

2020

# College Free Speech Rankings:

What's the Climate for Free Speech on  
America's College Campuses?



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## Executive Summary

College campuses are designed to be places for exchanging ideas—places to examine and analyze complex ideas from different points of view. Each year, college students, professors, and lecturers gather in classrooms across America (and increasingly online) to examine the most pressing issues facing society, such as the state of race relations in America, or the freedoms of religion and association. Yet free and open discussion of these issues is not always possible. Administrators and student governments routinely punish dissenting students; speakers from every ideological persuasion are restricted to misleadingly labeled “free speech zones”; and visiting campus speakers are shouted down,<sup>1</sup> blocked from entering lecture halls,<sup>2</sup> or disinvited from speaking.<sup>3</sup> While there are organizations dedicated to tracking these individual incidents, little information exists to help students, parents, or engaged citizens evaluate the experience of being a student on a particular campus, and what it is like to engage (or not) on that campus in the free exchange of ideas.

The College Free Speech Rankings project provides the first-ever way to comprehensively assess and compare the culture of freedom of speech on college campuses in America. These rankings are available online, along with more information to compare colleges on an interactive dashboard ([speech.collegepulse.com](https://speech.collegepulse.com)), for prospective students and their parents to better understand the campus climate at colleges they are considering. Professors, administrators, staff, and current students can also use these rankings to better understand the student experience on their campus by exploring which topics are most uncomfortable for students to discuss openly, as well as which groups feel most ready to do so.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), a non-profit organization committed to free and open inquiry at colleges and universities in the United States, in partnership with RealClearEducation, commissioned College Pulse to conduct a survey of students at 55 colleges about students’ experiences with free speech on their campuses. Fielded from April 1 to May 28, 2020, via the College Pulse mobile app and web portal, the survey included nearly 20,000 student respondents who were currently enrolled in four-year degree programs. This was the largest survey of college students about free speech on their campuses ever conducted.

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<sup>1</sup> Bauer-Wolf, J. (2017, November 22). *No consistent sanctions for silencing*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/11/22/punishments-shouting-down-college-speakers-run-gamut>

<sup>2</sup> Jaschik, S. (2017, April 10). *Another speech shut down*. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2017/04/10/protest-over-speakers-views-race-and-crime-prevents-event-taking-place-planned>

<sup>3</sup> Mangan, K. (2019, June 18). *Disinvited speakers get a platform to talk about being denied one*. <https://www.chronicle.com/article/disinvited-speakers-get-a-platform-to-talk-about-being-denied-one/>; Morey, A. (2016, December 20). *Campus disinvitations set record in 2016*. <https://www.thefire.org/campus-disinvitations-set-record-in-2016/>

Key findings include:

- **The University of Chicago received the highest score in the College Free Speech Rankings from college students.** Liberal and Conservative college students alike agreed that the administration at the University of Chicago supports free inquiry and tolerates a wide range of opinions.
- **DePauw University was ranked last in the College Free Speech Rankings and had the highest percentage of students who self-censored (71%).** DePauw was also the lowest-rated school by Conservative students and the fourth lowest-rated school by Liberal students. In the overall rankings, the University of Texas at Austin ranked only slightly above DePauw and was rated poorly by Liberal and Conservative students alike.
- **Seven of the colleges that ranked in the top 10 in the College Free Speech Rankings are public state universities with undergraduate enrollments over 15,000.** Only one of the top 10 is in the Northeast or a member of the Ivy League (Brown University). In contrast, seven of the colleges ranked in the bottom 10 are private, with undergraduate enrollments at five of those seven below 10,000. Three of the bottom 10 colleges are in the Northeast, including two members of the Ivy League.
- **Students' assessment of the state of free speech on their campuses is, at least in part, driven by their political ideology and whether or not it is in line with the predominant viewpoint at their college.** Those students who attend colleges where their political opinions align with the majority are generally more comfortable sharing their beliefs.
- **60% of students can recall at least one time during their college experience when they did not share their perspective for fear of how others would respond.** While men and women are equally likely to report that they have censored themselves (60% and 61%, respectively), students who identify as Conservative are more likely to report a prior self-censorship incident (72% for Conservatives, 55% for Liberals).
- **Despite the high proportion of students who report self-censorship, students overwhelmingly (70%) agree that their college's administrators make it clear to the student body that free speech is protected on campus.** This sentiment is stronger among

White students (71%) than Black students (66%). Students also generally believe that their administration would come to the defense of a speaker if a controversy arose. While 57% of students say their college would defend a speaker's right to express his or her views in the case of a controversy over "offensive" expression, a disturbingly large minority, 42%, believe their college would punish the speaker for making the statement.

- **Race and race relations are pervasively difficult to talk about on college campuses, especially for Black students.** Overall, 43% of college students identified race as a challenging topic to have an open and honest conversation about on campus, a figure that rises to 66% for Black students. On 16 campuses out of 55, race was most frequently identified as a difficult topic to discuss. When asked whether they would support or oppose the right of someone to speak on campus about how "some racial groups are less intelligent than others," 85% of students either "strongly" or "somewhat" opposed the person's right to speak.
- **A large majority of students (82%) say that violent tactics are never acceptable when protesting campus speakers.** However, almost one in five consider using violence to stop a speech or other event on campus as "always" (1%), "sometimes" (3%), or "rarely" (13%) acceptable.

## About Us

### About College Pulse

College Pulse is a survey research and analytics company dedicated to understanding the attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of today's college students. College Pulse delivers custom data-driven marketing and research solutions, utilizing its unique American College Student Panel™ that includes over 400,000 undergraduate college student respondents from more than 1,000 two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states.

For more information, visit [collegepulse.com](http://collegepulse.com) or College Pulse's Twitter account, @Collegelnsights.

### About FIRE

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education ([FIRE](http://fire.org)) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to defending and sustaining the individual rights of students and faculty members at America's colleges and universities. These rights include freedom of speech, freedom of association, due process, legal equality, religious liberty, and sanctity of conscience—the essential qualities of liberty.

For more information, visit [thefire.org](http://thefire.org) or FIRE's Twitter account, @thefireorg.

### About RealClearEducation

RealClearEducation is dedicated to providing readers with better, more insightful analysis of the most important news and education policy issues of the day. RealClearEducation is part of the RealClear Media Group, which includes RealClearPolitics and more than a dozen other news websites. RealClear's daily editorial curation, public opinion analysis, and original reporting present balanced, non-partisan news coverage that empowers readers to stay informed.

For more information, visit [RealClearEducation.com](http://RealClearEducation.com) or RealClearEducation's Twitter account, @RealClearEd.

## Acknowledgments

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Robert Shibley  
Executive Director, FIRE



## Detailed Methodology

The College Free Speech Survey was developed by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education, RealClearEducation, and College Pulse. The administration of the survey was conducted by College Pulse. No donors to the project took part in the design or conduct of the survey. The survey was fielded from April 1 to May 28, 2020. These data come from a sample of 19,969 undergraduates who were currently enrolled full-time in four-year degree programs in the United States. Fifty-five colleges and universities are represented in this sample. The margin of error for the U.S. undergraduate population is +/- 1 percentage point, and the margin of error for college student sub-demographics ranges from 2 to 5 percentage points.

The initial sample was drawn from *College Pulse's American College Student Panel™*, which includes more than 400,000 verified undergraduate students at more than 1,000 different two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states. Panel members are recruited by a number of methods to help ensure student diversity in the panel population, including 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 recruits 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, 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 were currently enrolled full-time in a four-year degree program. All invitations to complete surveys are sent using the student's .edu email address or through notification in the College Pulse app that is available on iOS and Android platforms.

College Pulse applies a post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from multiple data sources, including the 2017 Current Population Survey (CPS), the 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the 2017–18 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The post-stratification 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. Weights are trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results.

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 on the survey methodology, please visit <https://collegepulse.com/methodology>.

## Free Speech Rankings

The overall college rankings are based on a composite score of five sub-components described in detail below: Openness, Tolerance, Administrative Support, Self-Expression, and FIRE's Speech Code Rating. To create an overall score for each college, called the Overall Score, the five sub-component scores were rescaled and added for a maximum possible score of 100 points. Higher scores indicate stronger environments on campus for free speech and expression. A college's Overall Score is the average score of the students surveyed at that college. Two additional overall scores for each college were computed: an overall average score among students who identify as Liberal, and one among students who identify as Conservative.

### Openness

To capture how willing students are to have difficult conversations on campus, the College Free Speech Survey asked, *"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?"* Options included Abortion, Affirmative action, Feminism, Gun control, Immigration, The Israeli/Palestinian conflict, Race, and Transgender issues. Student responses received one point for each topic the student did not consider difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus, so the maximum openness score was 8. This score was then rescaled to a maximum of 40 points of a college's overall score.

## Tolerance

The tolerance score is the sum of points for the responses to six questions:

“Would you support or oppose your school ALLOWING a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea:”<sup>4</sup>

- “Abortion should be completely illegal?”
- “Black Lives Matter is a hate group?”
- “Censoring the news media is necessary?”
- “Some racial groups are less intelligent than others?”
- “The U.S. should support Israeli military policy?”
- “Transgender people have a mental disorder?”

Response options were coded on a four-point scale: *Strongly support* = 4 points, *somewhat support* = 3 points, *somewhat oppose* = 2 points, and *strongly oppose* = 1 point. Each question was weighed equally, for a maximum tolerance score of 24. This score was then rescaled to a maximum of 40 points in a college’s overall score.

## Self-Expression

Students were asked whether they “*Personally ever felt you could not express your opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond?*” Student responses of “no” received three points, while “yes” received no points. This sub-component is 12 points of the overall score.

## Administrative Support for Free Speech

Student perceptions of their college administration’s attitudes toward free speech were determined via two questions. First, “*Does your college administration make it clear to students that free speech is protected on your campus?*” Second, “*If a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on your campus, would the administration be more likely to...*” Answer options for the second question included: *Punish the speaker for making the statement* or *Defend the speaker’s right to express their views*. A response indicating that the administration clearly supports free speech, or that it would more likely defend a speaker’s right to free speech during

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<sup>4</sup> While eight questions were asked about whether a student would support or oppose different speakers on campus, only six items were included in this analysis. The six items included in the analysis reached an Eigenvalue greater than 1, suggesting that only six out of the eight survey questions contributed to a meaningful tolerance dimension. Tolerance items were included based on both exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis.

a controversy, received two points. The maximum for this sub-component was four points in the overall score.

### **FIRE Speech Code Rating**

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), an organization dedicated to promoting free and open inquiry on college campuses, rates the written policies governing student speech at over 470 higher-education institutions in the United States. Four ratings are possible: Warning, Red, Yellow, or Green (actually “red light,” “yellow light,” and “green light”). A Warning rating is assigned to a private college or university when its policies clearly and consistently state that it prioritizes other values over a commitment to freedom of speech. Colleges with this rating received a score of -1. A rating of Red indicates that the institution has at least one policy that both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech. These colleges also received a score of -1. Colleges with Yellow ratings have policies that restrict a more limited amount of protected expression or, by virtue of their vague wording, could too easily be used to restrict protected expression. This rating received a score of 0. Finally, the policies of an institution with a Green rating do not seriously threaten speech, although this rating does not indicate that a college actively supports free expression. This rating received a score of 1. With a maximum of 1, this sub-component was then multiplied by 4 to constitute +/- 4 points in the overall score.

### **Overall Score**

To create an overall score for each college, called the Overall Score, the five components were added, for a maximum possible score of 100. The Overall Score for each college is the average score of the entire student body surveyed at that college, including the College Pulse weighting described above.<sup>5</sup> The average Overall Score score was 52.72, and the standard deviation was 3.17.

### **Liberal and Conservative Scores**

This report provides two additional scores for each college: a score for Liberal students (Liberal Score) and a score for Conservative students (Conservative Score).<sup>6</sup> A higher Liberal Score

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<sup>5</sup> Two sources of school-specific weights were applied. The first weights were calculated for each college, with respondents considered within the sample of only their school. That is, weighting targets were developed for each college individually. The second set of weights considered respondents within the overall sample. Weighting targets for the overall sample were calculated from a weighted average of the individual school targets, based on school enrollment.

<sup>6</sup> These scores were computed from unweighted data because of a dearth of generalizable data on the political ideology of undergraduate students. Self-identification used a seven point scale that ranged from “Extremely liberal” to “Extremely conservative” and on which students could choose “4” to identify as “Moderate.” A “Something else” option was also available.

indicates that students who identify as Liberal at that college report a better climate for free speech and expression, while a higher Conservative Score conveys the same information about students who identify as Conservative at that college. The average Liberal Score was 49.79 with a standard deviation of 4.98, while the average Conservative Score was 53.14 with a standard deviation of 4.00.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The difference between the average Liberal Score and the average Conservative Score was statistically significant when analyzed at the level of individual respondents ( $p < .001$ ) and at the school level ( $p < .001$ ).

