

2025 College Free Speech Rankings

University of Pittsburgh

208

OVERALL
RANK

BELOW
AVERAGE

SPEECH
CLIMATE

YELLOW

SPOTLIGHT
RATING



FIRE
Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

Executive Summary **1**

Full Report **2**

How Often Are Pitt Students Self-Censoring on Campus? 2

What Topics Are Difficult for Pitt Students to Have Conversations About? 3

Which Speakers Do Pitt Students Consider Controversial? 3

What kinds of Disruptive Conduct Do Pitt Students Consider Acceptable? 4

Students' Propensity for Disruption Costs Pitt 5

How Do Pitt Students Perceive the Administration's Support for Free Speech? 5

A 'Yellow Light' School with Room for Improvement 6

How Can Pitt Improve? 6

Methodology **7**

Free Speech Rankings 8

Student Perceptions 8

Campus Behavioral Metrics 9

Overall Score 11

Topline Results **13**

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 the University of Pittsburgh:

- A ranking of 208 overall, with an overall score of 38.04 and a “Below Average” speech climate.
- Other nearby public institutions ranked above Pitt, including University of Virginia (1), George Mason University (16), University of Maryland (39), Ohio University (64), and the Ohio State University (174).
- Pitt performs near the very bottom (249) when it comes to students’ support for “Disruptive Conduct.” The impact of these attitudes is reflected in two deplatforming incidents for which Pitt was penalized.
- Pitt ranks very well for “Self-Censorship” (6), poorly for “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” (133), and exceptionally poorly for “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers” (216) and “Mean Tolerance” (205).
- Pitt performs well on “Administrative Support” (27), but only moderately well on “Comfort Expressing Ideas” (105) and “Openness” (97).
- Pitt was penalized for a number of campus controversies that occurred from 2021 to the present, including deplatforming events (Bhavini Patel and Justin Butterfield) and one incident where a scholar was sanctioned (Denise Turner).
- Pitt continues to maintain speech policies that earn it a “yellow light” rating from FIRE. If Pitt revised these policies and earned a “green light” rating, it would have ranked 57 overall.

Full Report

IN 2020, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (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.¹ University of Pittsburgh (Pitt) ranks 208 overall, with an overall score of 38.04 and a “Below Average” speech climate.

This represents a drop from last year's rankings, when Pitt performed better, but was still 130 overall and had what we considered an “Average” speech climate.

Pitt's scores on a number of the survey-based components dropped, resulting in a corresponding drop in rankings. Its ranking on “Disruptive Conduct” dropped noticeably (249 out of 251 compared to 221 out of 248 last year), as did its ranking for “Tolerance Difference” (202 compared to 149 last year). Pitt did improve in a number of measures, including “Comfort Expressing Ideas” (105 compared to 128 last year) and “Administrative Support” (27 compared to 221) last year. Students' support for illiberal actions in response to controversial speech remains a serious issue.

Among other ranked schools in Pennsylvania, University of Pittsburgh was near the bottom, coming in behind Carnegie Mellon (41), Swarthmore College (60), Temple University (65), Lehigh University (112), Franklin and Marshall College (118) Bucknell University (126), Drexel University (145th), Villanova University (185), Haverford College (190), and Gettysburg College (197), but ahead of Lafayette College (213), Duquesne University (222), Pennsylvania State University (228), and University of Pennsylvania (248).

HOW OFTEN ARE PITT STUDENTS SELF-CENSORING ON CAMPUS?

“Some students would completely stop listening if you said something that may be opposing their viewpoint, even if it is only said to invite discussion”

University of Pittsburgh ranks 6 overall in the Self-Censorship component.

More than 80% of students only “occasionally” (once or twice a month), “rarely,” or “never” self-censor in all the contexts asked about (with other students on campus, with professors, and during classroom discussions). More than 50% of students “rarely” or “never” censor during conversations with students or professors. Pitt students are only slightly more reserved during classroom discussions, where only 45% “rarely” or “never” self-censor.

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.

- 15% of Pitt students say they self-censor a couple times a week or more in conversations with other students compared to 24% of students nationally.
- 17% of Pitt students say they self-censor a couple times a week or more in conversations with their professors compared to 25% of students nationally.
- 19% of Pitt students say they self-censor a couple times a week or more in classroom discussions compared to 26% of students nationally.

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

“being a muslim and having jewish friends and not having a perspective in support of the extreme ends i don’t voice my opinion”

Pitt ranked 97 on the “Openness” component. As with the “Comfort Expressing Ideas” component, Pitt’s “Openness” ranking this year is an improvement from its mediocre ranking of 128 last year.

