



Embargoed until Sept. 9

WHAT IS THE STATE OF **FREE SPEECH** ON AMERICAN CAMPUSES?

2027 COLLEGE FREE SPEECH RANKINGS

Contents

Executive Summary	1
Key Findings	1
Overview	2
How The Rankings Are Calculated	2
The Six Survey-Based Components	2
2027 College Free Speech Rankings	4
The Best- And Worst-Ranked Schools For Freedom of Speech	7
Risers and Fallers	9
A Chilling Effect At Utah Valley University	11
National Trends: A Chilling Climate for Campus Speech	15
Conclusion: Reasons For Cautious Optimism	19
Topline Results	20
2027 College Free Speech Results	24
Appendix	33
About Us	40
College Pulse	40
FIRE	40
Acknowledgments and Suggested Citation	40

Executive Summary

For the seventh year in a row, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), a nonprofit organization committed to defending and sustaining the individual rights of all Americans to free speech and free thought, and College Pulse surveyed college undergraduates about their perceptions and experiences regarding free speech on their campuses.

This year's survey includes 62,997 student respondents from 262¹ colleges and universities. Students enrolled in four-year degree programs were surveyed via the College Pulse mobile app and web portal from Jan. 2 through June 3, 2026.

Overall, the findings suggest some improvement in campus free speech climates, while also showing that many students still report difficulty discussing controversial topics and remain skeptical of allowing controversial speakers on campus.

The College Free Speech Rankings are available online and are presented in an [interactive dashboard](#) that allows for easy comparison between institutions. The full pre-registered [methodology](#) is available on the [Open Science Framework website](#).

KEY FINDINGS:

- **The University of Chicago ranks first for freedom of speech for the third time in seven years. Claremont McKenna College, last year's top-ranked school, ranks second, followed by the Georgia Institute of Technology, Michigan Technological University, and Vanderbilt University.**
- **New York University ranks last. The University of Washington, Texas State University, Northeastern University, and Rutgers University–New Brunswick round out the bottom five.**

- **This year, the average overall score (61.36) is the highest recorded in seven years, though it still corresponds to a D- on the report's grading scale. Overall, 121 schools still receive an F, while just 24 receive a C or better.**
- **The University of California, Davis had the largest year-over-year increase in its overall score and now ranks 24, compared with 252 last year. Other schools with notable score increases include Harvard University, Barnard College, and Columbia University.**
- **In contrast, Texas State University had the largest year-over-year decrease in its overall score and now ranks 259, down from 112th last year. Other schools with considerable score decreases include Texas A&M University, the University of Arkansas, Utah Valley University, New York University, and Clemson University.**
- **Half of students surveyed said that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was difficult to discuss openly and honestly on campus, down from 53% last year. Notable portions of students also identified Donald Trump (46%), Charlie Kirk (44%), abortion (43%), immigration (38%), and transgender rights (38%) as difficult topics to discuss.**
- **The percentage of students who said it was acceptable to shout down a speaker, block entry to a campus speech, or use violence to stop a campus speech declined slightly from last year's record highs.**
- **For the second year in a row, a majority of students opposed allowing each of the six controversial speakers included in the survey — three conservative and three liberal — to speak on campus.**

¹ This year, 262 colleges and universities were surveyed. One school, Regis University, was given a Warning rating for its speech policies and was therefore excluded from the rankings. As a result, the 2027 College Free Speech Rankings includes 261 colleges and universities.

Overview

In 2020, in collaboration with College Pulse and RealClearEducation, the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) launched a first-of-its-kind tool to help high school students and their parents identify which colleges promote and protect the free exchange of ideas: the College Free Speech Rankings. Over the past seven years, the annual rankings survey has captured the voices of almost 350,000 students — and over 60,000 this year alone. Whether you're a prospective student sizing up your options, a professor curious about classroom openness, or an administrator charting a path forward, FIRE's 2027 College Free Speech Rankings offer a data-driven look at where campus free speech is flourishing — and where it is failing.

As in previous years, the College Free Speech Rankings [dashboard](#) offers a unique tool to compare schools' rankings and survey responses and also explore other factors — such as cost and proximity to home.

This report begins by presenting this year's rankings, highlighting the top-performing schools and detailing why schools near the bottom perform poorly.² It then briefly discusses schools whose rankings improved or declined significantly over the past year before turning to an analysis of national trends that have emerged among undergraduate students over the past seven years.

HOW THE RANKINGS ARE CALCULATED

Each school's overall score is the sum of 12 components. Six measure student perceptions, three assess campus speech policies, and three evaluate how schools respond to speech controversies. Higher scores indicate a better climate for free speech and expression.

THE SIX SURVEY-BASED COMPONENTS ARE:

- **“Comfort Expressing Ideas”** measures how comfortable students are expressing controversial views in five campus settings.
- **“Self-Censorship”** measures how often students withhold their views in conversations with students, professors, and administrators, and during classroom discussions.
- **“Disruptive Conduct”** measures students' acceptance of shouting down speakers, blocking access to events, and using violence to stop campus speech.
- **“Administrative Support”** measures whether students believe administrators clearly protect free speech and would defend a speaker during a controversy.
- **“Openness”** measures how many of 22 social and political topics students identify as difficult to discuss openly and honestly.
- **“Political Tolerance”** measures students' willingness to allow six controversial speakers on campus — three offensive to liberals and three to conservatives. The score rewards overall tolerance and tolerance across ideological lines.

The three policy components are the Chicago Statement, which recognizes an explicit commitment to free expression; Institutional Neutrality, which recognizes a commitment to avoid taking positions on social and political issues unrelated to a university's mission; and Spotlight Rating, which evaluates written policies regulating student expression.

2 The following R packages were used to calculate the 2027 College Free Speech Rankings: Johnson, J.D. (2023). pollster: Calculate Crosstab and Topline Tables of Weighted Survey Data. R package version 0.1.6. [The Comprehensive R Archive Network](#) was used to produce topline results and demographic crosstabs; Larmarange, J. (2025). labelled: Manipulating Labelled Data. R package version 2.14. 1.9000. <https://github.com/larmarange/labelled>, was used to import variable and value labels into the data file for the survey items; Lumley, T. (2024). survey: analysis of complex survey samples. R package version 4.4-2. [The Comprehensive R Archive Network](#) was used to calculate the survey components of the College Free Speech Rankings, and each school's overall score; Wickham et al. (2019). Welcome to the tidyverse. *Journal of Open Source Software*, 4(43), 1686, doi.org/10.21105/joss.01686, was used to clean and subset data for additional analyses.

The remaining components — Campus Deplatformings, *Scholars Under Fire*, and *Students Under Fire* — account for institutional responses to speech controversies. Schools may receive bonuses for clearly defending free expression or penalties when administrators restrict speech. These bonuses and penalties decrease over time.

The full preregistered methodology explains the scoring process in greater detail.³

Overall, the findings suggest some improvement in campus free speech climates, while also showing that many students still report difficulty discussing controversial topics and remain skeptical of allowing controversial speakers on campus.

Embargoed until Sept.9

³ FIRE Research, Stevens, S., & Honeycutt, N. (March 2, 2026). FIRE's 2027 College Free Speech Rankings. Available online: <https://osf.io/tfz9u/overview>.