## Overview

Every year, high school juniors and seniors make critical decisions about where they will spend their college years. There is no shortage of factors to consider: Will I attend a college close to home or far away? Is a public or private college best for me? How much can I afford to spend on my education, and how will I pay for it?

Many resources are available to help prospective students assess these factors. But college is also a time for exploring new ideas and digging deeply into complex topics, not only in the classroom but also with professors and peers outside the classroom. College is often a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to hear from visiting speakers, other scholars, and representatives of political organizations just by walking across the quad. Few resources exist to help students with this fundamental aspect of the college experience: whether a college promotes, merely facilitates, or actually hampers the free exchange of ideas.

The College Free Speech Rankings are the first tool to provide such detailed, quantitative insight into the relative environment for open dialogue at colleges under consideration, helping prospective students and their parents as they assess different colleges. These Rankings represent the most comprehensive such analysis to date, taking into account multiple dimensions of open conversation on 55 U.S. campuses, from the ability to discuss challenging topics such as race, transgenderism, and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, to whether students on college campuses report holding back their views. Additionally, the College Free Speech Rankings Dashboard ([speech.collegepulse.com](https://speech.collegepulse.com)), which can be found on the College Pulse, FIRE, and RealClear websites, offers a unique tool to compare schools across a set of other important factors in combination with their free-speech rankings, such as cost and proximity to home.

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*“As a Christian being on a very liberal campus I might find it difficult at times to express my views because I am afraid of being the odd one out on my opinion. I feel as though I do live in a respectful community and I very much believe in not judging others but feeling like you may lean more on a minority opinion for a decision might make it hard to speak out.”*

—University of Wisconsin student

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The College Free Speech Rankings also serve as a call for colleges to examine their students' perception of free speech on their campuses. For the first time at many of these colleges, their professors, administrators, and staff can understand which topics are most uncomfortable for students to discuss openly, as well as which groups feel comfortable doing so. Subsequent reports will offer recommendations for how colleges can work to improve their free-speech climates.

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*"A certain teacher gave his/her opinions on how the current administration is handling the coronavirus outbreak and I felt I should not share my opinion on the topic. I'm sure this particular teacher would welcome any civilized debate with open arms but the atmosphere around politics encourages people to lash out at those who disagree. I decided to not ruin my reputation freshman year by stating my opinion and kept quiet."*

—University of Tennessee student

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The body of this report contains three sections. First, it presents analyses of the free-speech attitudes of all of the college students surveyed. Next, it provides the College Free Speech Rankings. Finally, to offer additional richness in comparing colleges on free-speech environments, we profile six colleges in greater detail.

The College Free Speech Rankings reveal that students' political ideology is a prominent factor in students' experience of their ability to speak freely. This association suggests that colleges with more ideologically monolithic student bodies may have an advantage in the rankings, since these colleges may have fewer dissenters who might feel prevented from speaking out. Therefore, this report presents not only the overall rankings but also rankings exclusive to students who identify as Liberal or Conservative.

## National Data

One way to assess the campus climate for free expression is to ask whether students have hesitated to share what they think on campus, in their classrooms, or with their peers or professors. In the survey, more than half of students (60%) could recall an instance when they felt that they could not express their opinion on campus because of how other students, professors, or their college administration would respond. This was the case even for first-year students who had not even been on campus for a full academic year, as 58% of them reported not expressing their opinion because of the potential consequences of doing so.

Men and women are about equally likely to report such self-censorship (60% and 61% respectively). Students also have similar self-censorship rates by race and by whether the college is public (60%) or private (61%).

Black or African American students are most likely to report an instance when they censored themselves (63%), followed by White students (60%). Asian and Hispanic students report similar rates of 60% and 59% respectively. Experiences with self-censorship do diverge by political ideology. Survey responses show that students who identify as Conservative are more likely to report self-censorship than Liberal students (72% vs. 55%). Moderate students fell between the two, with 62% reporting self-censorship.

Have you personally ever felt you could not express your opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond?



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*"Being a conservative on a college campus I've just learned to avoid politics and confrontation because I don't want to force my views on other people and I don't want the judgement for having them."*

—University of Colorado student

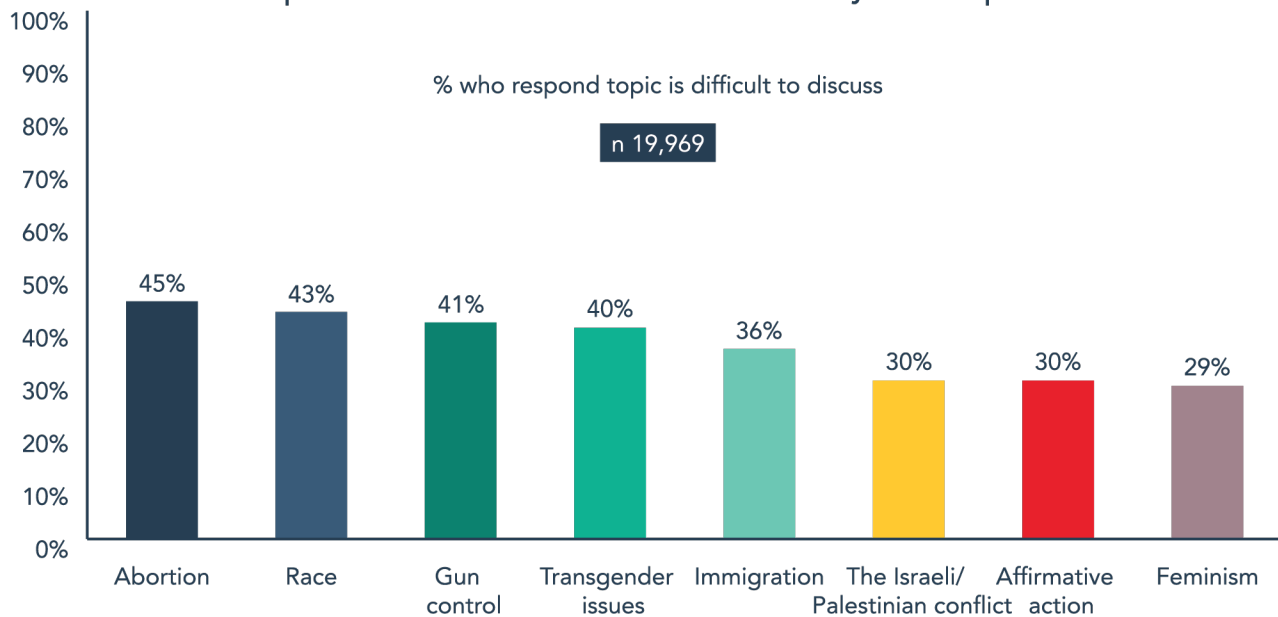
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## What Topics are Most Often Identified as Difficult for Students to Discuss?

The survey asked not only about self-censorship in general, but also about the climate for discussing some of the most pressing social issues of our time. We asked students how difficult it is to have an open and honest discussion about eight such topics on their campuses. Across all 55 campuses, abortion, race, gun control and transgender issues were most frequently chosen among the eight issues as the most challenging to discuss. In particular, students at 37 of the 55 colleges surveyed (67%) most frequently chose abortion or race as most difficult.

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?



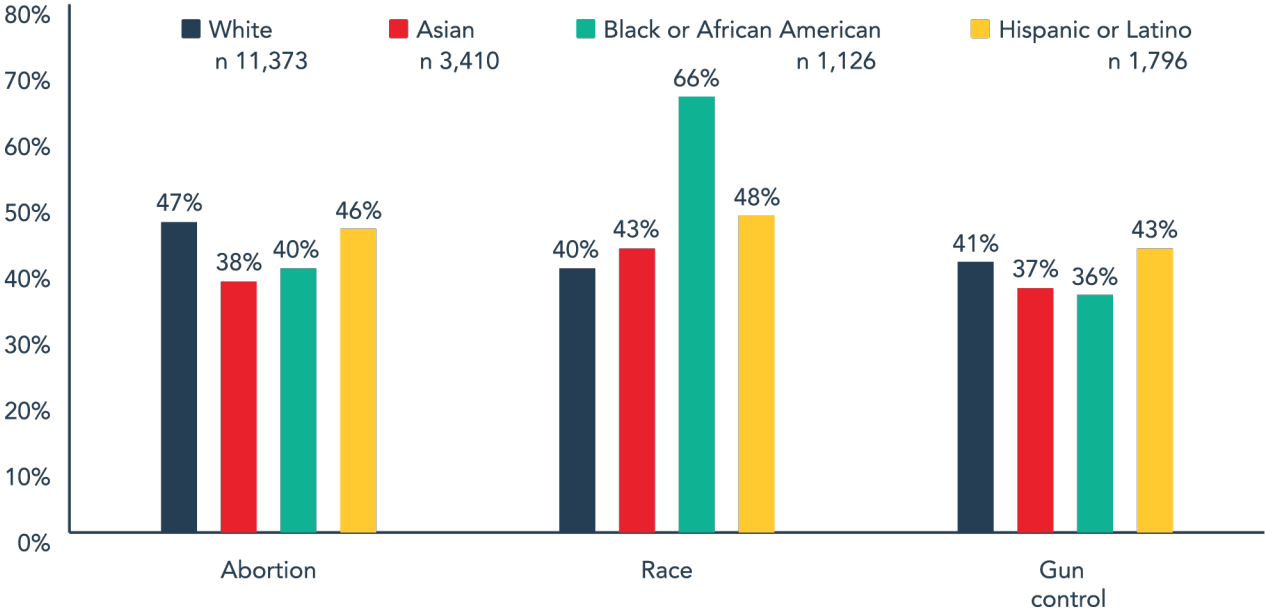
Students most frequently identified abortion (45%) as a difficult topic to discuss. A University of Alabama student said,

I never feel comfortable when the topic of abortion comes up. I'm pro-choice, pro sex-ed, pro-birth control and none of those are really popular stances in the religious south regardless of it being a "Liberal college campus."

Perceived openness of a campus for discussing difficult issues varies substantially by race. For example, White students are more likely to say that it's difficult to have a conversation about abortion on campus (47%) than Black or African American students (40%), while Asian students are the least likely to identify this topic as challenging (38%).

The gaps are even larger by race when talking about race itself. Overall, 43% of students identify race as hard to discuss, yet Black or African American students share this sentiment most pervasively (66%), whereas fewer than half of White students (40%), Asian students (43%) and Hispanic or Latino students (48%) share this sentiment. Similarly, Black or African American students are 11 percentage points more likely to identify affirmative action as a challenging topic than White students (39% vs. 28%). Hispanic or Latino students are the most likely to report that it is challenging to speak openly about immigration in the United States (49%), compared to 34% for White students and 39% for Black or African American students. At the University of Colorado, race was the topic most often identified as difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus, with 41% of students reporting this sentiment.

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?



*“In my philosophy classes when we discuss race and or any liberal issue. I feel like when I’m the only black person in a class of 30-40 why would I want to stand out more than I already do? During a lecture against reparations I was already having a kinda bad day and the lecture noted things like “black people were rewarded by being brought to America” and out of pure uncomfotability I was crying. I’ve taken notes and been interested in topics I disagree with but I felt like all eyes were on me every-time the word race*

*or black was spoken. Looking back if I was in a completely okay place for the day I may have not cried. But the tension of being at a Predominantly White Institution had been building up all day. It didn't help that in the class I had heard ignorant comments from time to time like "if you grow up in the ghetto you're just more naturally violent" or "poorer areas are just more dangerous". That class definitely helped me recognize my place at CU. And I saw echoes of this behavior all around campus all year."*

