2025 College Free Speech Rankings
Portland State University

194
OVERALL RANK

SLIGHTLY BELOW AVERAGE
SPEECH CLIMATE

RED
SPOTLIGHT RATING

FIRE
Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression

2025 College Free Speech Rankings
Portland State University

Executive Summary

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

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

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

Key findings from Portland State University (PSU):

- With an overall score of 40.08 and a "Slightly Below Average" speech climate, PSU ranks 194 overall after finishing 232 last year.

- PSU experienced a meteoric rise in rank for both "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" (from 85 last year to 16 this year) and "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" (from 176 last year to 43 this year). It also ranks 12 on "Mean Tolerance" (143 last year) and 190 on "Tolerance Difference" (193 last year).

- It also saw an improvement from 139 last year to 73 this year on the "Disruptive Conduct" component.

- PSU ranks a mediocre 165 on "Administrative Support" after finishing 131 last year.

- After finishing 25 last year, PSU has fallen to 131 on the "Comfort Expressing Ideas" component.

- PSU plummeted from 84 last year to 247 this year on the "Openness" component.

- Portland State was penalized in this year's rankings for a 2021 incident in which administrators filed a copyright strike against Professor Bruce Gilley for a video that attempted to expose what he called an effort to hinder his academic freedom and again in 2022 when the Division of Equity and Inclusion blocked Gilley from its Twitter account.

- PSU maintains speech policies that earn it a "red light" rating from FIRE. A "green light" rating would have taken PSU's score up from 40.08 to 60.08, which would have improved its overall rank from 194 to 26.

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. Portland State University, with a score of 40.08, has a "Slightly Below Average" speech climate and ranks 194 overall in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings after finishing 232 last year.

PSU's scores on a number of the survey-based components improved, resulting in a corresponding improvement in rankings. PSU's rankings on "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" (16 compared to 85 last year), "Tolerance to for Conservative Speakers" (43 compared to 176 last year), and "Disruptive Conduct" (73 compared to 139 last year) improved drastically. On the other hand, PSU's "Comfort Expressing Ideas" (131 compared to 25 last year) and "Openness" (247 compared to 84 last year) rankings sharply declined, and its "Administrative Support" ranking dropped slightly (165 compared to 131 last year).

Among other public universities in Oregon and the surrounding states, PSU ranked toward the back of the pack. It came in behind Oregon State University (8), University of Idaho (63), Boise State University (81), and Washington State University (139). However, it scored higher than University of Oregon (200) and University of Washington (226).

HOW OFTEN ARE PSU STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

PSU ranks 230 on the "Self-Censorship" component.

Students were presented with the following definition of "self-censorship" before being asked about their habits within three different contexts, in random order:

> *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.*

Over a quarter of PSU students (27%) report self-censoring either "fairly" or "very" often during conversations with other students on campus. Though this is similar to students nationally (24%), the percentage of PSU students saying they self-censor "very" often (15%) is more than double that among students nationally (6%). What's more, the percentage of PSU students reporting that they "never" self-censor fell from 21% last year to 6% this year, half the percentage of students nationally.

Next, students were asked to what extent they self-censor during conversations with their professors. About 1 in 4 PSU students (26%) report doing so either "fairly" or "very" often, in line with students nationally. The percentage of PSU students reporting they "never" self-censor halved (from 18% last year to 9% this year), while the percentage of students saying they self-censor "very" often doubled (from 7% last year to 14% this year).

Finally, students were asked how often they self-censor during classroom discussions. Twenty-eight percent of PSU students say they self-censor either "fairly" or "very" often in this setting, in line with students nationally. Similar to the prior two questions, the percentage of PSU students who report that they self-censor "very" often has jumped, from 6% last year to 19% this year (compared to only 8% for students nationally). Only 3% of PSU students report "never" self-censoring in this setting, far below the 11% of students nationally who say the same.

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

After ranking 25 last year on the "Comfort Expressing Ideas" component, Portland State plummeted to 131.