2027 College Free Speech Rankings

The release of the *2027 College Free Speech Rankings* bookends a jarring year for free expression on campus. One day after the release of last year's rankings, conservative activist and Turning Point USA founder Charlie Kirk was assassinated at Utah Valley University, doing what he often did: engaging in open political debate.⁴ His assassination had a profound impact on students nationwide. A FIRE survey of 2,028 college undergraduates conducted last October found that half of the students surveyed felt less comfortable attending or hosting controversial public events on their campus than before Kirk's assassination. About half also said they were less comfortable expressing their views on controversial topics in class, in common campus spaces, and on social media. One in five even said they were less comfortable attending class in person.⁵

Charlie Kirk's assassination also prompted increased pressure from public officials to sanction faculty speech, primarily in response to social media comments about his death.⁶

For example, Indiana Attorney General Todd Rokita launched an Eyes on Education platform, which is "designed to give parents, students, and educators a way to share examples of what is being taught and promoted in schools and to provide transparency for parents and keep Hoosiers informed."⁷ Multiple submissions to this platform concern comments made by college and university faculty

about Kirk's political views and his assassination. Alabama's U.S. Sen. Tommy Tuberville took a more direct approach, demanding that the Huntsville and Tuscaloosa campuses of the University of Alabama fire multiple professors for their comments about Kirk's death on social media.⁸

Elsewhere, Clemson University condemned the expression of two professors — Joshua Bregy and Melvin Earl Villaver Jr. — who made controversial social media posts in response to Kirk's death, but initially resisted punishing them while emphasizing its commitment to the First Amendment. After U.S. Rep. Nancy Mace and South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson amplified public backlash, Clemson reversed course and decided to terminate both professors.⁹ Similarly, the University of Tennessee capitulated to demands from state and federal lawmakers to fire professor Tamar Shirnian because of a social media post she made following Kirk's assassination.¹⁰ While at Fort Hays State University, professor Nuchelle Chance was placed on administrative leave after the Kansas Republican Party condemned her social media comments and demanded that the university terminate her.¹¹

Other on-campus censorship efforts focused on a different target: Turning Point USA, the organization Charlie Kirk founded and led. These efforts came primarily from student governments. Attempts to establish TPUSA

4 Associated Press (Sept. 10, 2025). Conservative activist Charlie Kirk assassinated at Utah university. Available online: <https://apnews.com/article/charlie-kirk-conservative-activist-shot-546165a815104e0938a5e085be1e8bd>.

5 Stevens, S.T. (2025). After the earthquake: How the assassination of Charlie Kirk is reshaping campus speech nationwide. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/how-assassination-charlie-kirk-reshaping-campus-speech-nationwide>.

6 Stevens, S. & Lenthall-Cleary, C. (Sept. 30, 2025). The government is now the leading threat to faculty expression: 77% of all sanctions efforts involve government actors. Available online: <https://expression.fire.org/p/the-government-is-now-the-leading>.

7 Eyes on Education: What is your child learning in school? Available online: <https://www.in.gov/attorneygeneral/education-liberty/>.

8 McArdle, R. (Sept. 16, 2025). Multiple University of Alabama professors mocked Charlie Kirk after his assassination. Available online: <https://yellowham-mernews.com/multiple-university-of-alabama-professors-mocked-charlie-kirk-after-his-assassination/>.

9 Davis, E., Escott, G., & Murphy, C. (Sept. 15, 2025). Clemson U. touted free speech after 3 employees posted about Charlie Kirk. Then it reversed course. Available online: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/clemson-u-touted-free-speech-after-3-employees-posted-about-charlie-kirk-then-it-reversed-course?sra=true>.

10 Local 3 News Staff (Sept. 16, 2025). University of Tennessee fires professor who was 'endorsing violence and murder'. Available online: https://www.local-3news.com/local-news/university-of-tennessee-fires-professor-who-was-endorsing-violence-and-murder/article_ac9a361b-eb98-43b3-bb47-67511642b8d8.html.

11 Parks, K. (Oct. 4, 2025). Kansas professor put on leave after calling White men 'dangerous animals' in the wake of Charlie Kirk's murder: Fort Hays State University assistant psychology professor said her posts were deliberately misinterpreted. Available online: <https://www.foxnews.com/media/kansas-professor-put-leave-after-calling-white-men-dangerous-animals-wake-charlie-kirk-murder>; Rutt, S. (Oct. 4, 2025). Professor is put on leave for Facebook post about 'dangerous white men' in the wake of Charlie Kirk's murder. Available online: <https://www.dailymail.com/news/article-15162751/nuchelle-chance-kansas-professor-leave-charlie-kirk.html>.

chapters at Brown University,¹² Duquesne University,¹³ Fort Lewis College,¹⁴ Point Loma Nazarene University,¹⁵ the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga,¹⁶ and Valparaiso University¹⁷ were all rejected by student governments on those campuses.

Other campus actors also imposed obstacles on TPUSA-related activity. At the University of Maryland, College Park, campus police refused to approve a TPUSA event featuring *The Daily Wire*'s senior editor Cabot Phillips unless the organization paid for four hours of security, despite no such requirement for similar past events.¹⁸ At Concordia University in Wisconsin, an administrator pressured students attempting to establish a TPUSA chapter on campus to denounce the national organization's "Professor Watchlist" in the group's charter as a condition for being recognized as a student organization.¹⁹ At Manchester Community College, administrators required a student affiliated with the campus TPUSA chapter to relocate his tabling display to a "free speech zone" because of its political content.²⁰ At Barry University, administrators denied the recognition of a campus TPUSA chapter but later overturned the decision under pressure from the Florida attorney general.²¹

All of these incidents and more occurred after Charlie Kirk's assassination, and they help illustrate why student perceptions of openness, tolerance for controversial speakers, and confidence in administrative support for speech remain central to assessing campus free expression. They also unfolded amid the ongoing efforts of the Trump administration to eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion programs in higher education,²² as well as attempts in a number of states to influence the higher education curriculum through laws regulating the teaching of "divisive topics."²³

Against this backdrop, FIRE releases its *2027 College Free Speech Rankings*. Despite these conditions, the report contains some positive developments.

- **This year, the average overall score (61.36) is the highest recorded in seven years, though it still corresponds to a D- on the report's grading scale.**
- **Overall, 121 schools receive an F, while just 24 receive a C or better. But this is an improvement compared to last year, when 166 schools received an F and just 11 received a C or better.**

12 Marcus, B. (March 20, 2026). Brown rejects Turning Point USA chapter: is three conservative clubs too many? Available online: <https://www.brownspectator.com/p/brown-rejects-turning-point-usa-chapter/>.

13 Mantush, L. (Nov. 20, 2025). On-campus chapter of Turning Point USA denied by SGA. Available online: <https://duquesneduke.org/on-campus-chapter-of-turning-point-usa-denied-by-sga/news/>.

14 Sison, G. (Nov. 11, 2025). Fort Lewis TPUSA wins recognition after initial rejection by student government. Available online: <https://www.thecollegefix.com/fort-lewis-tpusa-wins-recognition-after-initial-rejection-by-student-govt/>.