—University of Colorado student

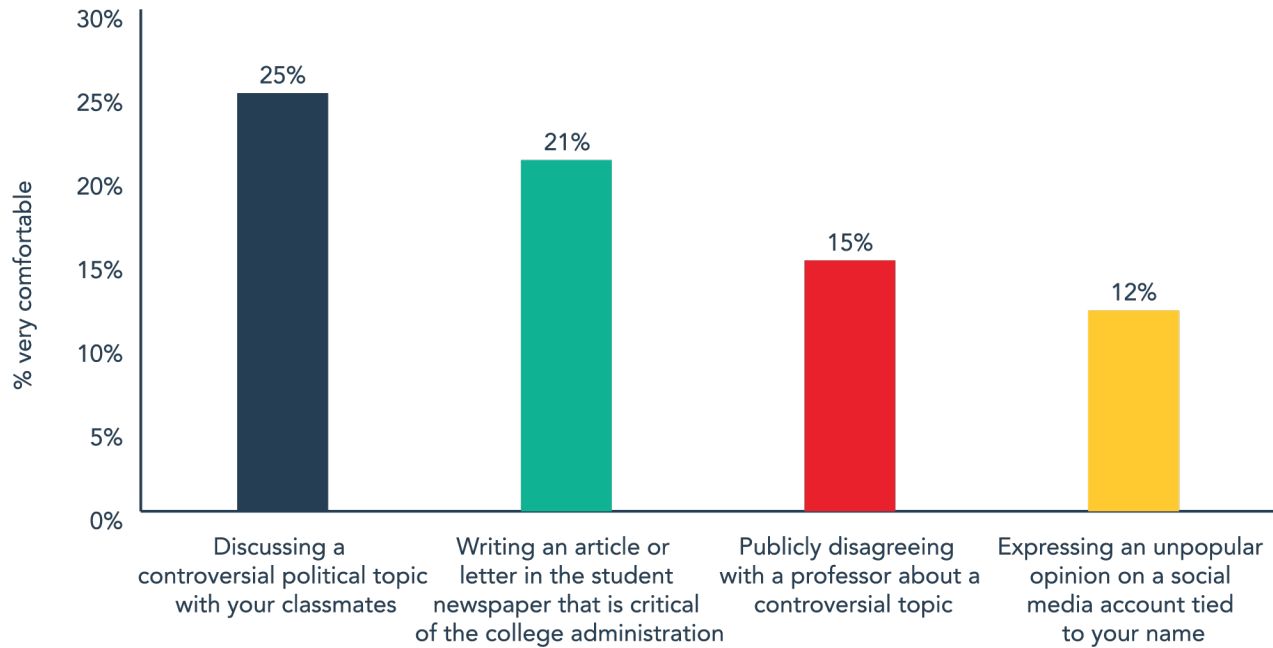
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Other factors that appear to contribute to perceived openness of a campus to discuss difficult issues included region of the country, type of school, and school prestige. Of the 21 colleges where abortion was chosen by the largest percentage of students as difficult to discuss, almost half (10) are located in the South, all but one (Georgetown University) are public institutions, and none is in the Northeast, California, or the Chicago area. Of the seven colleges where the Israeli/Palestinian conflict was most frequently identified as a difficult topic to discuss, five are private and four are in the Ivy League. Furthermore, all seven are in the Northeast, the upper Midwest or California, and all are ranked among the top 25 national universities by *U.S. News & World Report*.

### How Comfortable are Students Engaging in Expressive Behavior?

Only a quarter of students (25%) report that they generally feel "very comfortable" having a discussion on a controversial political topic with their classmates. Fewer students would feel very comfortable writing a letter in the student newspaper expressing a critical view of their college's administration (21%), and only 15% of students report that they would feel very comfortable disagreeing with a professor publicly about a controversial topic. Perhaps due to the more widespread reach of social media compared with the limited scope of the classroom, students are most sensitive and hesitant to post about a controversial issue on their social media accounts. Only about one in nine (12%) students would feel very comfortable expressing their perspective on social platforms; one in three students report that they would be very uncomfortable posting it.

How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus:



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*“Personally, I’m not a huge supporter of Bernie Sanders like many of my peers may be and so I don’t feel like I could/should express my criticisms about his campaign in fear of hostility from my peers. When someone published an op-ed criticizing the Sanders campaign, they received a lot of backlash from students on social media and this only further minimized my desire to express my own political views and criticisms of the Sanders campaign.”* —University of Pennsylvania

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*“On Facebook, a lot of Harvard students can post rants about different topics, often taking a very liberal stance. I am also liberal, but am still afraid of posting Facebook posts that would offend even more liberals.”*  
—Harvard University student

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## Who are the Most Controversial Speakers?

Students are concerned not only about their own speech but also about the speech of invited guests. Each year, thousands of speakers visit college campuses to give lectures and talks. Yet many such talks have led to controversy, demands for silencing, or even official disinvitations.<sup>8</sup> The survey therefore listed several controversial ideological positions and asked students, “Would you support or oppose your school *ALLOWING* a speaker on campus who promotes the following ideas?” We emphasized that the question was merely about *allowing* such a person to speak on campus, in order to avoid confusion about whether the students themselves supported the positions listed.

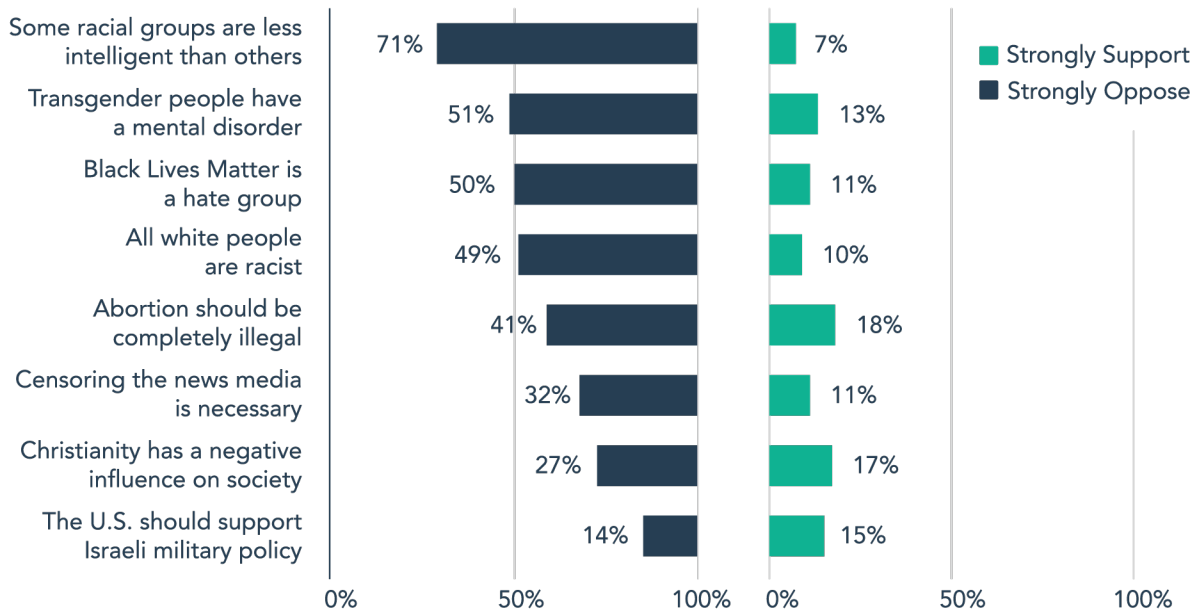
The results were ominous for supporters of free expression on campus. For instance, the figure below, Support for Controversial Speakers, reveals that 71% of students would “strongly” oppose letting someone who advocates, “Some racial groups are less intelligent than others,” to speak on their college campus. Only a small minority (7%) of students would “strongly” support allowing such a person to speak on their campus. Similarly, a majority of students would strongly oppose allowing speakers on campus who say that transgender people have a mental disorder, and half would strongly oppose allowing speakers who say that the Black Lives Matter movement is a hate group (51% and 50% respectively). These two issues are bimodal, with approximately a 40-point gap between students who would strongly support or strongly oppose such speakers.

Nearly equal numbers of students would strongly support (15%) or oppose (14%) allowing a speaker who advocates that the United States should support Israeli military policy. There is a 10-point gap between students who would strongly support or strongly oppose a campus speaker with the message, “Christianity has a negative influence on society.” Further study may be necessary to interpret how students interpret campus free-speech prerogatives in relation to these issues.

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<sup>8</sup> FIRE (2014, May 28). *Disinvitation report 2014: A disturbing 15-year trend*. <https://www.thefire.org/disinvitation-season-report-2014/>.

Would you support or oppose your school ALLOWING a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea:



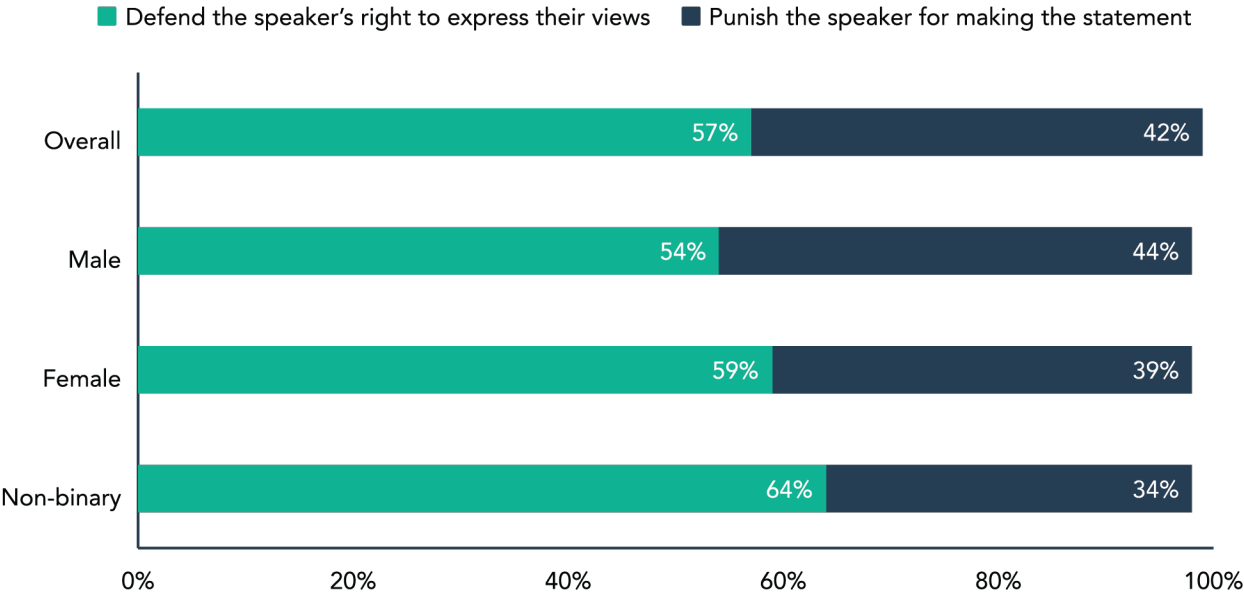
### What are Students' Views About Their Administration's Support for Freedom of Speech on Campus?

Despite relatively low overall scores for all colleges surveyed in the College Free Speech Survey, many students say that their campus administration does a good job of communicating the idea that their college protects free speech on campus. A majority (70%) of students answered that their administration makes it clear that it protects free speech on their campus, with women (72%) expressing this view more frequently than men (68%). On this question, there are no wide variations by race.

A smaller majority of students (57%) answered that if there were a controversy on their campus involving "offensive" expression, the administration would more likely defend the speaker's right to express their view. A notable minority of students (42%), however, answered that the administration would be more likely to punish the speaker for making the offensive statement. Women more frequently than men answered that their college's administration would defend the speaker (59% vs. 54%), while non-binary students were most likely (64%) to take this position.

A few institutions stand out with particularly high administrative ratings by their students. At the University of Chicago, 88% of students agree that the administration makes it known that they value free speech on their campus, the highest of any college surveyed. The percentages of students at Princeton University (71%) and Northwestern University (72%) who say that their college’s administration would defend a speaker’s right to speak were also well above the average of 57%.

**If a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on your campus, would the administration be more likely to:**



**What Constitutes Acceptable Protest on Campus?**

Regarding the forms of protest students find acceptable to use against speakers with whom they disagree, most students (82%) do not consider the use of violent tactics acceptable. However, almost one in five (17%) are willing to consider the use of violence as an acceptable form of protest. Specifically, 4% of college students say using violence to stop a speech or other event on campus is “always” or “sometimes” acceptable, and another 13% say violence is rarely acceptable.

Notably, there are considerable differences in accepting violence as a protest tactic among individual campuses. For instance, 10% of students at Columbia say violence is “always” or “sometimes” acceptable, and 23% say it is “rarely” acceptable. At Rutgers, the figure is 12% for “always” and “sometimes” acceptable, more than double the national average, and 14%

say that violence is “rarely” acceptable. In contrast, the rate responding that violence is “sometimes” acceptable is only 2% among Brigham Young University students, and no students at BYU said that it was “always acceptable.”

Most students (63%) also say they would never condone blocking prospective attendees from attending an on-campus event. However, 11% of students find it “always” or “sometimes” acceptable to do so, and another 26% consider it “rarely” acceptable. As with the acceptability of violent tactics, there are considerable differences among individual campuses. At the University of California, Berkeley, 25% consider blocking entry “always” or “sometimes” acceptable and another 30% say it is “rarely” acceptable. The story is similar at the University of Pennsylvania (23% and 33%, respectively), Columbia (21% and 33%), the University of Chicago (21% and 34%), and Northwestern (20% and 37%). Yet, In contrast, 94% of students at Clemson and an identical percentage of students at the University of Georgia say it is “rarely” or “never” acceptable to block other students from entering a campus event.

