2025 College Free Speech Rankings
University of Delaware

72
OVERALL RANK

AVERAGE

SPEECH
CLIMATE

YELLOW

SPOTLIGHT
RATING

2025 College Free Speech Rankings
University of Delaware

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 University of Delaware:

- The University of Delaware (UD) ranks 72 with an overall score of 51.60 and an "Average" speech climate. This year marks a return to the top 75 after finishing 153 last year and 65 the year before.

- UD is among the best institutions on the "Self-Censorship" component, ranking 19.

- UD improved from 186 last year to 94 this year on the "Openness" component, and from 242 to 79 on the "Comfort Expressing Ideas component.

- The University of Delaware ranks 122 on "Administrative Support," a significant improvement over its 193 finish last year. This result is primarily due to other schools doing worse than last year. UD's score improved slightly from 5.96 to 6.08.

- It's not all good news, however. This year the University of Delaware ranks near the bottom, 211, on the "Mean Tolerance" component after finishing 166 last year. Last year UD ranked 183 on "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers" and 143 on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers." UD now ranks near the bottom (209) on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" and a middling 158 on "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers."

- Another area of concern is a growing acceptance of illiberal forms of protest. While its ranking for "Disruptive Conduct" (112) is similar to last year (114), support for shouting down an offensive speaker rose (78%, up from 65% last year) as did blocking other students from attending a campus speech (54%, up from 45% last year).

- A "green light" rating would have taken the University of Delaware's score up from 51.60 to 66.60, which would have vaulted its overall rank from 72 to 9.

Full Report

IN 2020, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), College Pulse, and RealClearEducation published the first-ever comprehensive student assessment of free speech on 55 American college campuses: the College Free Speech Rankings. For the first time, prospective college students and their parents could systematically compare current students' understandings of the level of tolerance for free speech on campus.

This year FIRE and College Pulse surveyed 257 schools, ranking 251 of them. The University of Delaware, with a score of 51.60, has an "Average" speech climate and ranks 72 overall in the 2025 College Free Speech Rankings. This represents a return to the top-75 after finishing 153 last year and 65 in 2022.

HOW OFTEN ARE UD STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

The University of Delaware finished 19 overall 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.*

When asked to what extent they self-censor during conversations with other students on campus, 14% of students say they do so either "very" or "fairly" often, while 71% say not often (either "occasionally" or "rarely") and 15% say "never." The percentage of UD students who report self-censoring in this context often is substantially lower than among students nationally and those at public institutions (by 10 and 9 percentage points, respectively).

Students were subsequently asked to what extent they self-censor during conversations with their professors. 1 in 5 UD students say they self-censor often, while 65% say not often and 16% say "never." The percentage of UD students who report self-censoring in this context often is lower than among students nationally and those at public institutions (by five and six percentage points, respectively).
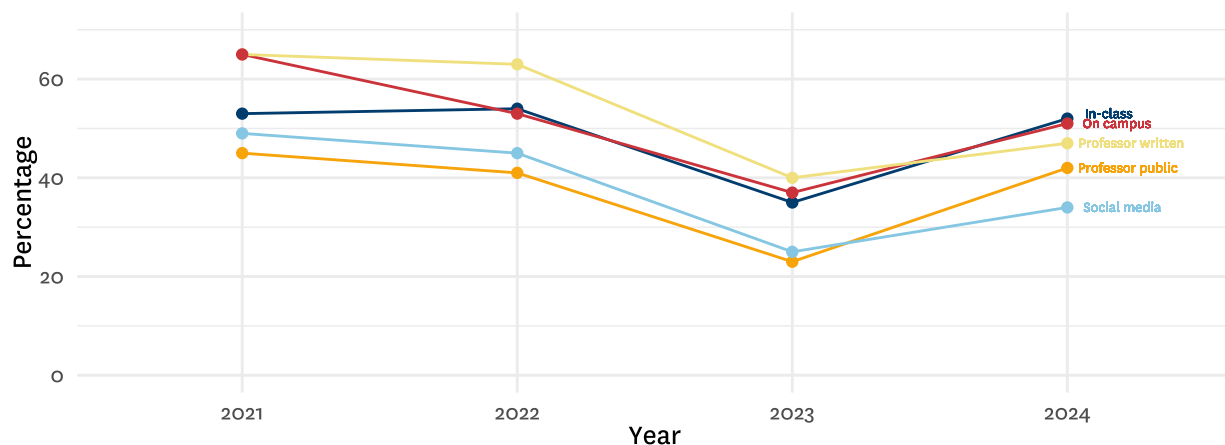
Finally, students were asked how often they self-censor during classroom discussions. Eighteen percent of UD students say they self-censor often, while 68% say not often and 14% say "never." Once again, the percentage of UD students who report self-censoring in this context often is significantly lower than among students nationally and those at public institutions (by eight and nine percentage points, respectively).

