2025 College Free Speech Rankings
Tulane University

217
OVERALL RANK

BELOW AVERAGE

SPEECH CLIMATE

YELLOW

SPOTLIGHT RATING

FIRE
Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

2025 College Free Speech Rankings
Tulane 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.

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

- A ranking of 217, with an overall score of 35.96 and a "Below Average" speech climate.

- A good performance on "Openness" (57) but an abysmal ranking on "Comfort Expressing Ideas" (214).

- A poor performance on its speaker-based components, ranking in the bottom half in both "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" (173) and "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" (213).

- Though Tulane's ranking on "Self-Censorship" is middling, there appear to be substantial differences in self-censorship rates among liberal and conservative Tulane students.

- Compared to its peer institutions, Tulane ranks last, behind Wake Forest University (78), Lehigh University (112), Southern Methodist University (136), Northeastern University (178), University of Miami (188), Brandeis University (231), George Washington University (240), and Syracuse University (246).

- Four speech controversies since 2020 negatively impacted Tulane's ranking.

- Maintaining speech policies that earn it a "yellow light" rating from FIRE. If Tulane had "green light" speech policies, it would rank 80 in this year's College Free Speech Rankings with a score of 50.96.

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 past year FIRE and College Pulse surveyed 257 schools, ranking 251 of them.[1] Tulane University, with a score of 35.96, has a "Below Average" speech climate and ranks 217 overall in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings. This represents a slight improvement from last year's rankings, when Tulane ranked 238.

Tulane's scores on the survey components varied from last year. Its "Comfort Expressing Ideas" ranking plummeted (214 compared to 18 last year). Additionally, its "Administrative Support" (164 compared to 103 last year) and "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" (173 compared to 90 last year) rankings declined. On the other hand, Tulane's "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" ranking slightly improved (213 compared to 227 last year) and its "Disruptive Conduct" (172 compared to 232 last year) and "Openness" (57 compared to 81 last year) rankings improved significantly.

Compared to its peer institutions, Tulane ranks near the back. It comes in behind Wake Forest University (78), Lehigh University (112), Southern Methodist University (136), Northeastern University (178), and University of Miami (188) but ahead of Brandeis University (231), Georgetown University (240), and Syracuse University (246).

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

Tulane students are particularly uncomfortable expressing their views on controversial issues, as evidenced by Tulane's ranking of 214 on the "Comfort Expressing Ideas" component. This is a major drop compared to Tulane's ranking of 18 last year. While students at other campuses report higher levels of comfort this year compared to last, Tulane students report low levels of comfort across all scenarios, sinking to their lowest levels since 2021.

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

FIGURE 1 Students Who Feel Comfortable Expressing Views by Context (%)
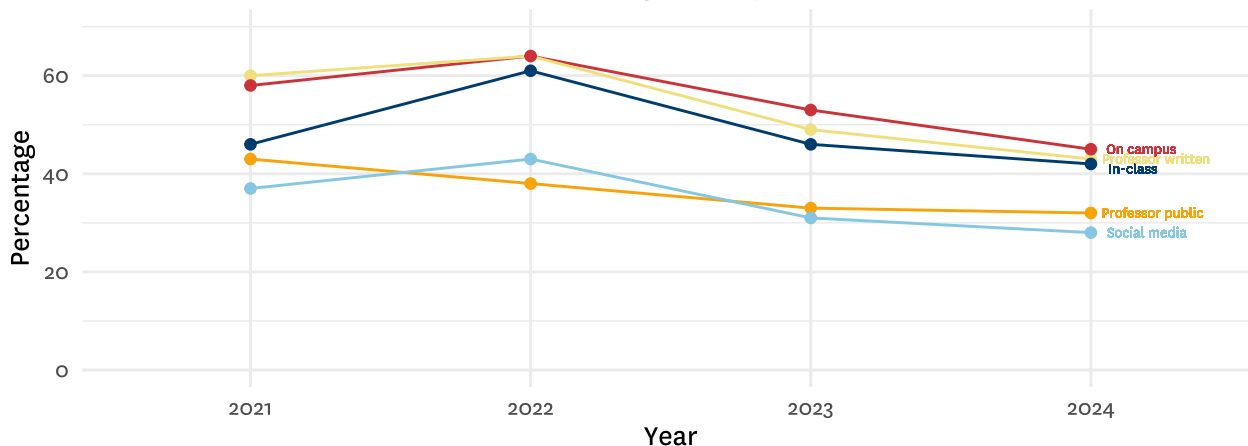
Compared to students nationally, fewer Tulane students are comfortable expressing their ideas and views in each of the campus and classroom settings asked about. Nationally, 39% of students are "somewhat" or "very" comfortable expressing their views on a controversial political topic publicly with a professor, 50% in a written assignment, 47% during an in-class discussion, 50% to other students in a common campus space, and 34% to other students on social media.