Students more frequently condone nonviolent disruption of speaking events. More than one in four students (27%) find shouting down a speaker or trying to prevent them from talking “always” or “sometimes” acceptable, and roughly one in three (34%) say shout-downs are “rarely” acceptable. Only 39% of students say such actions are “never” acceptable. Again, colleges differ widely on this question. Large minorities, more than 40% of students, at the University of Pennsylvania (45%), Northwestern (46%), Stanford (42%), the University of California, Berkeley (42%), and Georgetown (40%) find shouting down a speaker “always” or “sometimes” acceptable. In contrast, the figures are 12% at Brigham Young University and 13% at Kansas State University.

Of the four kinds of actions about which students were asked in this area of the survey, removing flyers or other advertisements for an upcoming speaker was deemed the most acceptable form of student protest, with about a third (29%) of students identifying this method as “always” or “sometimes” acceptable, and another 34% saying it is “rarely” acceptable. At the University of Chicago, 48% of students say this method is “always” or “sometimes” acceptable, but vast majorities at Brigham Young (80%), Kansas State (80%), and Clemson (82%) find this action “rarely” or “never” acceptable.



How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker:

	Always Acceptable	Sometimes Acceptable	Rarely Acceptable	Never Acceptable
Removing flyers or other advertisements for an upcoming speaker or event on campus	6%	23%	34%	36%
Shouting down a speaker or trying to prevent them from speaking on campus*	4%	23%	34%	39%
Blocking other students from entering a campus event	2%	9%	26%	63%
Using violence to stop a speech or event on campus	1%	3%	13%	82%

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*“I witnessed a group of students screaming at the College Republicans while they had a booth set up in front of one of the dining halls. I wanted to interject and potentially help them. However, the majority of students watching were in support of the students shouting at the College Republicans. It’s impossible to share your beliefs when 90% of the people around you will start calling you a racist, sexist bigot the moment you say something thought provoking.” —University of Minnesota student*

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Notably, with the exception of using violence to stop a speech or event on campus, the acceptability of each of the other forms of protest tends to be higher among students at Ivy League colleges: 36% of Ivy League students say that shouting down a speaker is “always” or “sometimes” acceptable, compared to 27% of students not enrolled at Ivy League colleges. On removing flyers, the figures are 37% versus 29%. Finally, 17% of Ivy League students find it “always” or “sometimes” acceptable to block other students from entering a campus event, compared to 11% of non-Ivy students.

## College Free Speech Rankings

The data above provide glimpses into the environment for open expression on college campuses in America. But for students trying to evaluate what kind of campus climate is right for them, rankings may provide deeper insight into the tradeoffs students might choose. It is critical for a student to consider what kind of college experience they want to have. Do they feel comfortable speaking out about topics they are passionate about, even when they have a minority viewpoint, or do they prefer to be surrounded by students who think similarly? Do they mind if their ideas are challenged in the classroom? Are they open to hearing from different and sometimes controversial speakers, or at least to an environment where speakers are allowed to visit and speak without obstruction?

The College Free Speech Rankings, plus a more comprehensive online dashboard ([speech.collegepulse.com](https://speech.collegepulse.com)), provide a way to compare colleges on the strength of their cultures of freedom of expression. These rankings can be used by prospective students and their parents to better understand the campus climate at colleges they may attend. Professors, administrators, and staff can also use these rankings to better understand the student experience on their campuses by exploring which topics are most uncomfortable for students to discuss openly, as well as which groups feel comfortable doing so.

### What are the Top-Ranked Schools for Freedom of Speech?

The rankings for all 55 colleges can be found in the Top Colleges Overall for Free Speech table, and clear differences between colleges are evident.<sup>9</sup>

Table 1. Top Colleges Overall for Free Speech

Rank	School	Overall Score	Liberal Score	Conservative Score
1	University of Chicago	64.19	63.10	59.92
2	Kansas State University	57.31	48.40	62.46
3	Texas A&M University	56.22	45.60	62.83
4	University of California, Los Angeles	55.80	57.75	54.64
5	Arizona State University	55.64	52.15	58.42

<sup>9</sup> At the state universities included in the rankings, all of the students surveyed were enrolled at the flagship campus unless otherwise specified.

Rank	School	Overall Score	Liberal Score	Conservative Score
6	University of Virginia	55.62	55.02	57.59
7	Duke University	55.36	54.87	54.38
8	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	55.34	51.97	57.25
9	Brown University	55.32	54.72	51.62
10	University of Arizona	55.32	51.93	55.73
11	University of Tennessee	55.23	47.35	59.05
12	Yale University	55.02	56.42	51.02
13	University of Missouri	54.59	47.82	57.98
14	Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey	54.47	51.69	55.20
15	University of Washington	54.17	52.10	53.82
16	University of Colorado <sup>10</sup>	54.13	53.54	52.37
17	Northwestern University	54.06	51.77	48.76
18	Indiana University	54.00	50.96	54.37
19	University of Iowa	53.95	51.52	55.21
20	University of Utah	53.92	51.18	53.26
21	Columbia University	53.88	54.09	46.04
22	University of Oregon	53.83	53.46	49.19
23	Washington State University	53.83	48.13	55.90
24	University of California, Davis	53.70	53.36	50.09
25	Pennsylvania State University	53.45	52.93	54.53
26	University of Arkansas	53.42	45.70	57.68
27	University of Minnesota	53.42	52.12	52.35
28	University of California, Berkeley	53.31	52.81	51.04
29	Princeton University	53.27	52.46	50.25

<sup>10</sup> On August 25, 2020, the University of Colorado earned a Green rating from FIRE, after the conclusion of the survey, during which the university had a Yellow rating.

Rank	School	Overall Score	Liberal Score	Conservative Score
30	Ohio State University	53.15	52.43	52.97
31	University of Nebraska	52.99	46.97	54.95
32	University of Pennsylvania	52.78	52.04	53.07
33	University of Texas at Dallas	52.74	51.08	52.48
34	University of Michigan	52.66	52.96	48.66
35	Stanford University	52.44	53.50	51.64
36	Clemson University	52.25	43.75	56.11
37	University of North Carolina	52.11	53.91	52.38
38	University of Oklahoma	51.43	47.64	53.46
39	University of Alabama	51.29	41.18	58.58
40	Cornell University	51.20	51.32	50.88
41	University of Wisconsin	50.95	51.42	52.15
42	University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign	50.74	49.65	51.45
43	University of Georgia	50.40	44.20	51.23
44	University of Illinois at Chicago	50.33	46.83	52.07
45	University of South Carolina	49.82	46.00	51.29
46	Harvard University	49.61	51.68	48.20
47	Wake Forest University	49.44	43.34	48.15
48	Georgetown University	49.26	46.91	48.34
49	Brigham Young University	49.23	35.31	59.23
50	Oklahoma State University	48.96	39.72	52.57
51	Syracuse University	48.92	46.58	50.17
52	Dartmouth College	48.57	48.21	47.74
53	Louisiana State University	47.85	40.58	50.24
54	University of Texas at Austin	44.54	44.98	46.58
55	DePauw University	44.18	41.13	44.89

At the top of the rankings is the University of Chicago, with an overall score more than three standard deviations above the average score for all 55 colleges. That this score is more than two standard deviations above the second-ranked college, Kansas State University, emphasizes Chicago's place as the top scorer. Texas A&M University, the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), Arizona State University, the University of Virginia, Duke University, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech), Brown University, and the University of Arizona round out the top 10.

At the other end, DePauw University is ranked lowest, with an overall score more than two standard deviations below the average for all colleges. The percentage of students who reported self-censoring at DePauw (71%) was the highest among the 55 colleges surveyed, and a whopping 94% of Conservative students at DePauw reported doing so. However, DePauw is not alone at the bottom, with the University of Texas at Austin also more than two standard deviations below the average for all colleges. Louisiana State University, Dartmouth College, Syracuse University, Oklahoma State University, Brigham Young University, Georgetown University, Wake Forest University, and Harvard University round out the bottom 10.

The colleges in the bottom 10 are no stranger to free-speech controversies,<sup>11</sup> but the top 10 colleges have not been immune to them either.<sup>12</sup> For instance, a digital event recently hosted by the Institute of Politics at the University of Chicago asked students to provide a response to the prompt "I vote because...." One student posed with a small whiteboard that read, "I vote, because the coronavirus won't destroy America, but socialism will."<sup>13</sup> For this, she was widely denounced by her peers, threatened with violence, and told that she did not belong at the University of Chicago because of her beliefs. This past summer at Kansas State, students began a petition to ban a student group because of a tweet sent by one of its members criticizing

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<sup>11</sup> FIRE (2020, January 29). *10 worst colleges for free speech: 2020*. <https://www.thefire.org/10-worst-colleges-for-free-speech-2020/>; FIRE (2019, February 12). *10 worst colleges for free speech: 2019*. <https://www.thefire.org/10-worst-colleges-for-free-speech-2019/>; Rank, L. (2019, October 9). *Another heckler's veto at Georgetown: Clown and crew disrupt climate policy event*. <https://www.thefire.org/another-hecklers-veto-at-georgetown-clown-and-crew-disrupt-climate-policy-event/>; FIRE (2017, February 22). *FIRE announces America's 10 worst colleges for free speech: 2017*. <https://www.thefire.org/fire-announces-americas-10-worst-colleges-for-free-speech-2017/>; Greenberg, Z. (2018, February 16). *Dartmouth student's op-ed incites calls for censorship and punishment of author*. <https://www.thefire.org/dartmouth-students-op-ed-incites-calls-for-censorship-and-punishment-of-author/>.

<sup>12</sup> FIRE Intern (2020, June 30). *The University of Chicago is a green light school. That doesn't mean speech is free*.

<https://www.thefire.org/the-university-of-chicago-is-a-green-light-school-that-doesnt-mean-speech-is-free/>;

Duffy, E. (2020, March 5). *I am the IOP whiteboard girl*. <https://www.chicagomaroon.com/article/2020/3/6/iop-whiteboard-girl/>;

Burnett, D. (2020, June 30). *Kansas State's free speech policies are some of the best in the country amidst the George Floyd tweet controversy it must live by them*. <https://www.thefire.org/kansas-states-free-speech-policies-are-some-of-the-best-in-the-country-amidst-the-george-floyd-tweet-controversy-it-must-live-by-them/>;

Friedersdorf, C. (2015, October 15). *The anti-free-speech movement at UCLA*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/10/the-anti-free-speech-movement-at-ucla/410638/>;

Jaschik, S. (2018, February 26). *Who gets shouted down on campus?* <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2018/02/26/event-sponsored-jewish-and-pro-israel-groups-university-virginia-disrupted-and>.

<sup>13</sup> Duffy, id.

George Floyd, and this petition amassed over 10,000 signatures.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, according to the students surveyed, the top 10 colleges are doing *something* right regarding freedom of speech and expression on campus, particularly compared to colleges near the bottom of the rankings.

Eight of the top 10 colleges have a Green speech code rating from FIRE, while the other two colleges (Virginia Tech, ranked 8th, and Brown University, ranked 9th) have a Yellow rating. Four of these colleges have endorsed the Chicago Principles.<sup>15</sup> Most of them enroll more than 10,000 undergraduate students.

The opposite is largely the case for the bottom 10 colleges. Eight of them have a rating of either Warning (Brigham Young, which does not promise free speech at all) or Red, the remaining two colleges are rated Yellow, and only two of the ten have adopted the Chicago Principles. Half of these colleges enroll under 10,000 undergraduates.

The Top Colleges and FIRE and Chicago Statement Adoption Table gives these data for the top and bottom 10 colleges.

Table 2. Top 10 Colleges and FIRE and Chicago Statement Adoption

Rank	College/ University	Overall Score	Undergraduate Enrollment	FIRE Rating	Adopted Chicago Statement
1	University of Chicago	64.19	6,298	Green	Yes
2	Kansas State University	57.31	18,171	Green	Yes
4	Texas A&M University	56.22	52,568	Green	No
4	University of California, Los Angeles	55.80	30,994	Green	No
5	Arizona State University	55.64	42,181	Green	Yes
6	University of Virginia	55.62	16,207	Green	No

<sup>14</sup> Burnett, id.

<sup>15</sup> The “Chicago Statement” is the free-speech policy statement produced by the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago in January of 2015. The spirit of the statement is well captured by this excerpt: “In a word, the University’s fundamental commitment is to the principle that debate or deliberation may not be suppressed because the ideas put forth are thought by some or even by most members of the University community to be offensive, unwise, immoral, or wrong-headed. It is for the individual members of the University community, not for the University as an institution, to make those judgments for themselves, and to act on those judgments not by seeking to suppress speech, but by openly and vigorously contesting the ideas that they oppose.”