15 Palombo, O. (Nov. 12, 2025). California university students' third attempt to form TPUSA chapter denied: Point Loma Nazarene University cites concerns over Professor Watchlist and faith policies. Available online: <https://www.foxnews.com/us/california-university-students-third-attempt-form-tpusa-chapter-denied>.

16 Talley, S. (Oct. 10, 2025). Student government association votes against Turning Point USA chapter at UTC. Available online: <https://newschannel9.com/news/local/student-government-association-declines-to-register-turning-point-usa-chapter-at-utc>.

17 Charron, C. (Feb. 20, 2026). Indiana college steps in after Turning Point chapter denied. Available online: <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/education/2026/02/20/a-turning-point-usa-chapter-was-denied-at-valparaiso-is-that-legal/88756968007/>.

18 Wason, S. (Oct. 21, 2025). Turning Point USA chapter says UMD event security fee is unconstitutional. Available online: <https://dbknews.com/2025/10/21/turning-point-umd-event-security-fee-unconstitutional/>; See also FIRE's Oct. 17, 2025 letter to the University of Maryland: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/fire-letter-university-maryland-october-17-2025>, and the University of Maryland's Oct. 20, 2025 response: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/university-maryland-response-fire-october-20-2025>.

19 Kraemer, S. (October 2, 2025). Concordia student secures Turning Point USA chapter approval after viral post. Available online: <https://www.fox6now.com/news/concordia-student-secures-turning-point-usa-chapter-approval>.

20 Fisher, D. (March 19, 2026). MCC under fire after student told to relocate TPUSA table. Available online: <https://nhjournal.com/mcc-under-fire-after-student-told-to-relocate-tpusa-table/>.

21 Palmer, K. (April 10, 2026). Florida AG demands law school allow Turning Point chapter. Available online: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2026/04/10/florida-ag-demands-law-school-allow-turning-point-chapter>.

22 Schwartz, N. (Jan. 23, 2025). Trump signs executive order targeting DEI policies at colleges: The directive escalates the crusade against diversity, equity and inclusion programs on campuses to the federal policy level. Available online: <https://www.highereddive.com/news/trump-executive-order-diversity-equity-inclusion-colleges/738052/>.

23 Chronicle Staff. (2026). DEI Legislation Tracker: Explore where college diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts are under attack. Available online: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/here-are-the-states-where-lawmakers-are-seeking-to-ban-colleges-dei-efforts>.

- **Some schools, including the University of California, Davis, Harvard University, Columbia University, and Barnard College, considerably improved their overall scores and rankings.**

Still, the average score corresponds to a D- on the report's grading scale; a majority of students opposed allowing each of the six controversial speakers asked about in the survey — three conservative and three liberal — to speak on campus; and more than two-thirds of students said it was acceptable to shout down a speaker on campus. In calendar year 2025, FIRE recorded a record number of campus speech controversies — including deplatforming attempts and attempts to sanction scholars and students for their expression.²⁴ These included a record number of event disruptions and attempted disruptions,²⁵ and the termination of at least 20 professors for their social media posts commenting on Charlie Kirk's assassination.²⁶

This year, the average overall score (61.36) is the highest recorded in seven years, though it still corresponds to a D- on the report's grading scale.

Embargoed until Sept.9

24 Dougherty, L. (Dec. 16, 2025). A deep freeze hits campus: 2025 marks the coldest year yet for student speech. Available online: <https://expression.fire.org/p/a-deep-freeze-hits-campus>; Stevens, S. (Jan. 6, 2026). Faculty censorship hits record high in 2025. Available online: <https://expression.fire.org/p/faculty-censorship-hits-record-high>; Stevens, S. (March 26, 2026). Campus cancellations approach record high. Available online: <https://expression.fire.org/p/campus-cancellations-approach-record>; See also FIRE's Campus Deplatforming Database: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/campus-deplatforming-database?orderdir=desc&orderby=year&range=10>; FIRE's Scholars Under Fire database: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/scholars-under-fire?orderdir=desc&orderby=year&range=10>; and, FIRE's Students Under Fire database: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/students-under-fire?orderdir=desc&orderby=year&range=10>.

25 See FIRE's Campus Deplatforming Database: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/campus-deplatforming-database?orderdir=desc&orderby=year&range=10>.

26 Nayer, E. (Jan. 27, 2026). How backlash over George Floyd and Charlie Kirk's deaths has reshaped campus speech. Available online: <https://expression.fire.org/p/how-backlash-over-george-floyd-and>.

THE BEST AND WORST-RANKED SCHOOLS FOR FREEDOM OF SPEECH

For the third time in seven years, the University of Chicago is the top-ranked school for free speech, with an overall score of 81.42 and a speech climate grade of B-. Claremont McKenna College (80.13), last year’s top-ranked school, is ranked second. The Georgia Institute of Technology (78.98), Michigan Technological University (78.72), and Vanderbilt University (77.09) round out the top five. Like UChicago, CMC has a speech climate grade of B-, while the rest of the schools ranked in the top five have a C+.

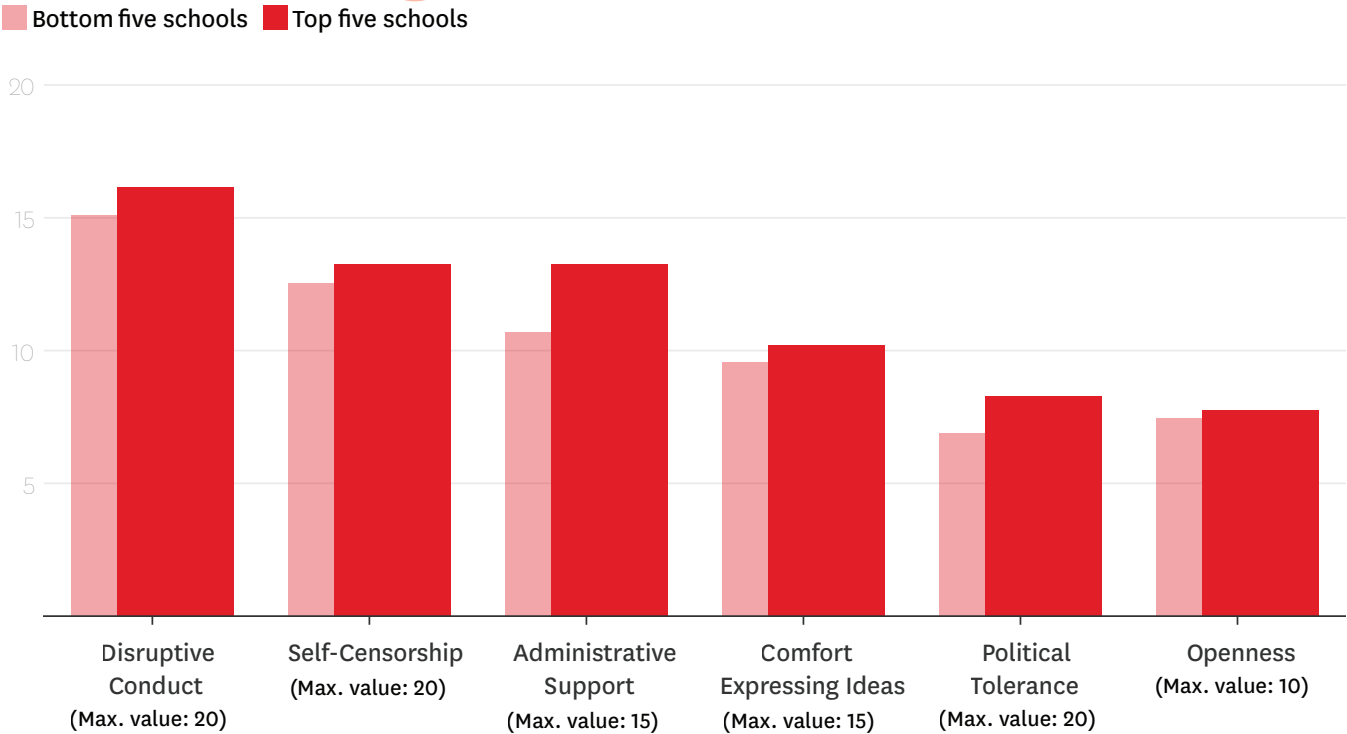
At the other end of the spectrum, New York University ranks last, with an overall score of 44.97. This comes after finishing as the third-worst school last year. The University of Washington (47.50), Texas State University (47.82), Northeastern University (49.78), and Rutgers University (49.91) round out the bottom five. The University of Washington and Northeastern were both ranked in the bottom five last year as well. All of these schools receive a failing grade of F for their speech climate.