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

UD ranks 79 on the "Comfort Expressing Ideas" component after finishing 242 last year.

Students were asked how comfortable they would be expressing their ideas in five contexts, in random order. Compared to last year, students are more comfortable in all five, with an average increase of 13 percentage points. However, compared to 2021, students today express less comfort in all five, with an average decrease of 10 percentage points.

FIGURE 1 Students Comfortable by Setting (%)

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

The University of Delaware ranks 94 on the "Openness" component, a substantial improvement over last year's rank of 186.

Students were presented a list of 20 topics and asked which, if any, they felt were difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus. Because two topics were replaced this year, a comparison to last year is possible for only 18 topics. Of these, 15 were identified as difficult to discuss by smaller percentages of UD students this year than last year. The topics seeing the greatest reduction in frequency were gender inequality (-19 percentage points), gun control (-19 percentage points), sexual assault (-17 percentage points), gay rights (-13 percentage points), and abortion (-10 percentage points).

For the three topics students identified more frequently this year than last year, the average difference was 12 percentage points. However, this is highly skewed by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which saw a 29 percentage point increase over last year.

This year, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the topic most frequently identified as being difficult to discuss at the University of Delaware (59%), followed by abortion (43%), transgender rights (41%), the presidential election (38%), and a tie between racial inequality and gun control (34%).

When looking at this year's results for all 20 topics, 15 were identified by students at UD less frequently than among students nationally, and 16 less frequently when compared to students at public institutions.

1 in 5 UD students identified freedom of speech as being difficult to have an open and honest conversation about. More than 1 in 4 (27%) students said the same about hate speech.

Fourteen percent indicated "none of the above."

WHICH SPEAKERS DO UD STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

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.

The University of Delaware ranks near the bottom (209) on "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers," 158 on "Tolerance for Liberal Speakers," 186 on "Tolerance Difference," and 211 on "Mean Tolerance." Overall, a majority of UD students oppose allowing 5 of the 6 speakers (ranging from 55% to 77%).

For conservative speakers, around 3 in 5 UD students (61%) oppose allowing someone who said that "abortion should be completely illegal," three-quarters oppose allowing someone who said that "transgender people have a mental disorder," and just over three-quarters (77%) oppose someone who said that "Black Lives Matter is a hate group."

When it comes to liberal speakers, 44% of UD students oppose allowing someone who said that "children should be able to transition without parental consent," 55% oppose someone who said that "the Catholic church is a pedophilic institution," and 57% oppose someone who said that "the police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan."

Additionally, this year's survey asked about two speakers relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though responses did not impact rankings. At the University of Delaware, 69% oppose bringing to campus a speaker who said that "collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security," whereas only 31% oppose someone who said, "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

At UD, tolerance for conservative speakers is lower than for liberal speakers and among the lowest nationwide. Some of the drop in the "Tolerance for Conservative Speakers" could be explained by a notable increase in its ratio of liberal-to conservative students, from 2.48:1 last year to 3.13:1 this year.

In addition, UD dropping could be the result of students elsewhere having grown more tolerant of conservative speakers while those at UD have gotten less tolerant of them. Whereas in 2023 the average difference in opposition between UD and students nationally for each conservative speaker was just one percentage point, this year the average difference is seven percentage points.

TABLE 1 Students Who Oppose Allowing a Speaker that Said

SPEAKER SAID	UD (2023)	NATIONAL (2023)	PERCENTAGE POINTS DIFFERENCE (2023)	UD (2024)	NATIONAL (2024)	PERCENTAGE POINTS DIFFERENCE (2024)
Transgender people have a mental disorder.	72%	71%	1	75%	67%	8
Abortion should be completely illegal.	59%	57%	2	61%	55%	6
Black Lives Matter is a hate group.	72%	71%	1	77%	68%	9

WHAT KINDS OF DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT DO UD STUDENTS CONSIDER ACCEPTABLE?