Students were asked how comfortable they would be expressing controversial views in five settings. In all five, a majority of PSU students say they would be uncomfortable. What's more, since 2022, PSU saw a notable increase in the percentage of its students who say they would be "very uncomfortable" in four of the five settings.

FIGURE 1 Students Who Are "Very Uncomfortable" by Context (%)
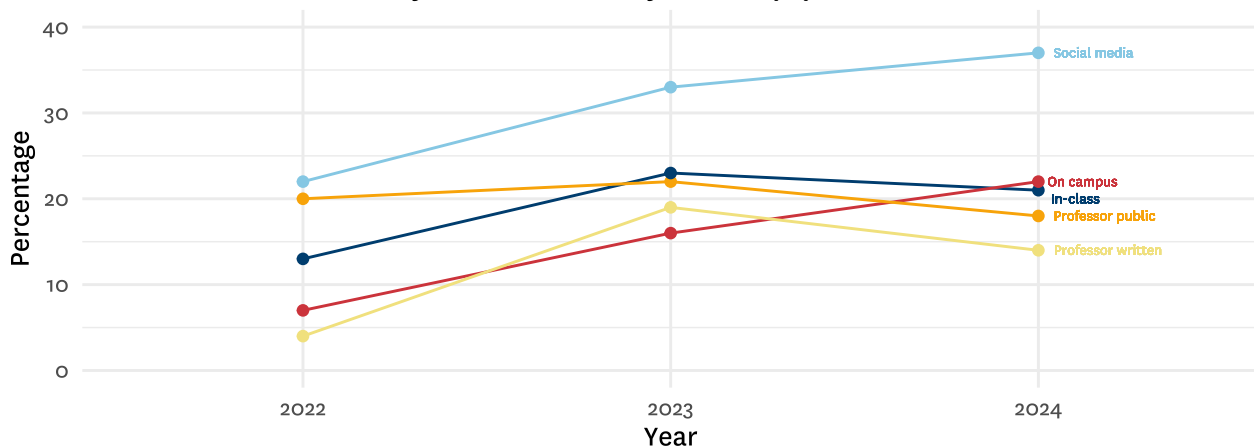
Fifty-seven percent of PSU students say they would be uncomfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic, slightly fewer than students nationally (61%). The percentage of PSU students saying they would be "very uncomfortable" is lower (18%) than students nationally (25%).

Fifty-two percent of PSU students say they would be uncomfortable expressing disagreement with one of their professors about a controversial political topic in a written assignment. Though this percentage is similar among students nationally and identical to PSU students in 2023, it is far greater than the 32% of PSU students in 2022 who said they would be uncomfortable in this setting. Since 2022, the percentage of students saying they would be "very comfortable" has more than halved (from 27% to 12%) while the percentage saying they would be "very uncomfortable" has more than tripled (from 4% to 14%).

Fifty-five percent say they would be uncomfortable expressing their views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion, similar both to students nationally (53%) and to PSU students in 2023 (54%). Though the percentage of PSU students saying they would be "very uncomfortable" (21%) is in line with students nationally (20%), it has increased since 2022 (13%). Since 2022, the percentage of PSU students saying they would be "very comfortable" remains steady (from 13% to 12%) while the percentage of those saying they would be "very uncomfortable" increasing (from 13% to 21%).

Sixty-two percent of PSU students say they would be uncomfortable expressing their views on a controversial political topic to other students in a common campus space, far more than among students nationally (50%), or PSU students in 2023 (46%) or 2022 (41%).

For the final setting, 66% of PSU students say they would be uncomfortable expressing an unpopular political opinion to fellow students on a social media account tied to their name. This is identical to findings for students nationally. Though also identical to findings at PSU in 2023, breaking down responses further reveals significant improvement, as fewer students in 2024 report feeling only "somewhat comfortable" (from 33% to 21%) while more felt "very comfortable" (from 2% to 13%).

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

After ranking 84 last year, PSU ranks among the 10 worst institutions for the "Openness" component, sinking all the way to 247.