HOW OFTEN ARE TULANE STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

Tulane ranks 139 on the "Self-Censorship" component.

Before being presented with key questions on self-censorship, participants were provided with the following, which defined self-censorship as:

> *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.*

This definition was followed by three questions asking about self-censorship during conversations with other students on campus, conversations with professors, and self-censorship during classroom discussions. The percentage of Tulane students who self-censor "a couple of times a week" or more match the national percentage: 25% with students on campus, 25% with professors, and 26% in classroom discussions.

Earlier in the survey, Tulane students were provided with a general question of self-censorship without a definition and were asked:

> *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?*

Responses to this question, which do not factor into the rankings, are noted here for comparison. Nineteen percent of Tulane students reported they self-censor "a couple of times a week" or more because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond, compared to 17% of students nationally.

When considering the prevalence of self-censorship, it's worth considering the political composition of Tulane students. Among those sampled, 62% identify as liberal, 12% moderate, 14% conservative, and 13% something else. Narrowing in, 20% of the sample identify as "very liberal," which outnumbers the total percentage of Tulane students right of center.

Across each of the first four questions on self-censorship, substantially larger percentages of conservative Tulane students report frequently self-censoring — double the percentage of liberal Tulane students. For example, 48% of conservative Tulane students report self-censoring "a couple of times a week" or more during conversations with professors compared to 19% of liberal Tulane students.

FIGURE 2 Students Who Self-Censor "a Couple Times a Week" or More, by Ideology (%)
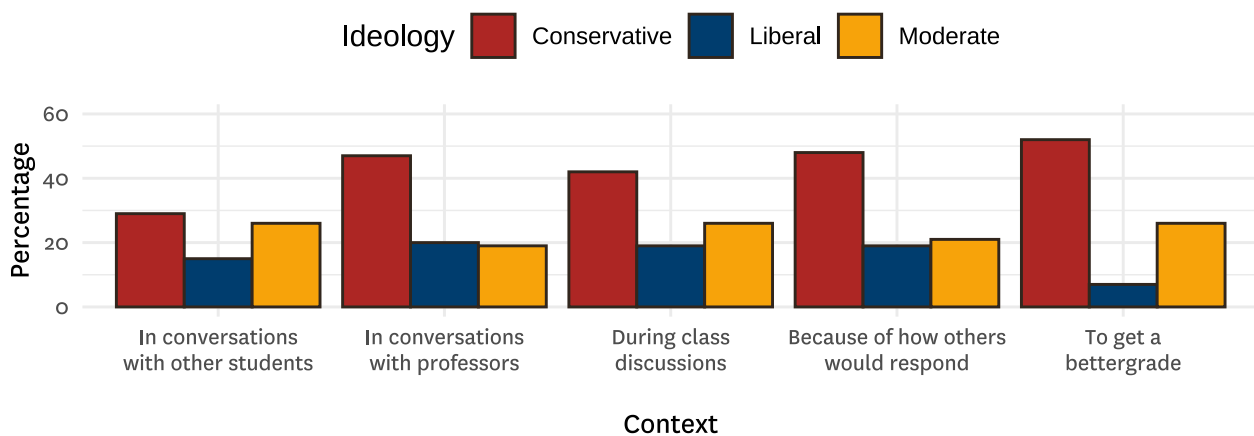
Additionally, one final question related to self-censorship was asked (which also did not factor into the rankings). Specifically, students were asked "How often, if at all, do you hide your political beliefs from professors in an attempt to get a better grade?" Overall, 18% of Tulane students report doing this at least "a couple times a week," which is identical to the 18% of students nationally who also report this. However, at Tulane there again appears to be a substantial ideological divide. While only 7% of liberal Tulane students report hiding their political beliefs from professors in an attempt to get a better grade "a couple of times a week" or more, this jumps to 52% among conservative Tulane students.