7	Duke University	55.36	6,552	Green	No
8	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	55.34	27,120	Yellow	No
9	Brown University	55.32	6,752	Yellow	No
10	University of Arizona	55.32	33,428	Green	Yes

Table 3. Bottom 10 Colleges and FIRE and Chicago Statement Adoption

Rank	College/ University	Overall Score	Undergraduate Enrollment	FIRE	Adopted Chicago Statement
55	DePauw University	44.18	2,137	Red	No
54	University of Texas at Austin	44.54	39,965	Red	No
53	Louisiana State University	47.85	23,331	Red	Yes
52	Dartmouth College	48.57	4,315	Red	No
51	Syracuse University	48.92	14,788	Yellow	No
50	Oklahoma State University	48.96	20,743	Red	No
49	Brigham Young University	49.23	31,233	Warning	No
48	Georgetown University	49.26	7,128	Red	Yes
47	Wake Forest University	49.44	5,101	Yellow	No
46	Harvard University	49.61	7,532	Red	No

Because FIRE's rating of a college's written promises of free speech accounts for just plus or minus four points of the overall score, this report examines whether any other factors might help explain differences between the top 10 and bottom 10 colleges. These comparisons suggest that whether a college is public or private, the size of its undergraduate enrollment, its location, and whether a college is a member of the Ivy League all may be relevant factors worth further analysis.

Specifically, seven of the top 10 colleges are public state universities, and undergraduate enrollment is above 15,000 at each of those eight. Only one of the top 10 colleges is located in the Northeast and is a member of the Ivy League (Brown University). In contrast, seven of the colleges in the bottom 10 are private, and undergraduate enrollment at five of those seven colleges is below 10,000. Three of these colleges are located in the Northeast, and two are members of the Ivy League.

### Among Students, the Predominant Viewpoint on Most Campuses is Liberal

Controversies over freedom of speech and expression almost always involve people who *disagree* on something, so we also explored if the predominant political viewpoint on a campus was associated with a college's overall score.<sup>16</sup> For colleges in the top 10, the predominant viewpoint on campus was Liberal for eight of them and Conservative for two of them. The colleges in the bottom 10 had a similar breakdown: seven Liberal and two Conservative. On the remaining campus (Louisiana State University), the percentages of Liberal and Conservative students differed by less than 5 percentage points. We refer to this type of college's dominant viewpoint as mixed.

Across all the campuses surveyed, the predominant viewpoint on 44 of the 55 campuses surveyed (80%) was Liberal. On 35 of those 44 campuses, 50% or more of the students identified as Liberal.<sup>17</sup> There were only six colleges where the predominant viewpoint was Conservative, and Brigham Young University was the only college where an actual majority of the students identified as Conservative. On the remaining five campuses, the predominant viewpoint was mixed.

The predominant viewpoint at 94% of the private colleges was Liberal, and most of these colleges enrolled fewer than 10,000 undergraduates. In contrast, the predominant viewpoint at roughly three-quarters of the state colleges was Liberal. Of the private colleges, more than half are in the Northeast, and the predominant viewpoint among students at all of these colleges was Liberal. A similar pattern prevails at colleges in the West, where the predominant viewpoint at 92% of the colleges sampled was Liberal. In the Midwest, the predominant viewpoint at most colleges (93%) was also Liberal. Students in the South were more ideologically diverse; the

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<sup>16</sup> Political viewpoint is generated from the question asked of all students in the survey, "Using a seven-point scale from extremely liberal—point 1—to extremely conservative—point 7—where would you place yourself on this scale?" Available options ranged from "Extremely liberal" to "Extremely conservative." A "Something else" option was also available.

<sup>17</sup> 49.8% of the students at the University of Nebraska identified as Liberal, and this percentage was rounded to 50%.



predominant viewpoint was Liberal at only 56% of them, mixed at 22%, and Conservative at 22%.

Finally, at all eight Ivy League colleges, the predominant viewpoint among students was Liberal. These colleges also were not very ideologically diverse, with the average percentage of students who identified as Liberal at 73% and as Conservative at 13%. At Yale University, Harvard University, and Cornell University the percentage of Conservative students exceeded 15%. In contrast, at non-Ivy League colleges, the predominant viewpoint was Liberal at 77%, versus the Ivy League's 100%. The predominant viewpoint was mixed at about 11% of colleges outside the Ivy League and Conservative at about 11% of them.

### Free Speech Rankings by Liberals and Conservatives

In 2012, 60% of Americans said that higher education had a positive effect on the way things were going in the country. As late as 2015, this figure was at 63%. However, by 2019 only 50% of Americans felt this way. This drop is almost entirely due to a shift in attitudes about higher education among Republicans. In 2015, 54% of Republicans said higher education had a positive effect. By 2017 this proportion had decreased to 36%, and in 2019 it stood at a dismal 33%.<sup>18</sup>

When asked in 2018, a majority of Americans (59%) said that colleges are partisan environments that lean towards one particular political viewpoint. In the same survey, 77% of respondents identified that viewpoint as Liberal, and 79% considered this a problem.<sup>19</sup> Survey data on college students support the notion that minority political viewpoints are more difficult to express on campus. When asked if a number of different groups were able to “freely and openly express their views” on campus, politically Conservative students were identified as the least able to do so. Liberal, Moderate, and Conservative students all agree on this point, although Conservative students are most likely to say this is the case. Additionally, students who identify as Democrat, compared to those who identify as Republican, are more supportive of speech restrictions on campus, more comfortable expressing dissenting opinions to peers and professors, and less likely to say the climate on their campus chills speech.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Parker, K. (2019, August 19). *The growing partisan divide in views of higher education*. <https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/essay/the-growing-partisan-divide-in-views-of-higher-education/>.

<sup>19</sup> Brewer, S. (2018, September 17). WGBH news national poll uncovers America's sentiments about higher education including perceptions about impact on society, race, and college admissions, and the value of a college degree. <https://www.wgbh.org/foundation/press/wgbh-news-national-poll-uncovers-americas-sentiments-about-higher-education-including-perceptions-about-impact-on-society-race-and-college-admissions-and-the-value-of-a-college-degree>.

<sup>20</sup> Knight Foundation and Gallup, Inc. (2020). *The First Amendment on campus 2020 report: College students' views of free expression*. <https://knightfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/First-Amendment-on-Campus-2020.pdf>.

When these contrasting perceptions of higher education and student experience on campus are considered along with the data in this report, which confirm that the dominant viewpoint among students on the majority of campuses surveyed is Liberal, it is reasonable to examine whether the expression of minority, often Conservative, viewpoints is more difficult. The “spiral of silence” theory contends that people routinely monitor their interpersonal networks to assess if their opinion on a given issue is in the majority or minority, and that when people are aware their opinion is in the minority, they are typically more reluctant to express it around those with whom they disagree.<sup>21</sup> This reluctance is often heightened when the disagreement is with those to whom they are in closest proximity, such as family, friends, and neighbors.<sup>22</sup> Thus, colleges with more ideologically homogeneous student bodies may have an advantage in the rankings, since these colleges may have fewer dissenters who might feel prevented from speaking out. Because of this concern, we created separate measures of the climate for campus free speech for Liberals and Conservatives. These additional rankings capture what the experience is like on an individual campus for a Liberal or a Conservative, and they demonstrate that college students frequently experience their ability to speak freely on the basis of their own political ideology and that of their peers.

### Rankings by Liberals

In total, five of the colleges ranked in the top 10 by Liberal students are also ranked in the top 10 overall. Like the overall rankings, the University of Chicago is first overall for Liberals, and it is more than two standard deviations above the average score for Liberals. University of California, Los Angeles is ranked second, Yale University is ranked third, University of Virginia is ranked fourth, and Duke University is ranked fifth. In contrast to the top 10 overall, three Ivy League colleges are ranked in the top 10 by Liberals: Yale University, Columbia University, and Brown University. The University of North Carolina, the University of Colorado, and Stanford University round out the top 10 for Liberals. Half of these colleges enroll fewer than 10,000 undergraduate students, and only two enroll more than 20,000.

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<sup>21</sup> Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The spiral of silence: A theory of public opinion. *Journal of Communication*, 24(2), 43-51. <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00367.x>.

<sup>22</sup> Matthes, J., Knoll, J. & von Sikorski, C. (2018). The “spiral of silence” revisited: A meta-analysis on the relationship between perceptions of opinion support and political expression. *Communication Research*, 45, 3-33; Mutz, D. (2006). *Hearing the other side: Deliberative versus participatory democracy*. Cambridge University Press.

Table 4. Top 10 Colleges for Free Speech for Liberal Students

Rank	School	Liberal Score	Percent Liberal	Undergraduate Enrollment	FIRE Rating	Adopted Chicago Statement
1	University of Chicago	63.10	76%	6,298	Green	Yes
2	University of California, Los Angeles	57.75	61%	30,994	Green	No
3	Yale University	56.42	69%	5,742	Yellow	No
4	University of Virginia	55.02	66%	16,207	Green	No
5	Duke University	54.87	67%	6,552	Green	No
6	Brown University	54.72	82%	6,670	Yellow	No
7	Columbia University	54.09	74%	8,170	Yellow	No
8	University of North Carolina	53.91	64%	18,658	Green	Yes
9	University of Colorado	53.54	58%	29,753	Yellow	Yes
10	Stanford University	53.50	68%	7,083	Yellow	No

Six of the colleges ranked in the bottom 10 by Liberals are also ranked in the bottom 10 overall. Brigham Young University is ranked lowest by Liberals, and its ranking is nearly three standard deviations below the average Liberal score for all colleges. Oklahoma State, Louisiana State University, DePauw University, Wake Forest University, and the University of Texas at Austin are all also ranked in the bottom 10 for Liberals and the bottom 10 overall. The University of Alabama, Clemson University, the University of Georgia, and Texas A&M University round out the bottom 10 for Liberals. Most of these colleges enroll over 20,000 undergraduate students, and only two enroll fewer than 10,000.

Table 5. Bottom 10 Colleges for Free Speech for Liberal Students

Rank	College/ University	Score	Percent Liberal	Undergraduate Enrollment	FIRE Rating	Adopted Chicago Statement
55	Brigham Young University	35.31	26%	31,233	Warning	No
54	Oklahoma State University	39.72	28%	20,743	Red	No
53	Louisiana State University	40.58	39%	23,331	Red	Yes
52	DePauw University	41.13	57%	2,137	Red	No
51	University of Alabama	41.18	33%	32,387	Yellow	Yes
50	Wake Forest University	43.34	50%	5,101	Yellow	No
49	Clemson University	43.75	31%	19,172	Red	No
48	University of Georgia	44.20	47%	28,740	Yellow	No
47	University of Texas at Austin	44.98	62%	39,965	Red	No
46	Texas A&M University	45.60	32%	22,763	Yellow	No

### Rankings by Conservatives

In total, five of the colleges ranked in the top 10 by Conservatives are also ranked in the top 10 overall. Texas A&M University is first overall, while Kansas State is also ranked highly. Both

schools have scores that are more than two standard deviations above the average score for Conservatives. The University of Chicago is third, The University of Tennessee is fifth, Arizona State University is seventh, and Virginia Tech is ninth. Brigham Young University is also ranked highly by Conservatives at fourth overall. This starkly contrasts with its ranking among all students and, particularly, its ranking among Liberals. The University of Alabama, the University of Missouri, and the University of Arkansas round out the top 10 for Conservatives. Most of these colleges enroll over 20,000 undergraduate students, and with the exception of the University of Chicago, they all enroll more than 15,000.

Table 6. Top 10 Colleges for Free Speech for Conservative Students

Rank	College/ University	Score	Percent Conservative	Undergraduate Enrollment	FIRE Rating	Adopted Chicago Statement
1	Texas A&M University	62.83	43%	52,568	Green	Yes
2	Kansas State University	62.46	43%	18,171	Green	No
3	University of Chicago	59.92	11%	6,298	Green	Yes
4	Brigham Young University	59.23	58%	31,233	Warning	No
5	University of Tennessee	59.05	40%	22,151	Green	No
6	University of Alabama	58.58	41%	32,387	Yellow	Yes
7	Arizona State University	58.42	20%	42,181	Green	Yes
8	University of Missouri	57.98	37%	23,455	Yellow	Yes

9	University of Arkansas	57.68	39%	22,763	Yellow	No
10	University of Virginia	57.46	18%	27,120	Yellow	No

Six of the colleges ranked in the bottom 10 by Conservatives are also ranked in the bottom 10 overall. DePauw University is ranked the lowest, and its score is two standard deviations below the average Conservative score. Columbia University, the University of Texas at Austin, Dartmouth College, Wake Forest University, Harvard University, Georgetown University, the University of Michigan, Northwestern University, and the University of Oregon are all also in the bottom 10. Seven of these colleges enroll fewer than 10,000 undergraduate students.