The contrasts between the best and worst schools are stark.

The average overall score of schools in the top five is 79.27, compared with an average of 47.99 among the bottom five schools — a difference of almost five standard deviations. Furthermore, the average ranking across the different survey-based components among the top five was 47 — including an average ranking of 12 on “Administrative Support” and 16 on “Political Tolerance.” The lowest average ranking among these schools on any of the survey-based components was 79 on “Disruptive Conduct.”

Things are considerably different at schools in the bottom five, whose average ranking on the survey-based components is 178 — including 210 on “Administrative Support” and 211 on “Disruptive Conduct.” The only survey-based component on which schools in the bottom five rank above the median is “Openness,” with an average ranking of 101.

Mean Scores For Survey Based Components Of Top 5 Schools vs. Bottom 5 Schools



The story is similar when comparing the top five and bottom five on the behavioral metrics of the rankings. All of the top five schools have a “green light” rating for their speech policies²⁷ and have endorsed the Chicago Statement issued in 2015.²⁸ Four of these five schools — Michigan Tech being the exception — have also adopted a commitment to institutional neutrality.²⁹ Additionally, none of them incurred any penalties for speech controversies on their campuses.

In contrast, the bottom five schools all lost points due to their speech policies and the outcomes of speech controversies that occurred on their campuses. None of the schools have endorsed the Chicago Statement or adopted a stance of institutional neutrality.

Northeastern’s speech policies earn a “red light” rating.³⁰ The remaining schools in the bottom five all have “yellow light” ratings.³¹ Worse, these schools collectively lost 41 points due to the outcomes of different speech controversies on their campuses.³²

The University of Chicago and Claremont McKenna College earned the two highest scores ever: 81.42 and 80.13, respectively. This is encouraging, but those scores are also equivalent to a grade of B-. The average score among the top five schools is a C+ (79.27), or slightly “above average.”

So, even the best schools for free speech have plenty of work still to do to create a truly open environment for expression on their campuses. Not all of that responsibility

rests with colleges. Campus speech climates also reflect broader cultural forces, including political polarization, fear of social consequences, and declining tolerance for disagreement.

At the same time, the best schools are clearly doing a superior job compared with the worst ones. The bottom five have an average overall score of 47.99 — they all receive failing grades, and their overall scores are more than two standard deviations below the nationwide average.

The problem is not just the speech policies at these schools; it is also how they handle speech controversies on campus and how the students interpret those actions.

In the span of a few weeks this past spring, Rutgers — after multiple students attempted to disrupt a talk by Yossi Hertz, a former Israel Defense Forces soldier — first prominently declared its commitment to free speech, stating that it “does not cancel events or speakers based on disagreements with their messages, however heartfelt such disagreements may be.”³³

Then, a week or so later, Rutgers rescinded the School of Engineering’s invitation to alumnus Rami Elghandour, chairman and CEO of Arcellx, to deliver the school’s commencement address. The university acted after some graduating students objected to Elghandour’s social media posts about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and indicated they would skip the ceremony. This time, a

27 A “green light” rating indicates that a college or university’s policies do not seriously imperil speech. It does not by itself guarantee that a school actively supports free expression. It simply means that FIRE is not currently aware of any serious threats to students’ free speech rights in the written policies on that campus. Individual policies that do not threaten free expression also receive green light ratings. For more information see: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/using-fires-spotlight-database>.

28 The “Chicago Statement” is a model free speech policy statement that many universities have adopted, affirming their commitment to free expression. For more information see: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/chicago-statement-university-and-faculty-body-support>.

29 Institutional Neutrality is the idea that colleges and universities should not, as institutions, take positions on social and political issues unless those issues “threaten the very mission of the university and its values of free inquiry.” Instead, these discussions should be left to students and faculty. For more information see: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/adoptions-official-position-institutional-neutrality>.

30 A “red light” institution has at least one red light policy that both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech. A “clear” restriction is one that unambiguously infringes on what is, or should be, protected expression. In addition, when a university restricts access to its speech-related policies by requiring a login and password, it denies prospective students and their parents the ability to weigh this crucial information, and FIRE considers this action to be deceptive and serious enough that it alone warrants a “red light” rating. For more information see: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/using-fires-spotlight-database>.

31 A “yellow light” institution has at least one yellow light policy that restricts a more limited amount of protected expression or, by virtue of vague wording, can too easily be used to restrict protected expression. For more information see: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/using-fires-spotlight-database>.

32 See Table 1 in this report’s appendix.

33 Fardin, M. (April 24, 2026). Students Supporting Israel brings IDF soldier to speak on campus, protests, disruptions. Available online: <https://www.dailytargum.com/article/eotazdczqxpi-students-supporting-israel-organ-invites-idf-soldiers-to-speak-on-campus-20260424>.

university spokesperson said that the “decision keeps the focus on our engineering students and honors the celebratory spirit of the event to ensure that no graduate feels forced to choose between their personal convictions and a convocation ceremony.”³⁴

Those two statements contradict each other and exemplify leadership that sends mixed messages to students and faculty on campus about which kinds of expression are welcome and which are not.

Other patterns are evident in how the bottom five schools handle speech controversies:³⁵

- **Texas State University administrators apparently fear state and federal government crackdowns.**
- **The University of Washington appears to struggle to ensure that campus events go off without a hitch.**
- **New York University is particularly concerned with events that discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.**

Leadership matters. Sending consistent messages to students and faculty matters.

This past year, NYU directed Jews Against Zionism, a Jewish student group that is critical of Israel’s actions in Gaza, to remove a social media post.³⁶ It also prevent-

ed students organizing an annual concert from inviting performers affiliated with the No Music For Genocide movement.³⁷ Last fall, it initially canceled an appearance by Ilya Shapiro, a law professor supportive of Israel’s actions in Gaza, that was organized by the university’s Federalist Society because it was scheduled for Oct. 7, 2025, and then reversed its decision following public backlash.³⁸

There are clear reasons why some schools do relatively well in FIRE’s *College Free Speech Rankings*, and also clear reasons why other schools do not — and those reasons are reflected not only in a school’s behavioral metrics but also in its survey data assessing student perceptions.