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

Tulane ranks 57 on the "Openness" component, Tulane's best this year. On almost every topic, only a third or fewer of Tulane students express difficulty having an open and honest conversation. This positively contributes to Tulane's ranking on this component.

The single topic identified by a majority of Tulane students as difficult to have an open and honest conversation about is the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which is identified by 78% of Tulane students. Last year, a large proportion of Tulane students (48%) already identified this as a difficult topic, which at the time was unusual. Even though this year a majority of students (55%) nationwide also identify this as a difficult topic, Tulane continues to stand out given the even larger percentage of its students who indicate this.

No other topic at Tulane is identified by a majority of students as difficult to have an open and honest conversation about. The next two most difficult topics were religion (35%) and economic inequality (33%).

WHICH SPEAKERS DO TULANE STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

Tulane ranks 173 on "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers," 213 on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers," and 219 on "Mean Tolerance." Tulane students are biased toward allowing controversial liberal speakers on campus compared to conservative ones, as evidenced by the ranking of 180 on the "Tolerance Difference" component.

Tulane students were presented with eight different previously expressed ideas (three liberal, three conservative, and two related to Israeli-Palestinian conflict which did not impact the rankings) in a random order. The percentage of Tulane students who say they would "probably" or "definitely" allow each of the three controversial liberal speakers ranged from 42% ("The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan") to 61% ("Children should be able to transition without parental consent"). While majorities of students nationally support allowing all three controversial liberal speakers on campus, they do not give the same level of support as Tulane students — support by students nationally ranges from 47% ("The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan") to 56% ("Children should be able to transition without parental consent").

Similar to last year, Tulane ranks extremely poorly on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" compared to most of the other schools surveyed. The percentage of Tulane students who say they would "probably" or "definitely" allow each of the three controversial conservative speakers on campus ranged from 21% ("Transgender people have a mental disorder") to 38% ("Abortion should be completely illegal"). Tulane students' intolerance for controversial conservative speakers is somewhat evident when its students are compared to students nationally, as larger proportions of students nationally would allow all three of the controversial conservative speakers on campus. Support by students nationally for the three controversial conservative speakers ranges from 32% ("Black Lives Matter is a hate group" and "Transgender people have a mental disorder") to 45% ("Abortion should be completely illegal").

The strong preference toward controversial liberal speakers over controversial conservative speakers is reflected in Tulane's poor ranking on the "Tolerance Difference" component (180). The strong favoritism toward allowing controversial liberal speakers on campus might stem, again, from the ideological makeup of Tulane's student body.

Finally, this year we also asked about tolerance toward two controversial speakers on Israeli-Palestinian conflict-related topics. For a speaker who said that "Collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security," 37% of Tulane students say they would "probably" or "definitely" allow this controversial speaker (compared to 41% of students nationally). For a speaker who said "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free," 53% of Tulane students say they would "probably" or "definitely"

allow this speaker (compared to 71% of students nationally). Thus, while there also appears to be a clear demarcation in the type of controversial speaker Tulane students would accept related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Tulane students support both speakers at rates lower than among students nationally.

WHAT KINDS OF DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT DO TULANE STUDENTS CONSIDER ACCEPTABLE?