Students were given a list of 20 topics and asked to select which they felt were difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on their campus. Across most topics assessed, greater proportions of Pitt students expressed difficulty having an open and honest conversation about them compared to last year. The only topic that a majority of Pitt students identified as difficult to have an “open and honest” conversation about was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (62%), up from 36% last year.

WHICH SPEAKERS DO PITT STUDENTS CONSIDER CONTROVERSIAL?

“I feel that many topics presented in lectures are very nuanced, but that nuance is typically very polarizing to people. I feel that many people see topics as purely black and white as opposed to gray. If you do not share an opinion that is not the “societal norm,” it definitely creates tension and discomfort in class.”

University of Pittsburgh ranked 133 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers,” 216 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers,” 202 on the “Tolerance Difference” component, and 205 on “Mean Tolerance.” Pitt displayed a heavy bias toward allowing controversial liberal speakers on campus compared to conservative ones.

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.

The percentage of students who said they would “probably” or “definitely” allow each of the three controversial liberal speakers on campus ranged from 42% (“The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan”) to 60% (“Children should be able to transition without parental consent”).

The percentage of students who said they would “probably” or “definitely” allow each of the three controversial conservative speakers on campus ranged from 16% (“Transgender people have a mental disorder”) to 32% (“Abortion should be completely illegal”).

The favoritism toward allowing controversial liberal speakers on campus, compared to conservative ones, might be due to the ideological makeup of the student body. Of the Pitt students surveyed, 62% identified as liberal, 16% identified as conservative, and 13% identified as moderate.

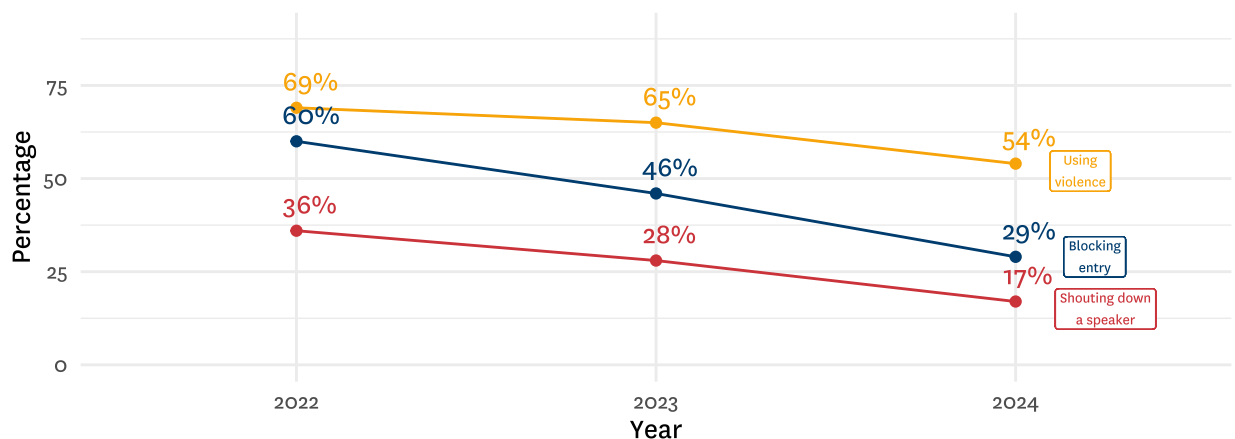
Additionally, this year’s survey asked about two speakers relevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, though responses did not impact rankings. At Pitt, 66% oppose bringing to campus a speaker who said that “collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security,” whereas only 27% oppose someone who said, “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.” Nationally, 60% oppose bringing to campus a speaker who said that “collateral damage in Gaza is justified for the sake of Israeli security” but only 29% oppose someone who said, “from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free.”

WHAT KINDS OF DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT DO PITT STUDENTS CONSIDER ACCEPTABLE?

University of Pittsburgh ranked near the bottom (249) on “Disruptive Conduct.”

Support for illiberal responses to speech have increased dramatically at Pitt since last year. As can be seen in figure 1, last year 28% of Pitt students said shoutdowns were “never” acceptable, compared to only 17% this year. Similarly, last year 46% of Pitt students said blocking entry to an event was “never” acceptable, compared to 29% this year. For the most pernicious form of disruptive conduct, last year 65% of Pitt students said violence was “never” acceptable; this year only 54% said this. Specifically, 24% said they think using violence is “rarely” (but not “never”) acceptable, 19% said violence is “sometimes” acceptable, and 3% said violence is “always” acceptable.