Table 7. Bottom 10 Colleges for Free Speech for Conservative Students

Rank	College/ University	Score	Percent Conservative	Undergraduate Enrollment	FIRE Rating	Adopted Chicago Statement
55	DePauw University	44.89	22%	2,137	Red	No
54	Columbia University	46.04	9%	8,170	Yellow	Yes
53	University of Texas at Austin	46.58	21%	39,965	Red	No
52	Dartmouth College	47.74	14%	4,315	Yellow	No
51	Harvard University	48.20	15%	7,532	Red	No
50	Georgetown University	48.34	18%	7,128	Red	Yes
49	Wake Forest University	48.15	31%	5,101	Yellow	No

48	University of Michigan	48.66	18%	29,550	Yellow	No
47	Northwestern University	48.76	10%	8,489	Yellow	No
46	University of Oregon	49.19	11%	19,163	Yellow	No

Students' assessment of free speech on their campuses is, at least in part, driven by their own political ideology and whether or not it is in line with the majority student viewpoint at their colleges. At every college ranked in the top 10 by Liberals, the majority of the student body identified as Liberal. At three of them the percentage of Liberal students exceeded 70%, and at nine of them it exceeded 60%. Thus, on all 10 campuses the dominant viewpoint among the students was Liberal. In contrast, at only three of the colleges ranked in the bottom 10 by Liberals did the percentage of students identifying as Liberal exceed 50%, and the dominant viewpoint on campus among the students was Conservative at five of the colleges and mixed at one of them.

At seven of the colleges ranked in the top 10 by Conservatives, the percentage of students who identify as Conservative is over 30%, and it is 40% or more at four of these colleges.<sup>23</sup> Yet, some schools that have a high percentage of Liberals among the student body are also ranked highly by Conservatives, such as the University of Chicago and the University of Virginia. In contrast, all of the colleges ranked in the bottom 10 by Conservatives are majority Liberal, including some of the most Liberal student bodies overall (Northwestern University, Columbia University, the University of Oregon, Dartmouth College, and Harvard University).

Comparing the top and bottom 10 schools for Liberal and Conservative students suggests that ideological homogeneity among a college's student body does indeed harm its environment for free expression. For example, Columbia, where 74% of students identified as Liberal, was ranked 21st overall and 7th by Liberal students. Yet, it was ranked 54th by Conservative students, suggesting that the heavy Liberal skew of the student body (74% Liberal vs. 9% Conservative) was a factor. At Brown, where 82% of students identified as Liberal and only 7% identified as Conservative, the survey results are similar. Brown is ranked 9th overall and 6th by Liberals but 35th for Conservatives. In the same way, BYU's student body was the most

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<sup>23</sup> The percentage of students identifying as conservative at the University of Tennessee was 39.7% and was rounded to 40%.

Conservative, with 58% of students identifying this way and 26% identifying as Liberal. It was ranked 49th overall and worst among Liberals, but it was 4th among Conservatives. These are all good examples of how the ideological makeup of the student body of a campus impacts how a given student may experience the campus climate for free speech.



## Individual School Profiles

The past five years have brought much national data on current college student attitudes about freedom of speech. However, there are good reasons to believe that a plethora of factors interact to produce a unique climate for freedom of speech and expression for various kinds of students on any particular campus at any particular time.<sup>24</sup> This section analyzes six colleges in greater detail to help demonstrate the value of campus-specific data on student attitudes about free speech. These analyses capture important differences between campuses that may be obscured by national data.

### The University of Chicago

Overall Score: 64.19	Liberal Score: 63.10	Conservative Score: 59.92
Ranking: 1st	1st	3rd

The University of Chicago has a long history of dedication to establishing freedom of expression as a central element of its campus culture.<sup>25</sup> In the summer of 2014, President Robert Zimmer and Provost Eric Isaacs established the Committee on Freedom of Expression at the University of Chicago and asked it to clearly articulate the University's commitment to freedom of expression. The committee released its report in January of 2015, and its conclusions have come to be known as the Chicago Statement.<sup>26</sup> These efforts appear to have paid off. In recognition of its commitment to free expression on campus, the University of Chicago was awarded the Institutional Excellence Award in 2018 at the inaugural Open Inquiry Awards.<sup>27</sup> Now, the verdict from students is finally in, too: not only is the University of Chicago the top-ranked college overall for freedom of speech, but also it is the top-ranked college for Liberals and the third-ranked college for Conservatives.

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<sup>24</sup> Binder, A.J. & Wood, K. (2013). *Becoming right: How campuses shape young conservatives*. Princeton University Press; Sachs, J. (2019, January 25). *Community and campus: The relationship between viewpoint diversity and community partisanship*. <https://heterodoxacademy.org/viewpoint-diversity-community-partisanship/>; al-Gharbi, M. (2019, February 4). *Community and Campus II: A longitudinal extension*. <https://heterodoxacademy.org/campus-community-diversity-longitudinal-extension/>; Stevens, S. (2020, May 15). *Campus-specific analyses of the climate for free expression reveal stark differences between campuses*. <https://www.thefire.org/campus-specific-analyses-of-the-climate-for-free-expression-reveal-stark-differences-between-schools/>; Stevens, S. (2020, May 22). *Spirals of silence: Expressing a minority political view on some campuses is difficult*. <https://www.thefire.org/spirals-of-silence-expressing-a-minority-political-view-on-some-campus-is-difficult/>.

<sup>25</sup> The University of Chicago (2015). *Report of the committee on freedom of expression*. <https://provost.uchicago.edu/sites/default/files/documents/reports/FOECommitteeReport.pdf>; Zoeller, M. (2019, January 25). *University of Chicago continues to excel in promoting free expression*. <https://www.thefire.org/university-of-chicago-continues-to-excel-in-promoting-free-expression/>.

<sup>26</sup> Id.

<sup>27</sup> Willinger, J. (2018, May 7). *Announcing the winners of the HxA Open Mind Awards*. <https://heterodoxacademy.org/announcing-the-winners-of-the-hxa-open-mind-awards/>.

According to University of Chicago students, the administration's support for freedom of speech is clear, as 92% of them say that the administration would more likely defend a speaker's rights than punish the speaker during a free-speech controversy, and 88% say the administration makes it clear that free speech is protected on campus. This clearly perceived administrative support for freedom of speech may be part of the reason why fewer than half of students report self-censoring on campus. It may also be why controversial speakers are more welcome at the University of Chicago than at any other college in the rankings. Overall, four of the controversial speakers in the survey received support for being allowed to speak on campus from a majority of the students, twice as many speakers as at any other college. Students overall also feel quite comfortable discussing controversial political topics with each other, as 75% of them said they were either "very" or "somewhat" comfortable doing so.

Nevertheless, some of the data from the University of Chicago are concerning, particularly with regard to differences between Liberals and Conservatives.

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*Afraid to disagree with certain liberal talking points because even if I do not agree with the conservative side either I feel like I will be rejected for not being "woke" enough.*

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First, although only 44% of students overall report self-censoring on campus, stark political differences are evident; 82% of Conservatives report self-censoring, compared to 53% of Moderates and 40% of Liberals. Considering that the University of Chicago is not only the top-ranked college overall and ranked 3rd for Conservatives, this rate of self-censorship among Conservative students at Chicago suggests that the free-speech environment for Conservatives on American campuses overall is dire.

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*I would generally be more of a devil's advocate if I didn't feel like it would negatively affect how others viewed me.*

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Furthermore, only a slight majority of the students at the University of Chicago (52%) said that they were "very" or "somewhat" comfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor about a

controversial topic. Slightly more than half of Liberal students (52%) said that they were “very” or “somewhat” comfortable doing this, compared to 42% of Conservative students. Regarding discussions about controversial issues with other students, 82% of Liberals said they were “very” or “somewhat” comfortable doing so, versus 59% of Moderates and 56% of Conservatives. As at colleges in the survey overall, University of Chicago students were most concerned about posting an unpopular opinion on social media linked to their name, with only 31% of Liberals and 21% of Conservatives saying they were “very” or “somewhat” comfortable doing so.

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*If you disagree with a popular opinion, a whole group of peers will laugh at your stupidity/ignorance/etc. but never try to help each other understand the other side. No one is willing to compromise or consider each other's points.*

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There were also stark political differences when it came to the controversial speakers students would allow on campus. Liberal students were overwhelmingly opposed to allowing a speaker who intended to be critical of transgender individuals (77%), one who says Black Lives Matter is a hate group (79%), and someone who planned to argue that some racial groups are less intelligent than others (83%). In contrast, a majority of Conservative students supported allowing every controversial speaker on campus.

The University of Chicago is the top-ranked college, and its overall score is considerably higher than any other college. The University's leadership has also demonstrated a clear commitment to free speech, and this staunch support for free expression is strongly perceived by students. Yet the responses from students whose views are not in the political majority on campus, and the responses from students in that majority on allowing speakers, suggest the University still has work to do to promote the discussion of a diverse array of opinions on campus and in the classroom.

## Syracuse University

Overall Score: 48.92	Liberal Score: 46.58	Conservative Score: 50.17
Ranking: 51st	43rd	44th

Close to the bottom of the rankings for all three scores is Syracuse University, a college that has seen several public free-speech controversies in recent years.<sup>28</sup> Although its speech policies are currently rated Yellow by FIRE, Syracuse's policies were rated Red for more than 10 years.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, since 2011, FIRE has annually identified the 10 worst colleges for free speech, and Syracuse has been listed among the worst colleges four times.<sup>30</sup>

For instance, in 2010, Syracuse's police department informed *The Daily Orange*, a student newspaper on campus, that it would require students to remove any "offensive" Halloween costumes and that students wearing such costumes would be reported to the college's Office of Judicial Affairs.<sup>31</sup> In 2012, Syracuse decided to expel a graduate student in its School of Education for a Facebook comment complaining about a racially-charged comment made by a community leader, a decision that was quickly reversed.<sup>32</sup> More recently, in 2018, Syracuse suspended 15 students from an engineering fraternity when a video showed a satirical roast in which one member of the fraternity was portrayed as the founder of a racist fraternity, even though the satirical act occurred in a private setting and was not directed at anyone outside the actual fraternity.<sup>33</sup>

Given Syracuse's checkered past, it is not surprising to find that only 50% of Syracuse students believe the administration would defend a speaker's free-speech rights in the face of controversy, while only 58% of students say the administration makes it clear it supports free

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<sup>28</sup> Fischetti, J. (2010, November 29). *SU's STOP Bias program endangers a wide swath of protected speech*. <https://www.thefire.org/sus-stop-bias-program-endangers-a-wide-swath-of-protected-speech/>.

<sup>29</sup> Beltz, L. (2020, August 19). *Syracuse University adopts even worse policies for free speech, threatens to hold bystanders accountable*. <https://www.thefire.org/syracuse-university-adopts-even-worse-policies-for-free-speech-threatens-to-hold-bystanders-accountable/>.

<sup>30</sup> FIRE (2020, January 29). <https://www.thefire.org/10-worst-colleges-for-free-speech-2020/>; FIRE (2019, February 12). <https://www.thefire.org/10-worst-colleges-for-free-speech-2019/>; Lukianoff, G. (2012, March 27). *The 12 worst colleges for free speech in 2012*. [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-12-worst-schools-for-b\\_1382159?ref=college](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/the-12-worst-schools-for-b_1382159?ref=college); Shibley, R. (2011, January 28). *Syracuse statement cements school's top spot on 12 worst for free speech list*. <https://www.thefire.org/syracuse-statement-cements-schools-top-spot-on-12-worst-schools-for-free-speech-list/>.

<sup>31</sup> Delaney, M. (2010, October 13). *DPS to crack down on insensitive Halloween costumes*. <http://dailyorange.com/2010/10/dps-to-crack-down-on-insensitive-halloween-costumes/>.

<sup>32</sup> Kissel, A. (2012, January 18). *Syracuse expels ed student for complaining on Facebook about racial comment*. <https://www.thefire.org/syracuse-expels-ed-student-for-complaining-on-facebook-about-racial-comment-2/>; FIRE Staff (2012, January 19). *Victory: Syracuse drops expulsion hours after FIRE press release*. <https://www.thefire.org/victory-syracuse-drops-expulsion-hours-after-fire-press-release/>.

<sup>33</sup> FIRE (2018, June 8). *Syracuse slams students with multi-year suspensions for satirical fraternity roast*. <https://www.thefire.org/syracuse-slams-students-with-multi-year-suspensions-for-satirical-fraternity-roast/>; FIRE Case Files (2019). *Syracuse University: Students threatened with expulsion for satirical fraternity 'roast'; fires professor who defended free speech*. <https://www.thefire.org/cases/syracuse-university-students-threatened-with-expulsion-for-satirical-fraternity-roast/>

speech on campus. Overall, 64% of students felt comfortable discussing a controversial political topic with their peers, 50% reported they were comfortable disagreeing publicly with a professor, and only 33% were comfortable with expressing an unpopular opinion on social media.