Students were given a list of 20 topics and asked to select the ones they feel are "difficult to have an open and honest conversation about" on their campus. All 20 were identified more frequently by PSU students than by students nationally, by an average of eight percentage points. The most frequently identified topics at PSU are the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (61%), abortion (51%), racial inequality (48%), religion (48%), and police misconduct (44%).

FIGURE 2 Students Who Find These Topics Difficult to Talk About (%)
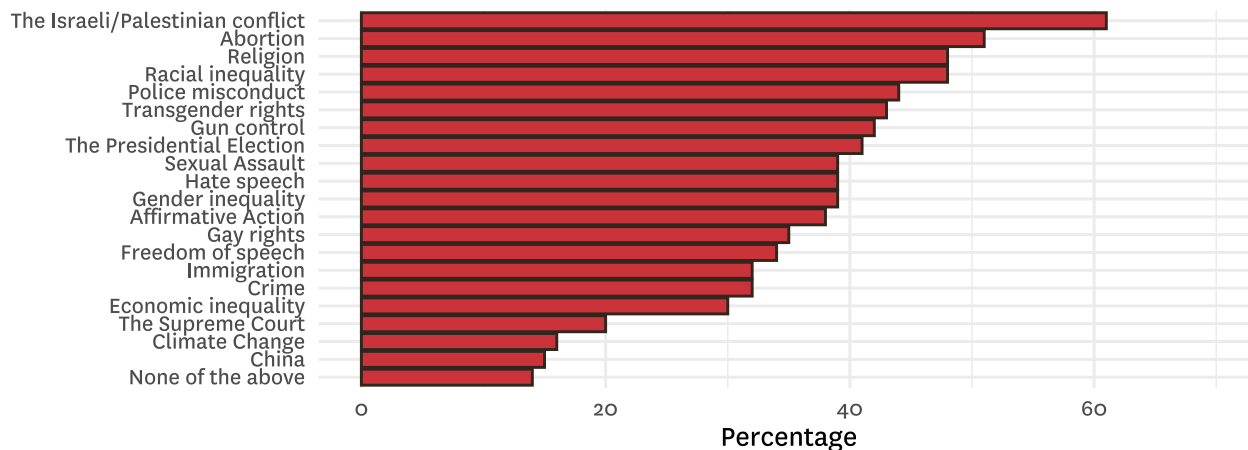
This is the third year we surveyed PSU students. However, because the list of topics has changed over the years, this year's results can be compared to 2023's results for 18 topics and to 2022's results for 15 topics. A comparison to 2023 shows that all 18 topics were identified more frequently this year. Not only did frequency among all topics increase by an average of ten percentage points, but the percent of students reporting "none of the above" nearly halved (from 26% to 14%). A comparison to 2022 shows that 13 of 15 topics were identified more frequently this year, with an average increase of twelve percentage points. Unsurprisingly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict saw a massive uptick in frequency. Even if this topic were excluded, these average yearly increases would still be alarmingly high (+9 percentage points since 2023 and +10 percentage points since 2022).

These trends suggest a worsening climate on campus for discussing certain contentious topics.

WHICH SPEAKERS DO PSU STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

PSU ranks 16 on "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" and 43 on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers." This marks a significant improvement from last year when it ranked 85 and 176 respectively. PSU also ranks 12 on "Mean Tolerance" (143 last year) and 190 on "Tolerance Difference" (193 last year).

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. While the conservative speakers were the same as last year, all three liberal speakers were new. This year's survey also asked about one pro-Israeli speaker and one pro-Palestinian speaker, though these results are not factored into the rankings.

When it comes to conservative speakers, most PSU students oppose allowing someone who said that "Transgender people have a mental disorder" (58%), that "Abortion should be completely illegal" (53%),

or that "Black Lives Matter is a hate group" (63%). Despite a majority opposition to all three speakers, support for each has risen over the years. More encouragingly, this increase is robust, as the percentage saying each conservative speaker "definitely should not" be allowed has decreased since 2023 by an average of 25 percentage points while the percentage saying they "definitely should" be allowed has increased over this time by an average of 14 percentage points.

