should not allow this speaker	175	34
Probably should allow this speaker	123	24
Definitely should allow this speaker	84	16

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	97	19
Probably should not allow this speaker	150	29
Probably should allow this speaker	163	32
Definitely should allow this speaker	103	20

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	134	26
Probably should not allow this speaker	173	34
Probably should allow this speaker	126	24
Definitely should allow this speaker	80	16

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	75	15
Probably should not allow this speaker	179	35
Probably should allow this speaker	153	30
Definitely should allow this speaker	106	21

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	118	23
Probably should not allow this speaker	164	32
Probably should allow this speaker	137	27
Definitely should allow this speaker	94	18

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	76	15
Probably should not allow this speaker	160	31
Probably should allow this speaker	177	35
Definitely should allow this speaker	100	19

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	102	20
Probably should not allow this speaker	174	34
Probably should allow this speaker	150	29
Definitely should allow this speaker	87	17

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	39	8
Probably should not allow this speaker	136	27
Probably should allow this speaker	203	40
Definitely should allow this speaker	134	26

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	257	50
Yes	252	49

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	383	75
Yes	126	25

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	419	82
Yes	90	18

## Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	407	79
Yes	101	20

## Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	417	81
Yes	92	18

## Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	408	80
Yes	100	20

## Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	380	74
Yes	129	25

## Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	306	60
Yes	203	40

## Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	321	63
Yes	188	37

## Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	308	60
Yes	201	39

## Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	338	66
Yes	171	33

## Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	346	67
Yes	163	32

## The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	222	43
Yes	287	56

## The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	322	63
Yes	186	36

## Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	345	67
Yes	164	32

## Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	284	55
Yes	225	44

## Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	339	66
Yes	170	33

## Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	352	69
Yes	157	31

## The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	443	86
Yes	66	13

## Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	259	51
Yes	250	49

## None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	468	91
Yes	41	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	222	43
Yes	284	55

## Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	217	42
Yes	290	56

## Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	222	43
Yes	285	55

## Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	236	46
Yes	270	53

## LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	226	44
Yes	280	55

## Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	219	43
Yes	287	56

## Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	217	42
Yes	290	56

## Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	234	46
Yes	272	53

## Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	219	43
Yes	288	56

## Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	252	49
Yes	255	50



## Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	262	51
Yes	244	48

## Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	257	50
Yes	249	49

## Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	262	51
Yes	245	48

## Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	263	51
Yes	243	47

## Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	247	48
Yes	259	51

## Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	302	59
Yes	204	40

## Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	295	58
Yes	211	41

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	289	56
Yes	217	42

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	424	83
Yes	83	16

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	143	28
Rarely	144	28
Occasionally	95	18
Fairly often, a couple times a week	68	13
Very often, nearly every day	57	11

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	83	16
No	424	83

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	60	12
About right	240	47
Too harsh	206	40

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	119	23
Rarely	174	34
Occasionally	150	29
Fairly often, a couple times a week	50	10
Very often, nearly every day	13	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Israelis	60	12
Palestinians	144	28
Both equally	105	21
Neither	42	8
Don't know	154	30

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	75	15
Hamas	141	27
Both equally	86	17
Don't know	204	40

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	174	34
Less than once a year	87	17
Once or twice a year	80	16
Several times a year	59	11
Once a month	21	4
2-3 times a month	23	4
About weekly	22	4
Weekly	31	6
Several times a week	6	1

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	15	3
No	487	95

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	11	2	2
No	492	96	98

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	13	3	11
Less than half the time	35	7	29
About half the time	43	8	36
Most of the time, nearly every day	18	4	15
Always	11	2	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	14	3	16
Less than half the time	32	6	37
About half the time	13	2	14
Most of the time, nearly every day	18	4	21
Always	10	2	12

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	10	2	11
Less than half the time	25	5	27
About half the time	30	6	33
Most of the time, nearly every day	19	4	21
Always	8	2	9

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	24	5	19
Less than half the time	52	10	42
About half the time	24	5	19
Most of the time, nearly every day	16	3	13
Always	7	1	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	1	4
Less than half the time	27	5	33
About half the time	16	3	19
Most of the time, nearly every day	23	5	28
Always	13	3	16

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

stressed	Claremont McKenna College	Harvey Mudd College	Pitzer College	Pomona College	Scripps College
Never	0	0	0	2	0
Less than half the time	52	39	31	4	11
About half the time	21	33	29	49	49
Most of the time, nearly every day	27	23	37	35	39
Always	0	5	3	10	0
n	20	31	10	17	19



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