Tulane ranks 172 on the "Disruptive Conduct" component. This ranking is quite poor but reflects improvement from a ranking of 232 last year

As can be seen in the figure below, percentages this year compared to last remain similar for all types of illiberal protest asked about: violence, blocking entry, and shutdowns. Thus, Tulane's slight improvement on this component likely stems more from increasing numbers of students at other institutions endorsing these forms of illiberal protest rather than decreasing numbers of Tulane students endorsing these forms of illiberal protest.

Compared to students nationally, fewer Tulane students indicate these forms of disruptive conduct are "never" acceptable. Nationally, 32% of students say "shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus" is "never" acceptable, 48% say "blocking other students from attending a campus speech" is "never" acceptable, and 68% say "using violence to stop a campus speech" is "never" acceptable. All of these percentages dropped since last year.

FIGURE 3 Students Who Say a Disruptive Conduct is Never Acceptable (%)
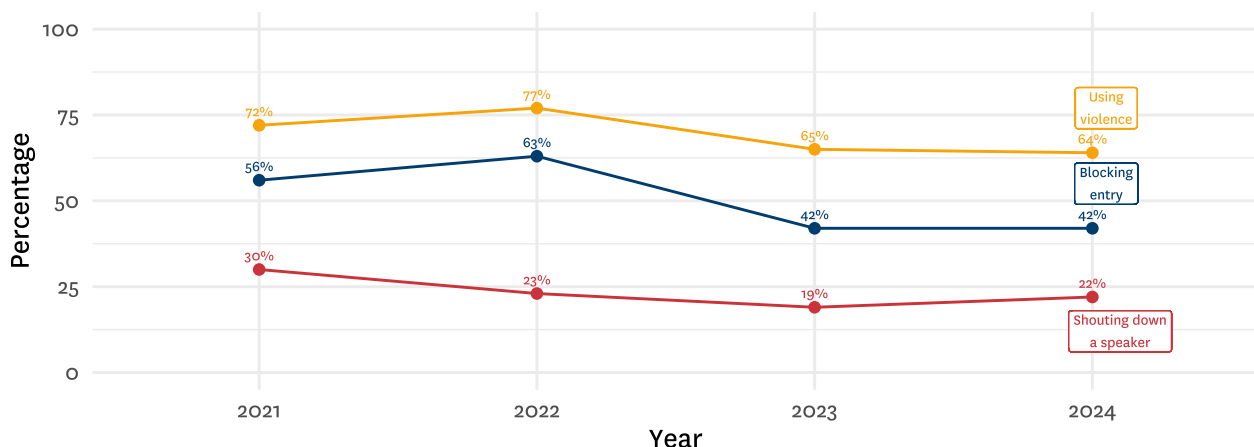
HOW IS TULANE'S ADMINISTRATIVE STANCE ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH PERCEIVED?

Tulane ranks 164 on the "Administrative Support" component — a drop from a ranking of 103 on this component last year.

Thirty-two percent of Tulane students say that their administration's protection of free speech on campus is "very" or "extremely" clear — a decline from 40% last year — though another 46% say that it is "somewhat" clear. When it comes to whether the administration will defend a speaker's rights during a controversy, only 19% of Tulane students say this is "very" or "extremely" likely — compared to 26% last year — though another 49% say that it is "somewhat" likely. Overall, these numbers reflect Tulane students' lukewarm confidence in the administration on their campus to protect and defend free speech.

A 'YELLOW LIGHT' SCHOOL WITH CONTROVERSY

FIRE gives Tulane's regulations on student expression a "yellow light," flagging six policies that earn that rating for posing either impermissibly vague or clear but narrow restrictions on protected speech. These include one harassment policy that fails to sufficiently track the legal standard for peer harassment in an educational setting, two policies that prohibit postings when they include content that is subjectively deemed "offensive" or "inappropriate," and two demonstration policies that require prior approval from campus administrators before a student group can hand out informational materials or otherwise demonstrate.