The top five schools perform well on almost every student-perception metric, particularly on “Administrative Support.” The bottom five do not, and they score particularly poorly on “Administrative Support.”

Simply put: Dear administrators, the students notice.

RISERS AND FALLERS

DePauw University ranked last in the first two years of the *College Free Speech Rankings*.³⁹ The university’s president then reformed the school’s speech policies, and DePauw began to improve.⁴⁰ This year, it ranks 25.

The University of South Carolina ranked 246 out of 248 schools in the 2024 *College Free Speech Rankings*.⁴¹ After a new chancellor initiated speech policy reform,

34 Quinn, R. (May 7, 2026). Rutgers disinvents engineering graduation speaker after he criticizes Israel. Available online: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2026/05/07/rutgers-disinvents-grad-speaker-after-he-criticizes-israel>.

35 See Table 1 in this report’s appendix.

36 Saadah, Y. (May 7, 2026). NYU investigates Instagram post advertising anti-Zionist Passover Seder: The Jewish students and faculty who organized the Seder are demanding the investigation be halted and calling for a boycott of NYU Hillel. Available online: <https://nyunews.com/news/2026/05/07/nyu-investigates-anti-zionist-seder-instagram-post/>.

37 Dev, K. (March 13, 2026). NYU censored V100 artist booking process, Program Board says: Students claim administrators offered an extra \$30,000 after barring them from working with artists boycotting Israel. Available online: <https://nyunews.com/news/2026/03/13/program-board-statement/>; See also: NYU Program Board Statement in Solidarity. Available online: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1TAgs2EYqOLWH78fyfR0zbGbhlAkGw4bc/view>.

38 Kabbany, J. (Oct. 6, 2025). NYU caves, reinstates free speech event after backlash. Available online: <https://www.thecollegefix.com/nyu-caves-reinstates-free-speech-event-after-backlash/>; Shapiro, I. (Oct. 4, 2025). NYU cancels my Oct. 7 event over “security concerns,” then caves in face of backlash: I was going to talk about my book *Lawless* but administrators feared protesters. The Federalist Society set an offsite event with federal judges joining me, so NYU magically found a way to host. Available online: <https://ilyashapiro.substack.com/p/nyu-cancels-my-oct-7-event-over-security>.

39 Stevens, S.T. & Schwichtenberg, A. (2020). 2020 College Free Speech Rankings: What’s the Climate for Free Speech on America’s College Campuses. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/2020-college-free-speech-rankings>; Stevens, S.T. & Schwichtenberg, A. (2021). 2021 College Free Speech Rankings: What’s the Climate for Free Speech on America’s College Campuses. The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/2021-college-free-speech-rankings>.

40 Stevens, S.T. (2022). 2022-2023 College Free Speech Rankings: What’s the Climate for Free Speech on America’s College Campuses. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Available online: <https://www.fire.org/research-learn/2022-2023-college-free-speech-rankings>.

41 Stevens, S.T. (2023). 2024 College Free Speech Rankings: What’s the Climate for Free Speech on America’s College Campuses. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/2024-college-free-speech-rankings>.

endorsed the Chicago Statement, and refused to cancel a roast of Kamala Harris hosted by Milo Yiannopoulos and Gavin McInnes in fall 2024, student responses improved, and the university ranked 34 the following year.⁴² This year, it ranks 14.

The story is similar at Vanderbilt University, which ranks 5, and Dartmouth College, which ranks 6.

In other words, improvement in the rankings — even rapid improvement — is possible. It starts with strong leadership on the issue of free expression.

This year, the schools with the largest increases in overall score were:

- **The University of California, Davis, whose score increased by almost 18 points primarily because of its adoption of the Chicago Statement, a commitment to institutional neutrality, obtaining a “green light” rating for its speech policies, and the decay of penalties imposed for older speech controversies.**
- **Harvard University, whose score increased by over 13 points due to significant improvements in student perceptions — particularly on “Comfort Expressing Ideas” and “Administrative Support” — and because penalties imposed for older speech controversies decayed, while not being supplemented with poor responses to fresh controversies.**
- **Barnard College, whose score increased by over 12 points mostly due to policy reforms.**
- **The Georgia Institute of Technology, whose score increased by almost 9 points because of improved student perceptions on “Disruptive Conduct” and “Administrative Support,” and its adoption of the Chicago Statement and a commitment to institutional neutrality.**

- **Columbia University, whose score increased by over 8 points because of improved student perceptions on “Comfort Expressing Ideas,” “Self-Censorship,” and “Openness,” and because penalties imposed for older speech controversies decayed.**

Other schools that improved their scores by more than one standard deviation this year, compared with last year, included: Utah State University, Dartmouth College, the University of Alabama, Furman University, Clark University, and Tufts University.

On the other hand, a number of schools had their overall scores decline considerably compared with last year’s rankings:

- **Texas State University, whose score decreased by over 11 points, primarily due to its poor handling of numerous campus speech controversies described in Table 1 of this report’s appendix.**
- **Texas A&M University, whose score decreased by almost 7 points because student perceptions on “Administrative Support” declined significantly and the university incurred additional penalties for its handling of multiple speech controversies. Some of those controversies made national headlines, including the termination of Melissa McCoul, a senior lecturer in the Department of English at the university, who came under scrutiny after a student secretly recorded part of her Literature for Children class that included discussion of gender identity and a “Gender Unicorn” slide, and then challenged McCoul, claiming the material was “illegal” under state policy.⁴³**
- **The University of Arkansas, whose score decreased by almost 6 points because of three separate incidents in which the university sanctioned faculty speech, including its decision to rescind an offer to Emily Suski, a**

42 Stevens, S.T. (2024). 2025 College Free Speech Rankings: What’s the Climate for Free Speech on America’s College Campuses. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/2025-college-free-speech-rankings>.

43 Whitford, E. (Sept. 10, 2025). 2 Texas A&M administrators and professor out after viral video: Video circulated by Texas state representative shows student accusing English professor of teaching material related to gender identity and violating Trump’s executive orders. State officials pressured the university to fire the professor involved. Available online: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/faculty/academic-freedom/2025/09/10/texas-am-professor-and-administrators-out-after-viral>.

professor of law and associate dean for strategic and institutional priorities at the University of South Carolina's Joseph F. Rice School of Law, to become the dean of the university's School of Law.⁴⁴

- **New York University, whose score decreased by almost 5 points primarily because of penalties incurred for its handling of a number of speech controversies, each of which is described in Table 1 of this report's appendix. NYU's "Administrative Support" also declined.**
- **Clemson University, whose score decreased by almost 5 points due to its termination of two professors — Joshua Bregy and Melvin Earl Villaver Jr. — who made controversial social media posts in response to Charlie Kirk's assassination.⁴⁵**

Other schools that experienced notable declines in their overall scores included the University of Minnesota, the University of Florida, California Polytechnic University, and the University of North Texas.