The University of Delaware ranks 112 on "Disruptive Conduct."

For this component, students were asked how acceptable it would be to engage in three acts of illiberal protest: shouting down a speaker on campus, blocking students from attending a campus speech, and using violence to stop a campus speech.
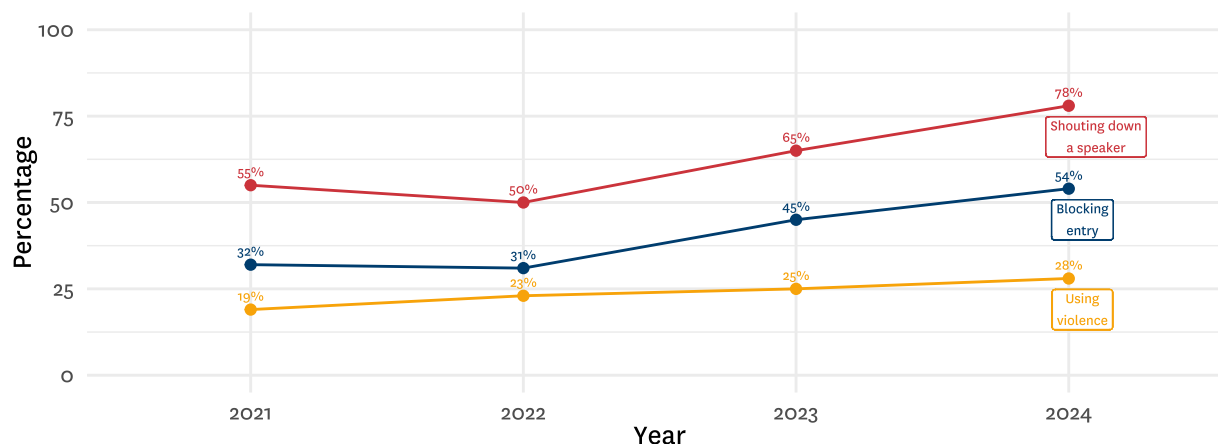
Despite seeing little change in ranking of 114 since last year, UD has seen a noticeable shift in acceptance in its student body for each of the three acts of illiberal protest.

Twenty-eight percent of UD students say it is acceptable, even if only rarely, to use violence to stop a campus speech, compared to 32% of students nationally. UD has been slightly less accepting than students nationally in three of the past four years; in 2022 UD was just barely more accepting. However, acceptance at UD has still gone up all four years.

More than half (54%) of UD students say it is acceptable, even if only rarely, to block other students from attending a campus speech, compared to 52% of students nationally. Whereas UD students were considerably less accepting than were students nationally in both 2021 and 2022, their attitudes have been in line with those of students nationally for the past two years. And since last year, support at UD has gone up considerably.

When it comes to shouting down a speaker, students at UD were far less accepting than students nationally in both 2021 and 2022. However, things took a dramatic turn beginning in 2023, when support at UD increased by 15 percentage points from 2022 to the point of matching students nationally. That trend continued in 2024, when levels of acceptability jumped a whopping 13 percentage points from 2023 to the point where nearly four-fifths of UD students (78%) today find it acceptable, even if only rarely, to shout down a speaker. This value is 10 percentage points above students nationally.

FIGURE 2 Students Who Believe It Is at Least Rarely Acceptable to Use Protest Tactic to Stop a Campus Speech (%)

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

The University of Delaware ranks 122 on "Administrative Support," an improvement from 193 last year. This is primarily due to other schools doing worse than last year, whereas UD's score improved slightly from 5.96 to 6.08.

Students were first asked, "How clear is it to you that your college administration protects free speech on campus?" Thirty-six percent say it is "very" or "extremely" clear (percentage unchanged each of the past two years), while 21% say it is "not at all" or "not very" clear (down from 28% last year) and 42% say it is only "somewhat" clear (up from 37% last year).