FIGURE 1 Students Who Say Disruptive Conduct is Never Acceptable (%)



Compared to students nationally, Pitt students are more likely to support these forms of disruptive conduct. Nationally, 32% of students said shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus is “never” acceptable, 48% said blocking other students from attending a campus speech is “never” acceptable, and 68% said using violence to stop a campus speech is “never” acceptable.

STUDENTS’ PROPENSITY FOR DISRUPTION COSTS PITT

University of Pittsburgh received penalties for two instances of deplatforming and a scholar under fire.

The administration appears to be aware that students are willing to disrupt events and, rather than improving security to allow these events to proceed, has resorted to canceling speeches instead. In February, 2024, Bhavini Patel, a graduate of the university as well as a congressional candidate and supporter of Israel, was scheduled to appear at the university to speak with students about her experience at the university. A day before the event, it was called off. The university said that it asked Patel to postpone the event because its policies bar “directly or indirectly engaging in any political campaign activities” and they were concerned that the event would not remain focused on Patel’s experiences at the university. Patel said that the university canceled the event “citing concerns of disruption and my safety” from supporters of one of her primary opponents, a critic of Israeli military policy in Gaza.

FIRE penalized Pitt for a substantial event disruption that occurred in 2021 when over a dozen protestors stormed the stage and disrupted a speech by Justin Butterfield about fetal tissue trafficking.

Pitt was *not* penalized for the widely publicized attempted disruption of a 2023 event featuring Michael Knowles where a smoke bomb was detonated. While we did not penalize Pitt for this event because Knowles was able to successfully complete his talk, the incident further demonstrates the problem that the Pitt student body has with letting controversial events go on undisrupted.

Pitt was, in contrast, penalized for an incident where, following a student’s complaint on TikTok about an assignment involving a rape scenario, the university launched an investigation into a professor and publicly stated it had “taken appropriate action internally to address” student concerns.

HOW DO PITT STUDENTS PERCEIVE THE ADMINISTRATION’S SUPPORT FOR FREE SPEECH?

University of Pittsburgh ranked 27 on “Administrative Support.” This represents a dramatic change from last year, when Pitt ranked near the bottom at 221.

Thirty-one percent of Pitt students say that the administration’s protection of free speech on campus is “very” or “extremely” clear and another 54% say that it is “somewhat” clear. When it comes to whether the administration will defend a speaker’s rights during a controversy, 34% of Pitt students say this is “very” or “extremely” likely—a large uptick from 19% last year—and another 54% say that it is “somewhat” likely.

Similarly, “Openness” improved from 128 to 97.

It is not clear if these trends are capturing a positive change in the culture of free speech or if students feel more protected in their forms of illiberal expression.

A ‘YELLOW LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

FIRE awards Pitt's regulations on student expression a "yellow light" rating, flagging six policies that earn that rating for posing either impermissibly vague or clear but narrow restrictions on protected speech. These include a policy on posting and chalking that effectively bans anonymous materials, a chilling bias incident reporting policy, an overbroad use of computers policy, and two harassment policies that fail to sufficiently track the legal standard for peer harassment in an educational setting. Of greatest concern is the policy called the "Pitt Promise," which requires students to commit to maintaining "civility." Civility may indeed be a laudable goal for students to aspire to, but mandates on civility can easily be applied by administrators to punish disfavored speech. Pitt must revise these policies to reduce the chilling effect they impose on the campus speech climate.

HOW CAN PITT IMPROVE?

University of Pittsburgh can improve its speech code rating by revising its policies to better track First Amendment standards. If Pitt were to revise its yellow light policies and earn an overall "green light" rating, it would rank 57. Doing so publicly, with a push to make students aware of these changes, might signal that Pitt is starting a new chapter, one where it unequivocally supports freedom of speech and is poised to defend it when controversy arises.

It has already started on this path, launching the Campus Call for Free Expression campaign in August of 2023. This initiative might have contributed to Pitt's dramatic improvement in "Administrative Support," discussed above. It is critical that such programming address the widespread support for disruptive protests. Clearly communicating what activities and behaviors are acceptable for protest — and how peaceful protest is a critical part of free expression — could lead to an improvement in Pitt's "Disruptive Conduct" ranking. Defending the ability of speakers to speak on campus without disruption will prevent future penalties.

Still, obtaining a green light rating does not itself guarantee that a school actively supports free speech. Student perceptions of an administration's support for free speech on campus are just that, perceptions, which are subject to their own idiosyncrasies and could quickly change year-to-year due to student turnover. The proof of whether a school truly supports free expression as a core value is revealed when that core value is tested by controversy.