Embargoed until Sept. 9

A CHILLING EFFECT AT UTAH VALLEY UNIVERSITY

Charlie Kirk was assassinated at a Turning Point USA event at Utah Valley University on Sept. 10, 2025. Later that day, UVU President Astrid S. Tuminez addressed the campus community through an Instagram post:⁴⁶

On behalf of Utah Valley University, we are shocked and saddened by the tragic passing of Charlie Kirk.

We express our sincere condolences to the Kirk family. We grieve with our students, faculty, and staff who bore witness to this unspeakable tragedy. He was invited by the student group Turning Point USA to speak on our campus. We firmly believe UVU is a place to share ideas and to debate openly and respectfully. Any attempt to infringe on those rights has no place here. We do not condone any form of violence at UVU and seek to make our campus a safe place for all.

The university then responded quickly. Classes were canceled for the rest of the week and counseling services were expanded. New student organizations promoting tolerance popped up, and the university later launched a civic dialogue program — "Our Better Selves for a Better America."⁴⁷

A FIRE survey of 2,028 students nationwide conducted in the month after the assassination included 204 UVU undergraduates and found that 94% of them said it was "never" acceptable for students to use violence to stop a campus speech, compared with 81% of UVU students who said this the previous spring. That same month, UVU also invited FIRE President and CEO Greg Lukianoff to deliver a lecture titled "Free Speech: An Antidote to Violence." Lukianoff emphasized that words are not violence and that free speech is the greatest antidote humanity has to actual violence.⁴⁸

Some students appeared to notice the administration's efforts. This year, about half of UVU students (48%) said it was "very" or "extremely" clear that their administration protects free speech on campus, while just 12%

44 FIRE. (Jan. 15, 2026). University of Arkansas rescinds dean offer after lawmakers object to legal advocacy in trans athletes Supreme Court case. Available online: <https://www.fire.org/news/university-arkansas-rescinds-dean-offer-after-lawmakers-object-legal-advocacy-trans-athletes>.

45 Davis, E., Escott, G., & Murphy, C. (Sept. 15, 2025). Clemson U. touted free speech after 3 employees posted about Charlie Kirk. Then it reversed course. Available online: <https://www.chronicle.com/article/clemson-u-touted-free-speech-after-3-employees-posted-about-charlie-kirk-then-it-reversed-course>.

46 The Instagram post is available online: https://www.instagram.com/p/DOcDpx6kjqp/?utm_source=ig_embed&ig_rid=37c9ded7-cae8-4c2b-9080-6d02cb80935d.

47 Utah Valley University (Feb. 23, 2026). Utah Valley University launches "Our Better Selves for a Better America." The new initiative promotes peaceful dialogue, constructive disagreement, and civic resilience. Available online: <https://www.globenewswire.com/news-release/2026/02/23/3242971/0/en/Utah-Valley-University-Launches-Our-Better-Selves-for-a-Better-America.html>; Wen, Leana S. (Oct. 21, 2025). Utah Valley University faced a choice after Charlie Kirk's killing: The school's president sought to care for her community after the shocking assassination. Available online: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2025/10/21/charlie-kirk-utah-valley-university-uvu-healing-tuminez/>.

48 Lukianoff, G. (Nov. 7, 2025). Speaking at the site of a murder: My speech at Utah Valley University — and why America must not become like everybody else. Available online: <https://eternallyradicalidea.com/p/speaking-at-the-site-of-a-murder>.

said that it was “not very” or “not at all” clear. Last year, these percentages were 42% and 12%, respectively. Improvement was even more evident when students were asked how likely it was their administration would protect speech rights during a controversy. Last year, 29% of UVU students said it was “very” or “extremely” likely their administration would do so, while 16% said it was “not very” or “not at all” likely. This year, those percentages were 42% and 15%, respectively. In terms of the College Free Speech Rankings, UVU’s “Administrative Support” score increased compared with last year, and the university ranks 24 on this component.

Yet, it is also evident that the assassination has had negative effects on the campus speech climate.

In that same survey conducted in the month following the assassination, UVU students said that after what happened to Charlie Kirk, they were less comfortable expressing views on a controversial political topic during a class discussion, in a common campus space, or to other students on social media than their peers nationwide. UVU students were also considerably less comfortable attending public events on campus and even attending class. The percentage of UVU students reporting self-censorship at least a few times a week also increased after Kirk’s assassination, compared with the percentage of UVU students who reported this in the spring of 2025.⁴⁹

Then this past spring, the campus chapters of TPUSA and the College Republicans, state and federal politicians, and members of the general public all opposed the university’s announcement of Sharon McMahon, an author, educator, and podcaster, as its commencement speaker because of a series of social media posts she had made criticizing Charlie Kirk after his assassination.⁵⁰ In response to the backlash, UVU rescinded McMahon’s invitation to deliver the commencement address, citing “increased safety concerns.”⁵¹

The data from the UVU students surveyed this spring for this year’s *College Free Speech Rankings* also showed that Kirk’s assassination had lasting effects on that particular campus.

When asked to “share a moment where you personally felt you could not express your opinion on your campus because of how you thought other students, a professor, or the administration would respond,” UVU students from across the political spectrum reported a chilling effect on their speech. Their responses included:

There’s one side whose opinion is assumed to be the “wrong” one but apparently public assent. I have personally heard threats on campus of violence towards those who share opinions with right-wing figures like Charlie Kirk.
— **Very conservative student**

I attend the University in where Charlie Kirk was shot and often disagree with conservative/ right winged discussions about his influence in free speech and open discussion. Tables advocating for what he believed in are often set up around my campus and I know if I openly disagreed with what they are doing, majority of the student body would disagree with me.
— **Very liberal student**

49 Stevens, S.T. (2025). After the earthquake: How the assassination of Charlie Kirk is reshaping campus speech nationwide. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/how-assassination-charlie-kirk-reshaping-campus-speech-nationwide>.

50 Aitken, P. (April 11, 2026). Conservatives furious with university where Charlie Kirk died — what to know. Available online: <https://www.newsweek.com/conservatives-furious-utah-valley-university-charlie-kirk-sharon-mcmahon-11816314>.

51 Alonso, J. (April 17, 2026). Commencement speaker who criticized Charlie Kirk out at UVU. Available online: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2026/04/17/commencement-speaker-who-criticized-charlie-kirk-out-uvu>; Lamb, M. (April 16, 2026). Utah Valley University drops graduation speaker who called Charlie Kirk ‘bigoted’ after murder. Available online: <https://www.thecollegefix.com/utah-valley-university-drops-graduation-speaker-who-called-charlie-kirk-bigoted-after-murder/>.

I feel I can't express my opinion on Charlie Kirk or the President. MAGAs are extremely hot headed and vengeful. I also don't feel comfortable expressing facts about transgenderism being a mental illness, even though I wish no ill will against them. I find many in the trans community to exhibit similar qualities to MAGAs when being confronted with facts. — **Slightly conservative student**

Last semester there was a lot of talk on campus about Charlie Kirk and I felt in a lot of my conversations I would've got a bad reaction from other if I shared that I was against him coming to speak in the first place and that he spread harmful rhetoric. — **Somewhat liberal student**

students have expressed they hold beliefs that people like me should be discriminated against in certain ways. (posting about charlie kirk, trump, etc, as well as religious beliefs). even though they dont talk about them around me, knowing they hold these beliefs, i dont feel safe considering I've had friends be harassed, bullied, and gotten threats for sharing similar opinions. — **Very liberal student**

Other student survey responses reinforced these experiences.