Next, students were asked: "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?" Twenty-one percent say it is "very" or "extremely" likely (slightly down from 23% last year), while 29% say it is "not at all" or "not very" likely (down from 34% last year) and 49% say it is only "somewhat" likely (up from 43% last year).

A 'YELLOW LIGHT' SCHOOL

FIRE awards Delaware's regulations on student expression a "yellow light" rating, flagging two policies that earn that rating for posing either impermissibly vague or clear but narrow restrictions on protected speech. One of these is a harassment policy that fails to sufficiently track the legal standard for peer harassment in an educational setting. The other is a policy regulating hosting speakers on campus, requiring that a student organization must bear the cost of "ensuring the safety of the speaker as well as those who listen." Forcing a student organization to pay all security fees associated with a speaking event they seek to host subjects the event to a "heckler's veto," in which any individuals who disagree with the perspective of the student group and speaker can engage in disruptive behavior and increase the costs of securing the safety of the event until the student group is forced to cancel the event. UD must revise each of these policies to reduce the chilling effect they impose on the campus speech climate.

HOW CAN THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE IMPROVE?

The easiest thing UD can do to improve its ranking would be to earn a "green light" rating, which would have vaulted its overall rank from 72 to 9.

After a top-20 finish in "Self-Censorship" and meteoric improvements over last year in "Administrative Support", "Openness", "Comfort Expressing Ideas", and overall ranking, there is a lot to be proud of at the University of Delaware. But it's not all positive.

In fact, looking at the University's year-to-year changes across several components reveals an increasingly intolerant student body that's growing more accepting of illiberal forms of protest:

- 78% of students believe it is acceptable, even if only rarely, to shout down a speaker (65% last year).

- 54% of students believe it is acceptable to block other students from attending a campus speech (45% last year).

- A majority (55% to 77%) of UD students oppose allowing on campus five of the six speakers presented in the survey.

- Nearly 1 in 5 (19%) UD students say that they have "been involved in publicly calling out, punishing, or 'canceling' someone or a group for inappropriate statements or actions".

Though the rankings show that UD has corrected course in several areas, the growing illiberalism described above is disturbing. We fear that these attitudes, when coupled with declining viewpoint diversity, will get even worse unless the administration sends a loud and clear signal to students that the University of Delaware proudly defends expressive rights for all. They can do this by taking the following actions: improving its expressive policies and officially adopting both the "Chicago Statement" and the principle of institutional neutrality as outlined in the "Kalven Report."

Should these measures be taken, we anticipate an even greater rise for UD in next year's report.

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/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.[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	20	6
Not very clear	48	15
Somewhat clear	133	42
Very clear	88	28
Extremely clear	26	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	18	6
Not very likely	71	23
Somewhat likely	156	49
Very likely	61	19
Extremely likely	9	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	71	23
Somewhat uncomfortable	110	35
Somewhat comfortable	106	34
Very comfortable	28	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	40	13
Somewhat uncomfortable	125	40
Somewhat comfortable	102	32
Very comfortable	48	15

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	48	15
Somewhat uncomfortable	104	33
Somewhat comfortable	116	37
Very comfortable	47	15

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	45	14
Somewhat uncomfortable	110	35
Somewhat comfortable	111	35
Very comfortable	50	16

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	110	35
Somewhat uncomfortable	97	31
Somewhat comfortable	76	24
Very comfortable	31	10

On your campus, how often have you felt that you could not express your opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	53	17
Rarely	137	44
Occasionally, once or twice a month	85	27
Fairly often, a couple times a week	24	8
Very often, nearly every day	16	5

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

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

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	48	15
Rarely	122	39
Occasionally, once or twice a month	102	32
Fairly often, a couple times a week	30	10
Very often, nearly every day	13	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	50	16
Rarely	104	33
Occasionally, once or twice a month	100	32
Fairly often, a couple times a week	37	12
Very often, nearly every day	24	8

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	45	14
Rarely	97	31
Occasionally, once or twice a month	117	37
Fairly often, a couple times a week	40	13
Very often, nearly every day	16	5

How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker? [Presented in randomized order]

Shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	16	5
Sometimes acceptable	108	34
Rarely acceptable	123	39
Never acceptable	67	21

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	6	2
Sometimes acceptable	56	18
Rarely acceptable	106	34
Never acceptable	147	47