Liberal speakers are more tolerated. Forty percent of PSU students oppose allowing someone who said that "The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution," 42% oppose allowing someone who said that "The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan," and 32% oppose allowing someone who said that "Children should be able to transition without parental consent." Not only are PSU students less opposed to each speaker than students nationally (by an average of 11 percentage points), but their opposition is less absolute, with fewer saying each speaker "definitely should not" be allowed (by an average of six percentage points) and more saying each "definitely should" be allowed (by an average of 15 percentage points).

Tolerance levels were not equal when it comes to pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian speakers. Whereas 46% of PSU students support allowing a speaker who said that "Collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security," 84% support someone who said "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

WHAT KINDS OF DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT DO PSU STUDENTS CONSIDER ACCEPTABLE?

PSU ranks 73 on the "Disruptive Conduct" component, improving on its ranking of 139 last year.

Compared to 68% of students nationally, 58% of PSU students say it is acceptable, even if only rarely, to shout down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus. Students at PSU find it less acceptable to do so in 2024 than in 2023 (65%) or 2022 (73%).

Around half of PSU students (49%) say it is acceptable, even if only rarely, to block other students from attending a campus speech, up from 34% in 2023 and 45% in 2022. This year's results are in line with students nationally (52%).

Thirty percent of PSU students say it is acceptable, even if only rarely, to use violence to stop a campus speech, consistent with results from 2023 (27%) and 2022 (30%). This year's results are in line with students nationally (32%).

HOW DO PSU STUDENTS PERCEIVE THE ADMINISTRATION'S SUPPORT FOR FREE SPEECH?

PSU ranks 165 on the "Administrative Support" component after finishing 131 last year.

Compared to 34% of students nationally, 26% of PSU students say it is either "very" or "extremely" clear that their administration protects free speech on campus, down from 36% in 2023 and slightly up from 23% in 2022. Of particular concern is that 12% of PSU students say it is "not at all" clear, up from 1% in 2023 and 4% in 2022.

Next, students were asked if it was likely that their administration would defend a speaker's right to express their views should a controversy occur. Compared to 25% of students nationally, 29% of PSU students say it is either "very" or "extremely" likely that their administration would defend the speaker's rights, up from 22% in 2023 and 11% in 2022.

A 'RED LIGHT' SCHOOL WITH SOME CONTROVERSY

FIRE awards Portland State's regulations on student expression our worst, "red light" rating, flagging one policy that clearly and substantially restricts student expression and four policies that earn a "yellow light" rating for posing either impermissibly vague or clear but narrow restrictions on protected speech. Portland State earns a red light rating for maintaining a harassment policy that fails to sufficiently track the legal standard for peer harassment in an educational setting. Indeed, Portland State's definition of sexual harassment is so broad that sending a single "cartoon…of a sexually suggestive nature" could result in a student being subject to discipline under the policy. Ultimately, the policy leaves broad swaths of expression that are typically protected under First Amendment standards subject to discipline. Portland State must revise this and their other policies to reduce the chilling effect they impose on the campus speech climate.

PSU's policies were not the only thing to hurt its ranking. The university was penalized for its actions in two speech controversies over the last five years. First, in 2021, administrators used a copyright claim to attempt to remove a YouTube video posted by Professor Bruce Gilley that included footage of the Portland State University Faculty Senate voting unanimously to approve a resolution stating that public criticism of critical race theory curricula prompts bullying and intimidation. Then, in 2022, Portland State University's Division of Equity and Inclusion blocked Gilley from seeing the division's Twitter content after he responded to one of their tweets. In response, Gilley filed a federal lawsuit against the administrator. PSU was penalized for these two incidents because, in both cases, the university took action against Gilley in response to his expression.

HOW CAN PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY IMPROVE?