The decisions administrators and other school leaders make in response to campus speech controversies are likely to have a more lasting influence on a school's climate for free expression than its policies or its students' perceptions of "Administrative Support." When a decision is made unequivocally in defense of free speech, it sends one kind of message to a school's students and faculty. When a response is tepid or, worse, violates someone's speech rights, it sends a very different kind of message — one that usually chills the campus speech climate.

Methodology

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

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

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

College Pulse applies a post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from multiple data sources, including the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The “weight” rebalances the sample based on a number of important benchmark attributes, such as race, gender, class year, voter registration status, and financial aid status. The sample weighting is accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting (IFP) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables to produce a representative sample of four year undergraduate students in the United States.

This year College Pulse introduced a similar post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from multiple data sources, including the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The “school universe weight” rebalances the sample based on a number of important benchmark attributes, such as race, gender, class year, voter registration status, and financial aid status. The sample weighting is accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting (IFP) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables to produce a representative sample of four year undergraduate students from the 257 colleges and universities surveyed.

College Pulse also applies a post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from the Current Population Survey (CPS), the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). This “school weight” rebalances the sample from each individual school surveyed based on a number of important benchmark attributes, such as race, gender, class year, voter registration status, and financial aid status. The sample weighting is accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting (IPF) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables to produce a representative sample of students at each individual school.

All weights are trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results and to ensure over-sampled population groups do not completely lose their voice.

The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the target populations. Even with these adjustments, surveys may be subject to error or bias due to question wording, context, and order effects.

For further information, please see: <https://collegepulse.com/methodology>.

FREE SPEECH RANKINGS

The College Free Speech Rankings are based on a composite score of 14 components, seven of which assess student perceptions of different aspects of the speech climate on their campus. The other seven assess behavior by administrators, faculty, and students regarding free expression on campus. Higher scores indicate a better campus climate for free speech and expression.

Student Perceptions

The student perception components include:

- **Comfort Expressing Ideas:** Students were asked how comfortable they feel expressing their views on controversial topics in five different campus settings (e.g., “in class,” or “in the dining hall”). Options ranged from “very uncomfortable” to “very comfortable.” Responses were coded so that higher scores indicate greater comfort expressing ideas. The maximum number of points is 20.
- **Self-Censorship:** Students were provided with a definition of self-censorship and then asked how often they self-censored in three different settings on campus (e.g., “in a classroom discussion”). Responses were coded so that higher scores indicate self-censoring less often. The maximum number of points is 15.²
- **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 speaker’s message. Options ranged from “definitely should not allow this speaker” to “definitely should allow

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.

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

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/1ish8y1M4GFv5FQzyx6lLZqHj10Oa1YQJOYvozCqAzE8/edit?gid=1964386004#gid=1964386004>. The full Campus Deplatforming database is available on FIRE’s website at <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/campus-deplatforming-database>.

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

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:

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.

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

Topline Results

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all clear	0	0
Not very clear	22	15
Somewhat clear	80	54
Very clear	37	25
Extremely clear	8	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	3	2
Not very likely	15	10
Somewhat likely	80	54
Very likely	36	24
Extremely likely	16	10

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	32	22
Somewhat uncomfortable	66	45
Somewhat comfortable	40	27
Very comfortable	10	7

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	23	15
Somewhat uncomfortable	52	35
Somewhat comfortable	60	40
Very comfortable	14	10

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	25	17
Somewhat uncomfortable	40	27
Somewhat comfortable	71	47
Very comfortable	13	9

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	25	17
Somewhat uncomfortable	44	29
Somewhat comfortable	67	45
Very comfortable	14	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	33	22
Somewhat uncomfortable	61	41
Somewhat comfortable	43	29
Very comfortable	12	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	28	19
Rarely	60	40
Occasionally, once or twice a month	48	32
Fairly often, a couple times a week	8	6
Very often, nearly every day	4	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	27	18
Rarely	64	43
Occasionally, once or twice a month	36	24
Fairly often, a couple times a week	18	12
Very often, nearly every day	4	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	18	12
Rarely	68	46
Occasionally, once or twice a month	36	24
Fairly often, a couple times a week	23	15
Very often, nearly every day	4	2

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	27	18
Rarely	41	27
Occasionally, once or twice a month	53	36
Fairly often, a couple times a week	27	18
Very often, nearly every day	2	1