Charlie Kirk was the most difficult topic to discuss on UVU's campus, with 62% of students identifying it as difficult to discuss; 44% of students nationally said this. Other topics identified by a notable portion of UVU students included: abortion (54%), Donald Trump (53%), transgender rights (53%), gun control (51%), gay rights (46%), and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (42%). In this year's *College Free Speech Rankings*, UVU declined noticeably on "Openness," and ranks 251 on this component compared to 183 last year.

Additionally, the percentage of UVU students who said they self-censor frequently, at least a few times a week, also increased. Last year, roughly a quarter of UVU students said they self-censored frequently in conversations with other students (24%), in conversations with professors (27%), and during classroom discussions (24%).

As with "Openness," UVU's score on "Self-Censorship" noticeably declined, and the university ranks 230 on this component compared to 96 last year.

About half of UVU students (51%) surveyed this year reported that they were "somewhat" or "very" uncomfortable expressing their views on a controversial political topic during a class discussion, compared with 40% last year. The result was essentially identical for expressing views on a controversial political topic in a common campus space, with 52% of UVU students saying they were "somewhat" or "very" uncomfortable doing so this year, compared with 40% last year. Like its scores on "Openness" and "Self-Censorship," UVU's score on "Comfort Expressing Ideas" declined, and the university ranks 153 compared to 23 last year.

Overall, UVU ranks 210 out of 261 schools — down from 71 out of 257 last year — and its overall score declined compared with last year. This placement is painful but understandable: A public figure was assassinated on campus in front of many students engaging in free speech and open debate. As several liberal and conservative UVU students told us (see student quotes above) — the chilling effect of this assassination persists. Charlie Kirk was the most difficult topic to discuss on campus. Comfort expressing views is down, self-censorship is up.

There is no doubt that the speech climate at UVU is currently a challenging one. The administration has made some laudable efforts, but its decision to rescind Sharon McMahon's commencement invitation was a mistake. Rather than deplatforming McMahon, UVU should respond to every instance of and every call for censorship with a clear defense of free expression.

Percentage of UVU Students Who Identify Each Topic As Difficult To Discuss

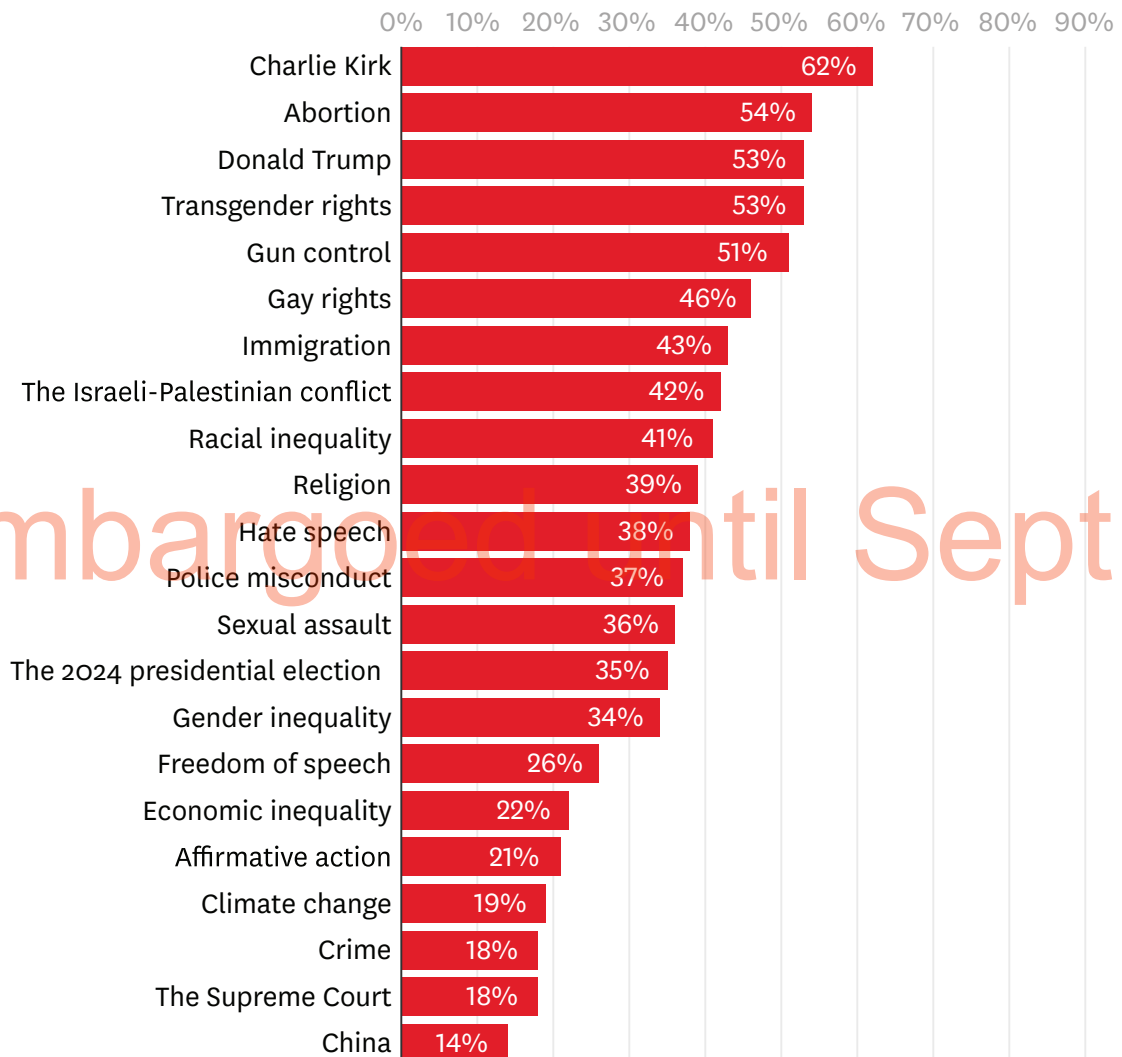


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE/College Pulse

National Trends: A Chilling Climate For Campus Speech

After seven years of surveying almost 350,000 college undergraduates nationwide, a sobering picture has emerged: Students are reluctant to speak their minds, especially on controversial political issues. Many report that they self-censor regularly, avoid certain topics entirely, and doubt their administrators would defend free expression if controversy struck.

This year, many students continue to report difficulty discussing a number of important social and political issues openly and honestly. Significant numbers also believe it's acceptable to shout down a speaker, block access to events, or even resort to violence to silence campus speech. Many also show low tolerance for controversial speakers.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains the most taboo topic on campuses across the country for the third year in a row. This year, half of students nationwide identified this topic as difficult to discuss, down from 53% last year and 55% two years ago. This year, students were also reluctant to talk about two public figures, Charlie Kirk and Donald Trump, and reported increased concern discussing immigration. As in prior years, abortion and transgender rights were identified as difficult topics.

Last year, we reported that the percentages of students who said it was acceptable for other students to shout down a speaker, block entry to an event, or use violence to stop a campus speech were all at record highs in the history of the *College Free Speech Rankings*.⁵² This year, each of these percentages declined slightly — although they each remain at disturbingly high levels.