Perhaps of greatest concern, however, is a policy encouraging students to report all "bias incidents" to campus administrators, who will then work on "mobilizing resources to address the issue." The policy acknowledges that Tulane's broad definition of bias incidents is not limited to hate crimes or another category of unprotected speech. Tulane must revise each of these policies to reduce the chilling effect they impose on the campus speech climate.

Since 2020, Tulane was involved in four speech controversies. In 2020, Tulane indefinitely postponed a virtual discussion of the book, "Life of a Klansman: A Family History in White Supremacy," in which author Edward Ball traces his family's ancestry and finds racist roots. The university faced criticism and calls to cancel the event from students, who called the book "antithetical to the anti-racist work." In postponing the event, the university released a statement apologizing for the "distress" it caused in scheduling the book discussion.

In 2022, student Sarah Ma was investigated by Tulane for publishing an article titled "Ye Did Nothing Wrong," discussing the controversy surrounding allegedly antisemitic comments made by the rapper formerly known as Kanye West. Ma was sanctioned by two student organizations of which she was a member, faced calls for expulsion, and received death threats. The university not only investigated her but also told her the university could not protect her when she was off campus. In December of the same year, Tulane placed fraternity Phi Gamma Delta on interim suspension after an internal spreadsheet was circulated that showed the fraternity labeled some students undergoing recruitment with an anti-gay slur. The university announced the fraternity's suspension while it investigated and released a statement calling the fraternity's comments "reprehensible and counter to our core values."

This past spring, Tulane investigated Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) in response to an open letter signed by 100 Jewish Tulane students alleging the group engaged in antisemitic bullying of Jewish members of the campus community. The Jewish students complained of SDS's "antisemitic hate speech and denigration of Israeli hostages held captive in Gaza." The university released a statement pledging to investigate the group and any individual student named.

Tulane was penalized for each of these speech controversies as it failed to adequately defend expressive freedoms in any of the four situations.

HOW CAN TULANE IMPROVE?

The easiest thing Tulane can do to improve its ranking in next year's College Free Speech Rankings is to revise its "yellow light" speech policies. If Tulane had "green light" speech policies, it would rank 80 in this year's College Free Speech Rankings. Publicizing its 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 support survey ranking, which is currently about average in the rankings.

Improving and publicizing the university policies could also be a helpful way to indicate to students which activities and behaviors are acceptable forms of protest and which are not, which might change the culture of the university toward less acceptance of violence and shutdowns. The university can also teach students more directly that disruptions will not be tolerated or why disruptions are bad for free expression to improve its "Administrative Support" and "Disruptive Conduct" rankings.

Additionally, teaching students about the importance of free expression could help the university improve its "Comfort Expressing Ideas" survey component, which is currently its worst ranking. By improving the atmosphere for free expression on campus, Tulane could strengthen its survey components and decrease speech controversies on campus.

Tulane could also increase its support for those involved in speech controversies. If Tulane had supported each individual or group targeted in a speech controversy by defending free expression without expressing disagreement for the viewpoint expressed, then the university would have benefited from its responses rather than been penalized for them.

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.[2]

- **Tolerance for Liberal Speakers:** Students were asked whether three speakers espousing views potentially offensive to conservatives (e.g., "The police are just as racist as the Klu[sic] Klux Klan.") should be allowed on campus, regardless of whether they personally agree with the

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

speaker's message. Options ranged from "definitely should not allow this speaker" to "definitely should allow this speaker" and were coded so that higher scores indicate more tolerance of the speaker (i.e., more support for allowing the speaker on campus). The maximum number of points is 12.

- **Tolerance for Conservative Speakers:** Students were also asked whether three speakers espousing views potentially offensive to liberals (e.g., "Black Lives Matter is a hate group") should be allowed on campus, regardless of whether they personally agree with the speaker's message. Scoring was performed in the same manner as it was for the "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" subcomponent, and the maximum number of points is 12.