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	3	1
Sometimes acceptable	26	8
Rarely acceptable	58	19
Never acceptable	227	72

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	146	46
Probably should not allow this speaker	90	29
Probably should allow this speaker	56	18
Definitely should allow this speaker	22	7

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	99	31
Probably should not allow this speaker	96	30
Probably should allow this speaker	90	28
Definitely should allow this speaker	30	9

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	145	46
Probably should not allow this speaker	98	31
Probably should allow this speaker	46	15
Definitely should allow this speaker	26	8

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	62	20
Probably should not allow this speaker	109	35
Probably should allow this speaker	99	31
Definitely should allow this speaker	44	14

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	68	21
Probably should not allow this speaker	113	36
Probably should allow this speaker	91	29
Definitely should allow this speaker	44	14

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	48	15
Probably should not allow this speaker	90	29
Probably should allow this speaker	135	43
Definitely should allow this speaker	42	13

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	98	31
Probably should not allow this speaker	120	38
Probably should allow this speaker	67	21
Definitely should allow this speaker	30	10

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	40	13
Probably should not allow this speaker	55	18
Probably should allow this speaker	141	45
Definitely should allow this speaker	79	25

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	177	56
Yes	135	43

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	251	80
Yes	61	19

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	272	86
Yes	40	13

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	275	87
Yes	37	12

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	278	88
Yes	34	11

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	255	81
Yes	57	18

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	250	79
Yes	62	20

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	235	74
Yes	77	25

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	242	77
Yes	70	22

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	205	65
Yes	107	34

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	226	72
Yes	86	27

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	216	69
Yes	96	30

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	127	40
Yes	185	59

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	192	61
Yes	120	38

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	211	67
Yes	101	32

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	206	65
Yes	106	34

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	218	69
Yes	94	30

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	238	76
Yes	74	23

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	274	87
Yes	38	12

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	183	58
Yes	129	41

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	269	85
Yes	43	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	85	27
Yes	227	72

Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	81	26
Yes	231	73

Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	90	29
Yes	221	70

Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	101	32
Yes	210	67

LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	85	27
Yes	227	72

Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	103	33
Yes	209	66

Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	90	29
Yes	222	70

Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	94	30
Yes	218	69

Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	94	30
Yes	217	69

Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	107	34
Yes	205	65

Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	118	38
Yes	193	61

Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	106	34
Yes	205	65

Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	114	36
Yes	198	63

Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	110	35
Yes	202	64

Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	95	30
Yes	216	69

Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	148	47
Yes	163	52

Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	125	40
Yes	186	59

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	133	42
Yes	179	57

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	275	87
Yes	36	12

How often, if at all, do you hide your political beliefs from your professors in an attempt to get a better grade?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	133	42
Rarely	94	30
Occasionally	37	12
Fairly often, a couple times a week	24	8
Very often, nearly every day	19	6

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	59	19
No	252	80

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	41	13
About right	161	51
Too harsh	107	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	68	21
Rarely	127	40
Occasionally	83	26
Fairly often, a couple times a week	23	7
Very often, nearly every day	7	2

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Israelis	40	13
Palestinians	110	35
Both equally	50	16
Neither	26	8
Don't know	82	26

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	84	27
Hamas	73	23
Both equally	55	17
Don't know	98	31

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	130	41
Less than once a year	46	15
Once or twice a year	38	12
Several times a year	45	14
Once a month	9	3
2-3 times a month	6	2
About weekly	10	3
Weekly	13	4
Several times a week	9	3

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	3	1
No	303	96

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	0	0	0
No	306	97	100

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	6	2	8
Less than half the time	25	8	32
About half the time	19	6	23
Most of the time, nearly every day	15	5	19
Always	14	5	18

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	8	3	15
Less than half the time	19	6	37
About half the time	17	5	32
Most of the time, nearly every day	6	2	12
Always	2	1	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	1	6
Less than half the time	20	6	27
About half the time	32	10	43
Most of the time, nearly every day	10	3	14
Always	8	2	10

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	10	3	18
Less than half the time	23	7	42
About half the time	15	5	28
Most of the time, nearly every day	1	0	2
Always	6	2	10

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	7	2	14
About half the time	22	7	44
Most of the time, nearly every day	16	5	33
Always	4	1	8

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