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*In class, when someone had an opinion, I didn't want to voice my opinion with there being a chance that my idea or belief would be shot down because it was different from the majority of the room.*

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Among the students at Syracuse, 61% say they have self-censored. This includes 55% of Liberals, 56% of Moderates, and 83% of Conservatives. This wide discrepancy between Liberals and Conservatives also appears elsewhere in the survey, in areas such as how open Conservative students are to discussing a controversial political topic with their peers (45%), disagreeing publicly with a professor about a controversial topic (40%), and expressing an unpopular opinion on a social media account linked to their name (24%). By contrast, the figures for Liberal students are much higher, at 68%, 49%, and 35%, respectively.

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*Difficult to talk about politics because I don't want to offend anyone.*

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Syracuse was also one of the many colleges at which not a single controversial speaker in the survey received support from a majority of students even to be *allowed to speak* on campus. For example, in contrast to the Conservative students at the University of Chicago, only one hypothetical speaker—who intended to argue that the United States should support Israeli military policy—received majority support to be allowed to speak on campus from the Conservative students at Syracuse.

## Brown University

Overall Score: 55.32	Liberal Score: 54.72	Conservative Score: 51.62
Ranking: 9th	6th	35th

Brown University prides itself on its history of encouraging its students to engage in political activism.<sup>34</sup> At times, however, Brown has sent mixed messages on freedom of speech<sup>35</sup> and, like Syracuse, it has experienced its share of controversy.<sup>36</sup>

Overall, 76% of students say that Brown's administration makes it clear that free speech is protected on campus, though this is undermined somewhat by the fact that only 57% say the administration is more likely to defend a speaker's rights than punish the speaker during a controversy. Self-censorship among all students was similar to Syracuse students at 59%. Although 70% of students say they feel comfortable discussing controversial political topics with their classmates, only 50% feel comfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial topic, and only about one in four (27%) are comfortable expressing an unpopular opinion on social media if they could be identified.

Of all the colleges sampled, Brown University had the highest percentage of Liberal students at 82% and the lowest percentage of Conservatives at 7%. This may be one of the reasons why Brown is ranked 6th overall for Liberals but only 35th for Conservatives. The data show that Liberals and Conservatives at Brown do not perceive or experience the same campus climate. For instance, 80% of Liberal students say Brown's administration makes it clear that free speech is protected versus just 50% of Conservative students. Regarding self-censorship, 53% of Liberal students say they have done so, versus 82% of Conservatives. Conservative students are also much less likely to say they are comfortable publicly disagreeing with their professor about a controversial topic (21%) or discussing a controversial political topic with their peers (50%), than Liberals (51% and 78% respectively).

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<sup>34</sup> Dietsch, E. (2017, February 28). *Brown University's history of protest*. <http://eastsidemonthly.com/stories/brown-universitys-history-of-protest.22368>; Hauptman, M., Healy, G., Morris, C., & Park, J. (2013, November 19). *Action is now: A history of Brown student activism*. <http://www.theindy.org/191>.

<sup>35</sup> Miller, S. (2014, November 14). *Brown University's two-faced attitude toward free speech*. <https://www.thefire.org/brown-universitys-two-faced-attitude-toward-free-speech/>; Lory, G.C. (2020). *I must object: A rebuttal to Brown University's letter on racism in the United States*. <https://www.city-journal.org/brown-university-letter-racism>.

<sup>36</sup> Creeley, W. (2013, October 30). *At Brown, free speech loses as hecklers silence NYPD commissioner*. <https://www.thefire.org/at-brown-free-speech-loses-as-hecklers-silence-nypd-commissioner/>; Brown University (2014). *Report of the committee on the events of October 29, 2013*. <https://www.brown.edu/web/documents/president/Report-on-Events-of-Oct-29-2013.pdf>;

Tomasi, J. (2016, July 21). *Free inquiry vs. social justice at Brown University*. <https://heterodoxacademy.org/free-inquiry-vs-social-justice-at-brown-university/>;

Shire, E. (2015, October 10). *Freedom of speech? Not at Brown University*. <https://www.thedailybeast.com/freedom-of-speech-not-at-brown-university>;

Soave, R. (2018, February 14). *Brown University students: Free markets, free speech enable 'white supremacist and fascist ideas.'* <https://reason.com/2018/02/14/brown-students-guy-benson/>.

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*There is a hyper-liberal bias at Brown—and I say this as a Liberal student.*

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Both survey and open-ended responses suggest that religious issues may be flashpoints for controversy at Brown. The topic most frequently identified as difficult to discuss, identified by 52% of students, was the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Of note, a far greater percentage of Liberal students (62%) than Conservatives (29%) said this was a difficult topic to have an open and honest conversation about. One student remarked, “Israel is toxic on campus. Hard to be a proponent without feeling attacked.” Meanwhile, another commented that “Palestine organizing is next to impossible and even bringing up the subject of Palestinian human rights is met with a wave of accusations of anti-semitism. Since when is it against Judaism to call for human rights and dignity!”

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*I think the campus is aggressively liberal so it can feel scary/hostile trying to share more conservative views.*

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The most-defended controversial speaker, and the only one whom a majority of students said they would allow on campus, was one who intended to say that Christianity has a negative influence on society. One student noted, “I felt uncomfortable expressing Christian beliefs. I understand that Christians should not actively reject other views, but it is also required for groups of other beliefs to respect Christian beliefs as well.”

These findings at the University of Chicago, Syracuse, and Brown demonstrate some of the value of campus-specific data. Although the students at Brown, like the University of Chicago and Syracuse, are majority Liberal (and on all three campuses Conservatives report more difficulty openly and honestly expressing themselves), students’ responses show that Brown’s climate for free speech and expression differs from the climates at the University of Chicago and at Syracuse.

## Brigham Young University

Overall Score: 49.23	Liberal Score: 35.31	Conservative Score: 59.23
Ranking: 49th	55th	4th

Brigham Young University is one of only a handful of colleges that has a Warning rating from FIRE. This means that, in contrast to most other private colleges and universities, the college makes it explicit that the college values *something else* over freedom of expression. In BYU's case, it is owned and operated by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and the campuses are governed by the Church Educational System Honor Code. This honor code requires faculty, staff, and students to attend religious services (among other things). BYU clearly requires compliance as a condition of being a student or employee at the University.

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*I'm pretty liberal in most of my views. BYU is very religious and conservative. So for the most part I do not feel comfortable discussing any of my views on things like abortion, LGBTQ+ rights, and immigration on campus for fear of hate and backlash.*

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BYU is also the only college surveyed where the majority of students identified as Conservative (58%), and it has the smallest percentage of Liberal students overall (26%), though it is still far more ideologically diverse than Brown, with its 82% to 7% split in the other direction. This environment provides a unique opportunity, among the 55 colleges surveyed, to explore the campus climate for freedom of speech where Conservatives are a majority. BYU is the only college where talking about transgender issues was most frequently identified by students (70%) as the most difficult topic about which to have an open and honest conversation about. Political differences were evident on this issue, with 83% of Liberals and 76% of Moderates reporting this sentiment, versus 59% of Conservatives.

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*Because of the honor code and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' stance on certain issues, it can sometimes be more difficult to reflect more liberal ideas, particularly those including LGBT rights.*

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Liberal students at BYU are far more likely to say they have self-censored than Conservatives (85% vs. 49%). They are also less likely to say they are comfortable publicly disagreeing with their professor about a controversial topic or discussing one with their peers. Additionally, a majority of Liberal students say it is difficult to have an open and honest conversation about transgender issues, abortion, immigration, feminism, race, and gun control. In contrast, the only topic that a majority of Conservative students identified as difficult to have an open and honest conversation about was transgender issues.

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*I felt like sharing pro-gay acceptance sentiments is especially unacceptable during religion classes and I've felt like I would be unwelcome if I ever expressed those thoughts.*

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These findings further demonstrate the value of campus-specific data. BYU is the only college surveyed where Conservative students are a clear majority. In contrast to other colleges, where Conservatives find open and honest expression more difficult, such as Brown or Columbia, presumably because those colleges skew heavily Liberal, it is Liberals at BYU who say they have difficulty freely expressing their views. These findings strengthen the conclusion that student political views *and* the dominant viewpoint on a campus (and the prevalence of that viewpoint) are important factors in identifying which students are more likely to say they experience difficulty expressing their views.

## Columbia University

Overall Score: 53.88	Liberal Score: 54.09	Conservative Score: 46.04
Ranking: 21st	7th	54th

Columbia University has adopted the Chicago Principles,<sup>37</sup> and it is the home of the Knight Foundation–supported Knight First Amendment Institute and an initiative on global free expression.<sup>38</sup> Its administration has clearly stated that it supports free expression and encourages open, public discussion of important political issues.<sup>39</sup> The students surveyed

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<sup>37</sup> Columbia University (2016, September 29). The rules of university conduct. [http://www.essential-policies.columbia.edu/files\\_facets/imce\\_shared/TheRulesOfUniversityConduct.pdf](http://www.essential-policies.columbia.edu/files_facets/imce_shared/TheRulesOfUniversityConduct.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Columbia University & John S. and James L. Knight Foundation (2017, February 1). Knight Foundation, Columbia University launch First Amendment Institute, \$60 million project to promote free expression in the digital age. <https://news.columbia.edu/news/knight-foundation-columbia-university-launch-first-amendment-institute-60-million-project>.

<sup>39</sup> Holmes, A. (2017, October 16). *Transcript: Bollinger discusses white nationalist speakers, free speech on campus*. <https://www.columbiaspectator.com/news/2017/10/16/transcript-bollinger-discusses-white-nationalist-speakers-free-speech-on-campus/>.

recognize this commitment; 79% say that the administration clearly advertises that it protects free speech. Even so, only 62% of students say the administration would more likely defend a speaker's rights than punish the speaker during a free-speech controversy.

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*I do not feel comfortable going against liberal beliefs in class.*

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Columbia's students are overwhelmingly Liberal, with 74% identifying this way, while only 9% identify as Conservative. Conservative students much more commonly say they have self-censored than Liberals (95% vs. 57%). They are also less likely to feel comfortable publicly disagreeing with their professor about a controversial topic (24% vs. 52%), posting an unpopular opinion on social media (14% vs. 28%), or discussing a controversial political topic with their peers (38% vs. 69%).

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*I just think in general it's very difficult to say anything that goes against the extremely liberal status quo. I'm pretty liberal myself [...] but I have critiques of political correctness, of one-sided politics, [and] of how the campus supports free speech [...] that I feel uncomfortable expressing publicly.*

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Like at Brown, religious issues may be areas of controversy at Columbia. The most difficult topic to discuss, identified by 58% of students, was the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, with a slightly greater percentage of Liberal students (64%) reporting this than Conservatives (62%). Students on both sides of this conflict commented that they cannot openly express their views, with one student remarking that "Supporting Palestinian students against Israeli occupation often leads to hate from some student groups. Even mentioning Palestine rings hatred in some," while another commented, "Whenever I hear 'from the river to the sea' it carries connotations of Israeli Jews being driven into the sea, but I feel very uncomfortable voicing this because of how strongly people take Palestine's side."

In a similar vein, the only controversial speaker in the survey whom a majority of students would support allowing to speak on campus was one who intended to contend that Christianity has a negative influence on society. One student commented that "Christianity is strongly looked

down upon on campus, and while I understand the oppression institutionalized religion has caused, freedom of religion should still be protected.”

## Kansas State University

Overall Score: 57.31	Liberal Score: 48.40	Conservative Score: 62.46
Ranking: 2nd	34th	2nd

Kansas State University has a Green rating from FIRE, has adopted the Chicago Statement, and is second overall in the College Free Speech Rankings. It is one of only six colleges where conservatism is the plurality viewpoint among students on campus, with 43% of students identifying as Conservative and 32% identifying as Liberal.

Yet, while Kansas State has a high overall ranking and a high ranking among Conservatives, it ranks only 35th among Liberals. The percentage of Liberal students at Kansas State who have self-censored (71%) is higher than the percentage of Conservatives who have done so (63%), while the percentage of Moderate students who have self-censored was 52%. This pattern was also present when students were asked if they were comfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial topic. A majority of Moderate students felt comfortable doing this (62%), while only 45% of Liberals and 42% of Conservatives did.

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*I would say about half of the students on the Kansas State campus are conservative and the other liberal so it's really a gamble if you share a controversial opinion on whether a student will appreciate it or not. I'm usually very careful about who I engage with in controversial topics.*

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*Most non-major specific courses are where this is most prevalent. Within major specific courses, instructors mainly focus on the material and teaching you. However, in English/Econ or otherwise known "K-State 8" courses it is best to keep your political opinions to yourself. If you don't, you can expect the teachers (who are grad students not professors) to grade your papers harsher and not listen to your ideas in class.*

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Liberal students also find it more difficult than Conservative or Moderate students to have open and honest conversations about a number of topics. On gun control, 76% of Liberal students identified it as a difficult topic, versus 42% of Moderates and 37% of Conservatives. On abortion, 72% of Liberal students identified it as difficult to discuss, versus 55% of Moderates and 48% of Conservatives. Fewer Liberal students identified immigration (48%) and race (42%) as difficult topics, yet they still found these topics difficult to discuss more often than Moderates (32% and 37% respectively) and Conservatives (31% and 30% respectively). The point spread for Liberals versus others was large in every case.