The easiest thing PSU can do to improve its ranking in next year's College Free Speech Rankings is to revise its "yellow" and "red light" speech policies. If the university had a "green light" rating, PSU would have ranked 26 instead of 194. Publicizing those policy changes — specifically to students — could also increase students' trust in the administration's support of free expression on campus. This could, in turn, improve the university's administrative support survey ranking, which is currently average.

Improving PSU's policies and supporting free expression more vocally could be extremely beneficial for PSU's ranking and culture. Fifteen percent of PSU students say they self-censor "very" often during conversations with other students on campus — more than double that among students nationally. On top of that, PSU ranks among the worst universities in "Openness," as students state they have difficulty discussing controversial topics at a much higher rate than students nationally. Increasing PSU's overt support for free expression could increase students' comfort discussing controversial topics and could lead to fewer instances of self-censorship.

Additionally, to improve its ranking, PSU could increase its support for faculty involved in speech controversies. If PSU had not taken action against Professor Gilley for his speech, the university's ranking would not have received any penalties for speech controversies.

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 (IFP) 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.[1]

- **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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[1] 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.[2]

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2   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/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj1oOa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/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.[3]

- Supporting students and student groups, as recorded in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings behavioral metrics documentation that is available online.[4]

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.[5] 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.[6]

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3   A full list of all the scholar sanction attempts that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj1oOa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=1204583933#gid=1204583933. The full Scholars Under Fire database is available on FIRE's website at https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/scholars-under-fire.

4   All data reported in this section reflect the Students Under Fire database as of June 15, 2024. A full list of all the student sanction attempts that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj1oOa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=472255842#gid=472255842. The full Students Under Fire database is currently internal to FIRE but will be released in full in early 2025.

5   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.

6   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.[7]

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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7   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.

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

Topline Results

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all clear	12	12
Not very clear	22	23
Somewhat clear	37	38
Very clear	17	18
Extremely clear	8	8

If a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on your campus, how likely is it that the administration would defend the speaker's right to express their views?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all likely	5	6
Not very likely	19	19
Somewhat likely	44	46
Very likely	21	22
Extremely likely	6	7

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	17	18
Somewhat uncomfortable	37	39
Somewhat comfortable	28	29
Very comfortable	13	14

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	14	14
Somewhat uncomfortable	36	38
Somewhat comfortable	34	35
Very comfortable	12	12

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	20	21
Somewhat uncomfortable	32	34
Somewhat comfortable	31	32
Very comfortable	12	12

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	21	22
Somewhat uncomfortable	38	40
Somewhat comfortable	22	23
Very comfortable	15	16

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	35	37
Somewhat uncomfortable	28	29
Somewhat comfortable	20	21
Very comfortable	13	13

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	10	11
Rarely	43	45
Occasionally, once or twice a month	24	26
Fairly often, a couple times a week	8	9
Very often, nearly every day	9	10

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

Refraining from sharing certain views because you fear social (e.g., exclusion from social events), professional (e.g., losing job or promotion), legal (e.g., prosecution or fine), or violent (e.g., assault) consequences, whether in person or remotely (e.g., by phone or online), and whether the consequences come from state or non-state sources. [Presented in randomized order]

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	6	6
Rarely	37	39
Occasionally, once or twice a month	26	27
Fairly often, a couple times a week	12	12
Very often, nearly every day	15	15

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	9	9
Rarely	37	39
Occasionally, once or twice a month	24	25
Fairly often, a couple times a week	11	12
Very often, nearly every day	14	14

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	3	3
Rarely	34	36
Occasionally, once or twice a month	32	33
Fairly often, a couple times a week	8	9
Very often, nearly every day	18	19

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	5	5
Sometimes acceptable	27	28
Rarely acceptable	24	25
Never acceptable	39	41

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	5	6
Sometimes acceptable	16	17
Rarely acceptable	24	26
Never acceptable	49	51

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	5	6
Sometimes acceptable	8	8
Rarely acceptable	15	16
Never acceptable	67	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	34	35
Probably should not allow this speaker	22	23
Probably should allow this speaker	18	19
Definitely should allow this speaker	21	22