- **Disruptive Conduct:** Students were asked how acceptable it is to engage in different methods of protest against a campus speaker, including "shouting down a speaker or trying to prevent them from speaking on campus," "blocking other students from attending a campus speech," and "using violence to stop a campus speech." Options ranged from "always acceptable" to "never acceptable" and were coded so that higher scores indicate less acceptance of disruptive conduct. The maximum number of points is 12.

- **Administrative Support:** Students were asked how clear it is their administration protects free speech on campus and how likely the administration would be to defend a speaker's right to express their views if a controversy over speech occurred on campus. For the administrative clarity question, options range from "not at all clear" to "extremely clear," and for the administrative controversy question, options range from "not at all likely" to "extremely likely." Options were coded so that higher scores indicate greater clarity and a greater likelihood of defending a speaker's rights. The maximum number of points is 10.

- **Openness:** Finally, students were asked which of 20 issues (e.g., "abortion," "freedom of speech," "gun control," and "racial inequality"), if any, are difficult to have open conversations about on campus. Responses were coded so that higher scores indicate fewer issues being selected. The maximum number of points is 20.

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

Campus Behavioral Metrics

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

- Supporting free expression during a deplatforming campaign, as recorded in FIRE's Campus Deplatforming database.[3]

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3   A full list of all the deplatforming incidents that impacted the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings is available here: https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1i5h8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj10Oa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=1964386004#gid=1964386004. The full Campus Deplatforming database is available on FIRE's website at https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/campus-deplatforming-database.

- Supporting a scholar whose speech rights were threatened during a free speech controversy, as recorded in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire database.[4]

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

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

- Successfully deplatforming a speaker, as recorded in FIRE's Campus Deplatforming database.

- Sanctioning a scholar (e.g., placing under investigation, suspending, or terminating a scholar), as recorded in FIRE's Scholars Under Fire database.

- Sanctioning a student or student groups, as recorded in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings behavioral metrics documentation that is available online.

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

In response to the encampment protests, FIRE and College Pulse reopened the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings survey on any campus with an encampment. This allowed us to collect survey data from students while the encampments were taking place.[6] That means that this year's College Free Speech Rankings provide a treasure trove of data on the evolving state of free expression at American colleges and universities.

FIRE's Spotlight ratings — our ratings of the written policies governing student speech at nearly 500 institutions of higher education in the United States — also factored into each school's overall score. Three substantive ratings are possible: "red light," "yellow light," and "green light." A "red light" rating indicates that the institution has at least one policy that both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech. A "yellow light" rating indicates that an institution maintains at least one policy that places a clear restriction on a more limited amount of protected expression, or one that, by virtue of vague wording, could too easily be used to restrict protected expression. A "green light" rating indicates that an institution maintains no policies that seriously threaten speech, although this rating does not indicate whether a college actively supports free expression.[7]

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

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

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

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

Finally, a fourth rating, "Warning," is assigned to a private college or university when its policies clearly and consistently state that it prioritizes other values over a commitment to free speech. "Warning" schools, therefore, were not ranked, and their overall scores are presented separately in this report.[8]

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

Overall Score

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

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

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

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

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

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8   The Spotlight Database is available on FIRE's website: **https://www.thefire.org/resources/spotlight/**.

> *The principles of free speech and inquiry are complemented by debate, challenge and protest . . . While dissent may be vigorous, it must not interfere with the speaker's ability to communicate — which is exactly why, should those interrupters not have left on their own accord, they would be subject to discipline.*

We awarded one point for this response, which occurred in 2024, then we set this bonus to decrease by one-quarter of a point for each year that passes.

We also applied penalties when a school sanctioned a scholar, student, or student group, or deplatformed a speaker.

A school lost up to five points each time it sanctioned (e.g., investigated, suspended, or terminated) a scholar. When the sanction did not result in termination the school received a penalty of one point, which we set to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year: This meant penalizing a school a full point for sanctioning a scholar in 2024, three-quarters of a point for sanctioning a scholar in 2023, half a point for sanctioning a scholar in 2022, and one-quarter of a point for sanctioning a scholar in 2021. However, if the administration terminated the scholar, we subtracted three points, and if that scholar was tenured, we subtracted five points. We applied full penalties for termination for four years, then set them to decline by one-quarter of a point each year. So, a penalty for termination that occurred in 2020 has just now started to decay.