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*I am a student in the College of Agriculture where most students are traditionally Conservative. Most conversations that touch on politics in my classes are uncomfortable for me to be in and I choose not to speak up.*

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Kansas State is also one of the many colleges where no controversial speaker in the survey received support from a majority of the students to be allowed to speak on campus. At the same time, regarding the acceptability of disruptive protest, Kansas State students expressed more tolerance for controversial speech than at many other schools. For instance, 13% said it is “always” or “sometimes” acceptable to shout down a speaker, less than half the national average in the survey; only 4% of students said it is “always” or “sometimes” acceptable to block other students from entering a campus event compared to a national average of 11%; and only 1% said it was “always” or “sometimes” acceptable to use violence to stop a speech or event on campus, compared to a national average of 4%.

## Conclusion

The College Free Speech Survey is the largest-ever examination of the environment for free expression on college campuses in the United States. The College Free Speech Rankings represent the first attempt to empirically measure student perceptions and attitudes about free speech on specific campuses and rank the results. Through a comprehensive, multi-dimensional examination of students' experiences and a small contribution from FIRE's objective ratings, the College Free Speech Rankings identify the best and worst places for free speech on 55 college campuses in America.

Students related whether they have self-censored in their classrooms, online, or with their administrators; most have. They evaluated their ability to have difficult conversations on their campus; many said they cannot, across many issues. They revealed how tolerant they are of controversial speakers on campus; many would not even allow them to speak, and disconcerting minorities said that violent protest against them is acceptable. Students also related whether they perceive their college's administration as offering support to speakers embroiled in controversy; many say that their administration makes it clear that free speech is protected on campus, yet many also say that an "offensive" speaker is more likely to be punished than protected by those same administrations.

The College Free Speech Survey results show that while some colleges do better than others in promoting a strong, open speech climate on campus, colleges overwhelmingly have a long way to go to improve their campus climates for free expression. The top college in the College Free Speech Rankings is the University of Chicago, and even this school scores only 64 out of a possible 100 points. In other words, even the best college in this study receives a grade that wouldn't pass a university course without a curve.

While it is extremely unlikely that any college would ever earn a perfect score, and a college can hardly be held responsible for the influences of culture beyond campus, there certainly is room for all colleges to improve their speech climates. Subsequent reports will put forward recommendations tied to the data in this study and the experience of those who have worked to improve free-speech culture on American campuses. In the meantime, professors, administrators, and students with school-specific knowledge each can use their school's data and their own experience to consider what they can do.

Students in this study generally have an awareness of their college's stated institutional support for free speech, with 70% agreeing that their college's administration makes it clear to the student body that free speech is protected on campus. A majority of students in this study, but only 57%, say that their administration is more likely to come to the defense of an "offensive" speaker than to punish the speaker if a controversy arose. And if students themselves were in charge, many say that they would not allow speakers with certain offensive points of view on campus in the first place.

Most students also report self-censorship. 60% of students said that at least one time during their college experience so far, they did not share their perspective for fear of how others would respond.

The reports by Liberal and Conservative University of Chicago students are encouraging in that both groups rate its culture highly for a culture of free exchange of ideas, demonstrating that such an environment is achievable. Comparisons of the top and bottom 10 colleges by Liberals and by Conservatives show, however, that students' assessment of free speech on campus is, at least in part, driven by their political ideology, and whether or not it is in line with the majority viewpoint at their college. This conclusion is further supported by deeper analyses of Brown, Columbia, Brigham Young University, and Kansas State. Being a Liberal or Conservative student at Brown or Columbia is likely to result in a different experience within the college as well as in comparison with a similarly Liberal or Conservative student at BYU or Kansas State. At Syracuse University and many other colleges, there are wide discrepancies in answers between Liberals and Conservatives.

Other key findings from this study involve differences between types of colleges surveyed. Large state universities appear to have better climates overall, particularly for Conservative students whose views, compared to their peers, tend to be out of the mainstream. These findings fit well with research findings on political tolerance and the theory of pluralistic intolerance,<sup>40</sup> as well as the suggestion that something akin to a spiral of silence for minority viewpoints occurs on many college campuses.<sup>41</sup> Simply put, a larger student body may make it harder for an individual student to identify the dominant viewpoint on campus, or it may allow people whose views are outside the mainstream to "hide in the background" until they find

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<sup>40</sup> Sullivan, J.L., Piereson, J., & Marcus, G.E. (1982). *Political tolerance and American democracy*. The University of Chicago Press. <https://press.uchicago.edu/ucp/books/book/chicago/P/bo3775122.html>; Marcus, G.E., Sullivan, J.L., Theiss-Morse, E., & Wood, S.L. (1995). *With malice toward some: How people make civil liberties judgments*. Cambridge University Press. <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/with-malice-toward-some/541621B12A95B531F1E1E86F2DDAEC01>.

<sup>41</sup> Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The spiral of silence: A theory of public opinion.; Stevens, S. (2020, May 22). Spirals of silence: Expressing a minority political view on some campuses is difficult.

like-minded peers, something that is more likely to occur when there are more people in one's immediate community.

These differences among colleges are strong enough that they can dramatically change a student's experience of college. This is why it is so important that prospective students (and their families) have such findings on individual colleges at hand as they navigate critical decisions about which colleges are right for the kind of education they hope to receive. Students, parents, college administrators, and engaged citizens also will benefit from interacting with the data on the publicly available website ([speech.collegepulse.com](https://speech.collegepulse.com)), which offers additional comparisons. This report and subsequent papers will add tens of thousands of student voices and experiences to the discussion on free expression on America's college campuses.

## Appendix: Survey Items and Toplines for All Institutions

Q.1 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? [Select up to 8 options]

- 45% Abortion
- 30% Affirmative action
- 29% Feminism
- 41% Gun control
- 36% Immigration
- 30% The Israeli/Palestinian conflict
- 43% Race
- 40% Transgender issues

Q.2 How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus: Publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial topic?

- 15% Very comfortable
- 30% Somewhat comfortable
- 33% Somewhat uncomfortable
- 22% Very uncomfortable
- <1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.3 How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus: Expressing an unpopular opinion on a social media account tied to your name?

- 12% Very comfortable
- 24% Somewhat comfortable
- 35% Somewhat uncomfortable
- 28% Very uncomfortable
- <1% Refused
- 100% Total



Q.4 How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus: Discussing a controversial political topic with your classmates?

- 25% Very comfortable
- 42% Somewhat comfortable
- 25% Somewhat uncomfortable
- 9% Very uncomfortable
- <1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.5 How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus: Writing an article or letter in the student newspaper that is critical of the college administration?

- 21% Very comfortable
- 35% Somewhat comfortable
- 30% Somewhat uncomfortable
- 14% Very uncomfortable
- 1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q6: Please read the following before proceeding.

Student groups often invite speakers to campus to express their views on a range of topics. For the following set of questions, please indicate whether you would support or oppose your school ALLOWING a speaker on campus who promotes the given.

Q.7 Would you support or oppose your school ALLOWING a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea: Transgender people have a mental disorder?

- 13% Strongly support
- 14% Somewhat support
- 20% Somewhat oppose
- 52% Strongly oppose
- 1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.8 Would you support or oppose your school ALLOWING a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea: Abortion should be completely illegal?

- 17% Strongly support
- 19% Somewhat support
- 23% Somewhat oppose
- 41% Strongly oppose
- 1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.9 Would you support or oppose your school ALLOWING a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea: The U.S. should support Israeli military policy?

- 15% Strongly support
- 33% Somewhat support
- 36% Somewhat oppose
- 14% Strongly oppose
- 2% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.10 Would you support or oppose your school ALLOWING a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea: Some racial groups are less intelligent than others?

- 7% Strongly support
- 8% Somewhat support
- 14% Somewhat oppose
- 71% Strongly oppose
- <1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.11 Would you support or oppose your school ALLOWING a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea: Christianity has a negative influence on society?

- 17% Strongly support
- 28% Somewhat support
- 28% Somewhat oppose
- 27% Strongly oppose
- 1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.12 Would you support or oppose your school ALLOWING a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea: Censoring the news media is necessary?

- 11% Strongly support
- 25% Somewhat support
- 32% Somewhat oppose
- 32% Strongly oppose
- <1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.13 Would you support or oppose your school ALLOWING a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea: Black Lives Matter is a hate group?

- 11% Strongly support
- 14% Somewhat support
- 25% Somewhat oppose
- 50% Strongly oppose
- 1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.14 Would you support or oppose your school ALLOWING a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea: All white people are racist?

- 10% Strongly support
- 16% Somewhat support
- 25% Somewhat oppose
- 49% Strongly oppose
- <1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.15 How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker: Removing flyers or other advertisements for an upcoming speaker or event on campus?

- 6% Always acceptable
- 24% Sometimes acceptable
- 34% Rarely acceptable
- 35% Never acceptable
- <1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.16 How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker: Blocking other students from entering a campus event?

- 2% Always acceptable
- 9% Sometimes acceptable
- 27% Rarely acceptable
- 62% Never acceptable
- <1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.17 How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker: Shouting down a speaker or trying to prevent them from speaking on campus?

- 4% Always acceptable
- 23% Sometimes acceptable
- 34% Rarely acceptable
- 38% Never acceptable
- 1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.18 How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker: Using violence to stop a speech or event on campus?

- 1% Always acceptable
- 3% Sometimes acceptable
- 14% Rarely acceptable
- 81% Never acceptable
- <1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.19 Regardless of whether you agree with them, do you feel any of the following figures should be allowed on campus to share their views? [Select up to 4 options]

- 69% Donald Trump
- 87% Bernie Sanders
- 78% Joe Biden
- 57% Talk radio host Rush Limbaugh
- 5% Refused

Q.20 Does your college administration make it clear to students that free speech is protected on your campus?

- 70% Yes
- 29% No
- 1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.21 If a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on your campus, would the administration be more likely to...

- 57% Defend the speaker's right to express their views
- 41% Punish the speaker for making the statement
- 2% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.22 Using a seven-point scale from extremely liberal–point 1–to extremely conservative–point 7–where would you place yourself on this scale?

- 9% Extremely liberal
- 25% Liberal
- 17% Slightly liberal
- 23% Moderate
- 13% Slightly conservative
- 10% Conservative
- 2% Extremely conservative
- 1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.23 Do you approve or disapprove of the way Donald Trump is handling his job as president?

- 28% Approve
- 72% Disapprove
- 0% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.24 [Asked if respondent disapproved of Trump's performance] Even if you are not currently single or dating, how difficult would it be for you to date someone who supports Donald Trump?

- 27% Impossible
- 28% Very difficult
- 23% Somewhat difficult
- 15% Not too difficult
- 6% Not at all difficult
- 0% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.25 [Asked if respondent approved of Trump's performance] Even if you are not currently single or dating, how difficult would it be for you to date someone who opposes Donald Trump?

- 3% Impossible
- 8% Very difficult
- 21% Somewhat difficult
- 37% Not too difficult
- 30% Not at all difficult
- <1% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.26 Have you personally ever felt you could not express your opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond?

- 60% Yes
- 40% No
- 0% Refused
- 100% Total

Q.27 Please share a moment where you personally felt you could not express your opinion on your campus. [Open-ended response]

## Appendix: Colleges Surveyed and Number of Undergraduates Sampled

College	Number of Undergraduates Sampled
Arizona State University	448
Brigham Young University	523
Brown University	394
Clemson University	474
Columbia University	238
Cornell University	229
Dartmouth College	289
DePauw University	240
Duke University	287
Georgetown University	347
Harvard University	296
Indiana University	504
Kansas State University	265
Louisiana State University	316
Northwestern University	327

Ohio State University	343
Oklahoma State University	357
Pennsylvania State University	500
Princeton University	330
Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey	307
Stanford University	253
Syracuse University	230
Texas A&M University	598
University of Alabama	277
University of Arizona	398
University of Arkansas	315
University of California, Berkeley	330
University of California, Davis	413
University of California, Los Angeles	305
University of Chicago	296
University of Colorado	451
University of Georgia	387
University of Illinois at Chicago	631



University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign	460
University of Iowa	304
University of Michigan	654
University of Minnesota	521
University of Missouri	267
University of Nebraska	299
University of North Carolina	336
University of Oklahoma	267
University of Oregon	349
University of Pennsylvania	475
University of South Carolina	343
University of Tennessee	433
University of Texas at Austin	298
University of Texas at Dallas	308
University of Utah	312
University of Virginia	421
University of Washington	356
University of Wisconsin	341

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	395
Wake Forest University	296
Washington State University	378
Yale University	258



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