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	25	27
Probably should not allow this speaker	25	26
Probably should allow this speaker	22	23
Definitely should allow this speaker	23	24

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	33	35
Probably should not allow this speaker	27	28
Probably should allow this speaker	14	15
Definitely should allow this speaker	21	22

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	8	9
Probably should not allow this speaker	30	31
Probably should allow this speaker	30	32
Definitely should allow this speaker	27	28

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	10	11
Probably should not allow this speaker	29	31
Probably should allow this speaker	24	26
Definitely should allow this speaker	31	33

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	13	13
Probably should not allow this speaker	18	19
Probably should allow this speaker	33	35
Definitely should allow this speaker	30	32

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	23	24
Probably should not allow this speaker	28	29
Probably should allow this speaker	25	26
Definitely should allow this speaker	19	20

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	3	4
Probably should not allow this speaker	12	12
Probably should allow this speaker	35	36
Definitely should allow this speaker	45	48

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	47	49
Yes	48	51

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	59	62
Yes	36	38

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	81	85
Yes	14	15

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	80	84
Yes	15	16

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	65	68
Yes	30	32

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	67	70
Yes	28	30

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	62	66
Yes	33	34

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	62	65
Yes	33	35

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	58	61
Yes	37	39

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	55	58
Yes	40	42

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	58	61
Yes	37	39

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	65	68
Yes	30	32

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	37	39
Yes	58	61

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	56	59
Yes	39	41

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	53	56
Yes	42	44

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	49	52
Yes	46	48

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	50	52
Yes	45	48

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	58	61
Yes	37	39

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	76	80
Yes	19	20

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	54	57
Yes	41	43

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	81	86
Yes	14	14

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	35	36
Yes	56	59

Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	25	26
Yes	65	69

Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	34	36
Yes	56	59

Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	37	39
Yes	53	56

LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	36	37
Yes	55	58

Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	42	44
Yes	48	51

Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	41	43
Yes	50	52

Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	40	42
Yes	51	53

Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	40	42
Yes	51	53

Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	45	47
Yes	46	48

Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	48	50
Yes	43	45

Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	44	47
Yes	46	48

Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	44	46
Yes	46	49

Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	49	51
Yes	42	44

Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	38	40
Yes	52	55

Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	54	57
Yes	36	38

Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	46	49
Yes	44	46

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	43	45
Yes	48	50

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	83	87
Yes	7	8

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	32	33
Rarely	16	16
Occasionally	19	20
Fairly often, a couple times a week	16	17
Very often, nearly every day	8	8

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	15	16
No	75	79

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Too lenient	8	9
About right	33	34
Too harsh	49	52

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	13	14
Rarely	49	52
Occasionally	16	17
Fairly often, a couple times a week	9	9
Very often, nearly every day	3	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Israelis	7	7
Palestinians	44	47
Both equally	8	8
Neither	12	12
Don't know	20	21

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Israel	25	27
Hamas	17	18
Both equally	18	19
Don't know	30	32

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	49	51
Less than once a year	3	3
Once or twice a year	5	5
Several times a year	11	12
Once a month	2	2
2-3 times a month	6	6
About weekly	5	5
Weekly	9	9
Several times a week	2	2

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	1	1
No	89	94

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	90	95	100

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	1	1	6
Less than half the time	9	9	48
About half the time	3	3	17
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	5	23
Always	1	1	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	2	2	7
Less than half the time	19	20	60
About half the time	3	4	10
Most of the time, nearly every day	7	7	21
Always	0	0	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	1	1	8
Less than half the time	2	2	19
About half the time	5	5	40
Most of the time, nearly every day	3	4	30
Always	0	0	3

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	5	28
Less than half the time	4	4	23
About half the time	6	7	40
Most of the time, nearly every day	0	0	3
Always	1	1	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	1	1	7
Less than half the time	2	2	18
About half the time	1	1	11
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	4	34
Always	4	4	30

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