A school lost up to three points for sanctioning students or student groups. When the sanction did not result in expulsion, the revocation of acceptance, the denial or revoking of recognition, suspension, or termination of a student's campus employment (e.g, as a resident assistant) the school received a penalty of one point. Like with scholar sanctions that did not result in termination, we set these penalties to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year. If a school suspended a student or terminated their campus employment, we penalized it two points. We also set these penalties to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year. However, if a school denied or revoked a student group's recognition, expelled a student, or revoked their acceptance, it was penalized three points. We applied these penalties in full for four years, and then set them to decline by one-quarter of a point each year.

Regarding deplatforming attempts, a school was penalized one point if an invited speaker withdrew because of the controversy caused by their upcoming appearance on campus or if an event was postponed in response to a controversy. We set this penalty to decrease by a quarter of a point each year. Schools where an attempted disruption occurred received a penalty of two points. We applied this penalty for four years, then set it to decrease by one-quarter of a point each year. Schools with deplatforming attempts that resulted in event cancellations, preemptive rejections of speakers, removal of artwork on display, the revocation of a speaker's invitation, or a substantial event disruption were penalized three points. We applied these penalties in full for four years, then set them to decline by one-quarter of a point each year.

After we applied bonuses and penalties, we standardized each school's score by group — "Warning" schools and other schools — making the average score in each group 50.00 and the standard deviation 10.00. Following standardization, we added one standard deviation to the final score of colleges who received a "green light" rating for their speech codes. We also subtracted half a standard deviation from the final score of colleges that received a "yellow light" rating, one standard deviation from the final score of schools that received a "red light" rating, and two standard deviations from schools that received a "Warning" rating.

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

Topline Results

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all clear	13	6
Not very clear	36	16
Somewhat clear	105	46
Very clear	59	26
Extremely clear	14	6

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	20	9
Not very likely	53	23
Somewhat likely	111	49
Very likely	36	16
Extremely likely	7	3

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	62	27
Somewhat uncomfortable	92	41
Somewhat comfortable	58	25
Very comfortable	16	7

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	41	18
Somewhat uncomfortable	87	38
Somewhat comfortable	74	33
Very comfortable	24	11

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	43	19
Somewhat uncomfortable	88	39
Somewhat comfortable	84	37
Very comfortable	12	5

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	47	21
Somewhat uncomfortable	79	35
Somewhat comfortable	81	36
Very comfortable	21	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	76	34
Somewhat uncomfortable	88	39
Somewhat comfortable	46	20
Very comfortable	17	8

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	27	12
Rarely	78	34
Occasionally, once or twice a month	79	35
Fairly often, a couple times a week	36	16
Very often, nearly every day	7	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	20	9
Rarely	71	31
Occasionally, once or twice a month	81	36
Fairly often, a couple times a week	46	20
Very often, nearly every day	9	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	21	9
Rarely	83	37
Occasionally, once or twice a month	67	30
Fairly often, a couple times a week	41	18
Very often, nearly every day	15	7

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	18	8
Rarely	79	35
Occasionally, once or twice a month	73	32
Fairly often, a couple times a week	43	19
Very often, nearly every day	15	7

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	12	5
Sometimes acceptable	85	37
Rarely acceptable	81	36
Never acceptable	50	22

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	6	3
Sometimes acceptable	44	20
Rarely acceptable	81	36
Never acceptable	96	42

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	6	3
Sometimes acceptable	18	8
Rarely acceptable	58	26
Never acceptable	145	64

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	111	49
Probably should not allow this speaker	70	31
Probably should allow this speaker	33	15
Definitely should allow this speaker	13	6

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	73	32
Probably should not allow this speaker	68	30
Probably should allow this speaker	63	28
Definitely should allow this speaker	22	10