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	11	8
Sometimes acceptable	68	46
Rarely acceptable	45	30
Never acceptable	25	17

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	8	6
Sometimes acceptable	42	28
Rarely acceptable	55	37
Never acceptable	43	29

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	5	3
Sometimes acceptable	28	19
Rarely acceptable	36	24
Never acceptable	80	54

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	55	37
Probably should not allow this speaker	69	47
Probably should allow this speaker	14	9
Definitely should allow this speaker	10	7

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	52	35
Probably should not allow this speaker	49	33
Probably should allow this speaker	36	24
Definitely should allow this speaker	12	8

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	57	38
Probably should not allow this speaker	67	45
Probably should allow this speaker	13	8
Definitely should allow this speaker	13	9

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	31	21
Probably should not allow this speaker	43	29
Probably should allow this speaker	57	38
Definitely should allow this speaker	17	12

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	27	18
Probably should not allow this speaker	58	39
Probably should allow this speaker	47	31
Definitely should allow this speaker	16	11

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	15	10
Probably should not allow this speaker	44	30
Probably should allow this speaker	60	40
Definitely should allow this speaker	30	20

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	44	30
Probably should not allow this speaker	54	36
Probably should allow this speaker	43	29
Definitely should allow this speaker	8	5

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	5	4
Probably should not allow this speaker	34	23
Probably should allow this speaker	73	49
Definitely should allow this speaker	37	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	96	64
Yes	53	36

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	116	78
Yes	33	22

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	131	88
Yes	18	12

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	123	83
Yes	25	17

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	116	78
Yes	33	22

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	116	78
Yes	33	22

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	122	82
Yes	27	18

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	106	71
Yes	43	29

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	103	69
Yes	46	31

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	102	69
Yes	47	31

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	106	71
Yes	43	29

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	114	77
Yes	35	23

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	56	38
Yes	93	62

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	110	74
Yes	38	26

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	108	72
Yes	41	28

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	118	79
Yes	31	21

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	97	65
Yes	52	35

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	99	67
Yes	49	33

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	127	85
Yes	22	15

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	93	63
Yes	56	37

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	132	89
Yes	16	11

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	48	32
Yes	101	68

Black or African American student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	46	31
Yes	103	69

Hispanic/Latino student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	50	34
Yes	99	66

Sororities or fraternities

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	53	35
Yes	96	65

LGBTQ+ student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	48	32
Yes	101	68

Christian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	55	37
Yes	94	63

Jewish student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	51	34
Yes	98	66

Muslim/Islamic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	51	34
Yes	98	66

Hindu student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	52	35
Yes	97	65

Atheist/agnostic/secular student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	63	42
Yes	86	58

Republican student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	70	47
Yes	79	53

Democratic student groups.

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	62	41
Yes	87	59

Politically conservative student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	69	47
Yes	79	53

Politically liberal student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	60	40
Yes	89	60

Black Lives Matter student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	57	39
Yes	91	61

Pro-Israeli student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	90	60
Yes	59	40

Pro-Palestinian student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	70	47
Yes	78	53

Other student groups

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	70	47
Yes	79	53

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	132	89
Yes	17	11

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	44	30
Rarely	56	38
Occasionally	22	15
Fairly often, a couple times a week	17	12
Very often, nearly every day	9	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	27	18
No	122	82

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	31	21
About right	77	52
Too harsh	41	28

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	20	14
Rarely	79	53
Occasionally	34	23
Fairly often, a couple times a week	14	9
Very often, nearly every day	1	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	12	8
Palestinians	81	54
Both equally	21	14
Neither	11	7
Don't know	23	16

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	44	29
Hamas	39	26
Both equally	25	17
Don't know	41	27

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	61	41
Less than once a year	17	11
Once or twice a year	21	14
Several times a year	15	10
Once a month	15	10
2-3 times a month	10	7
About weekly	3	2
Weekly	6	4
Several times a week	1	1

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	1
No	147	99

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	1	1	1
No	147	99	99

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	3	2	9
Less than half the time	9	6	25
About half the time	13	8	34
Most of the time, nearly every day	6	4	15
Always	6	4	17

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	2	2	9
Less than half the time	20	13	80
About half the time	3	2	10

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	3	13
Less than half the time	10	7	35
About half the time	9	6	29
Most of the time, nearly every day	7	5	23

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	7	5	23
Less than half the time	10	7	31
About half the time	7	5	24
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	3	13
Always	3	2	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	1	1	4
Less than half the time	4	3	16
About half the time	15	10	56
Most of the time, nearly every day	3	2	13
Always	3	2	12



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