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	94	41
Probably should not allow this speaker	77	34
Probably should allow this speaker	39	17
Definitely should allow this speaker	17	8

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	55	24
Probably should not allow this speaker	67	29
Probably should allow this speaker	85	37
Definitely should allow this speaker	20	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	49	22
Probably should not allow this speaker	81	36
Probably should allow this speaker	77	34
Definitely should allow this speaker	19	8

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	25	11
Probably should not allow this speaker	65	29
Probably should allow this speaker	106	47
Definitely should allow this speaker	31	14

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	56	25
Probably should not allow this speaker	83	37
Probably should allow this speaker	72	32
Definitely should allow this speaker	16	7

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	44	19
Probably should not allow this speaker	62	27
Probably should allow this speaker	83	36
Definitely should allow this speaker	39	17

Some students say it can be difficult to have conversations about certain issues on campus. Which of the following issues, if any, would you say are difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on your campus? [Presented in randomized order with none of the above always listed last]

Abortion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	159	70
Yes	67	30

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	168	74
Yes	58	26

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	200	88
Yes	26	11

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	209	92
Yes	17	7

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	200	88
Yes	26	11

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	152	67
Yes	74	33

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	178	78
Yes	48	21

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	188	83
Yes	38	17

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	187	83
Yes	39	17

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	169	74
Yes	57	25

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	162	71
Yes	64	28

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	184	81
Yes	42	19

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	48	21
Yes	178	78

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	162	71
Yes	64	28

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	168	74
Yes	58	26

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	154	68
Yes	72	32

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	146	64
Yes	80	35

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	159	70
Yes	67	29

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	209	92
Yes	17	7

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	166	73
Yes	60	27

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	211	93
Yes	15	7

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	64	28
Yes	161	71

Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	61	27
Yes	164	72

Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	62	27
Yes	163	72

Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	65	29
Yes	161	71

LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	67	29
Yes	159	70

Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	66	29
Yes	159	70

Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	62	27
Yes	163	72

Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	61	27
Yes	164	72

Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	71	31
Yes	154	68

Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	77	34
Yes	148	65

Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	79	35
Yes	146	64

Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	77	34
Yes	148	65

Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	83	37
Yes	142	63

Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	79	35
Yes	147	65

Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	85	38
Yes	140	62

Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	99	44
Yes	126	56

Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	99	44
Yes	126	56

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	109	48
Yes	116	51

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	202	89
Yes	24	10

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	70	31
Rarely	71	31
Occasionally	44	19
Fairly often, a couple times a week	28	12
Very often, nearly every day	12	5

Have you ever been involved in publicly calling out, punishing, or "canceling" someone or a group for inappropriate statements or actions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	46	20
No	179	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	26	11
About right	122	54
Too harsh	78	34

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	35	15
Rarely	101	44
Occasionally	62	27
Fairly often, a couple times a week	25	11
Very often, nearly every day	3	1

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	50	22
Palestinians	90	40
Both equally	51	22
Neither	10	4
Don't know	25	11

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Israel	58	26
Hamas	95	42
Both equally	29	13
Don't know	43	19

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	80	35
Less than once a year	34	15
Once or twice a year	46	20
Several times a year	27	12
Once a month	9	4
2-3 times a month	16	7
About weekly	7	3
Weekly	6	3

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	4	2
No	221	97

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	2	1	1
No	223	98	99

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than half the time	16	7	36
About half the time	12	5	27
Most of the time, nearly every day	10	4	23
Always	7	3	15

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	11	5	23
Less than half the time	21	9	47
About half the time	9	4	19
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	2	9
Always	1	0	2

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	2	10
Less than half the time	16	7	35
About half the time	12	5	27
Most of the time, nearly every day	6	3	14
Always	6	3	14

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	14	6	27
Less than half the time	21	9	42
About half the time	8	3	15
Most of the time, nearly every day	1	0	2
Always	7	3	14

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	0	0	1
Less than half the time	10	5	25
About half the time	19	8	46
Most of the time, nearly every day	6	3	16
Always	5	2	12

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