Finally, for the second year in a row, a majority of students opposed allowing each of the six controversial speakers included in the survey — three liberal and three conservative — to speak on campus.



This year, many students continue to report difficulty discussing a number of important social and political issues openly and honestly.

Embargoed until Sept. 9

52 Stevens, S.T. (2025). *2026 College Free Speech Rankings: What's the Climate for Free Speech on America's College Campuses*. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/2026-college-free-speech-rankings>.

Percentage Of Students Nationwide Who Identify Each Topic As Difficult To Discuss

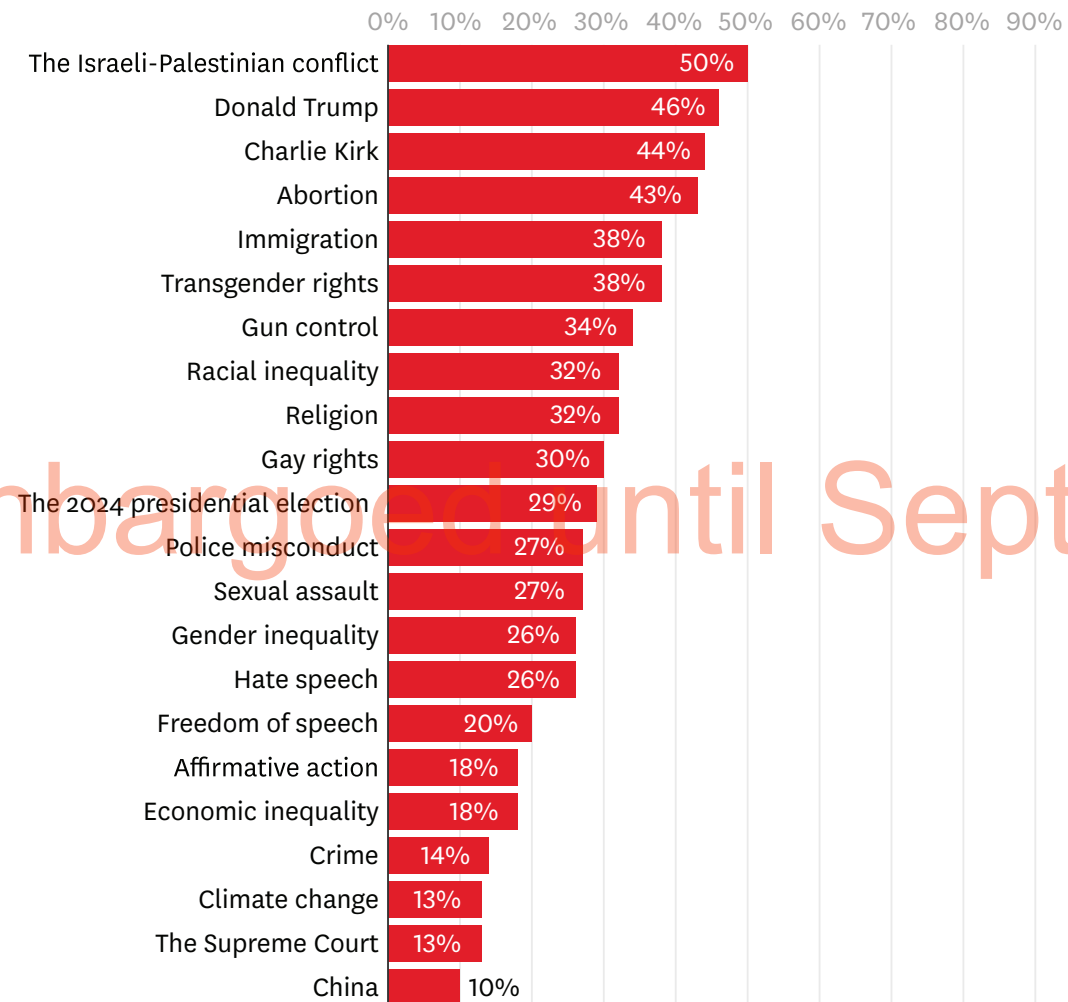


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Percentage Of Students Nationwide Who Found Each Of The Three Kinds of Illiberal Protest Actions Acceptable

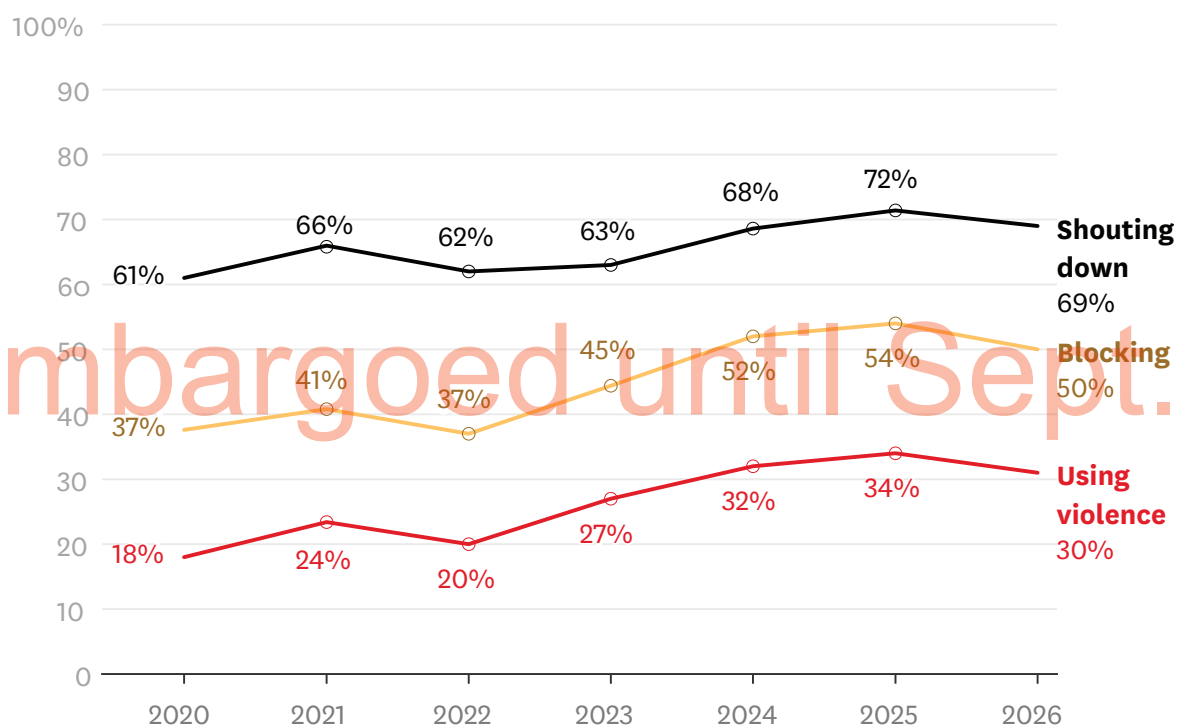


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Percentage Of Students Nationwide Saying Each Speaker Should Be Allowed On Campus

- Transgender people have a mental disorder.
- Abortion should be completely illegal.
- Black Lives Matter is a hate group.
- The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.
- - The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan.
- - Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

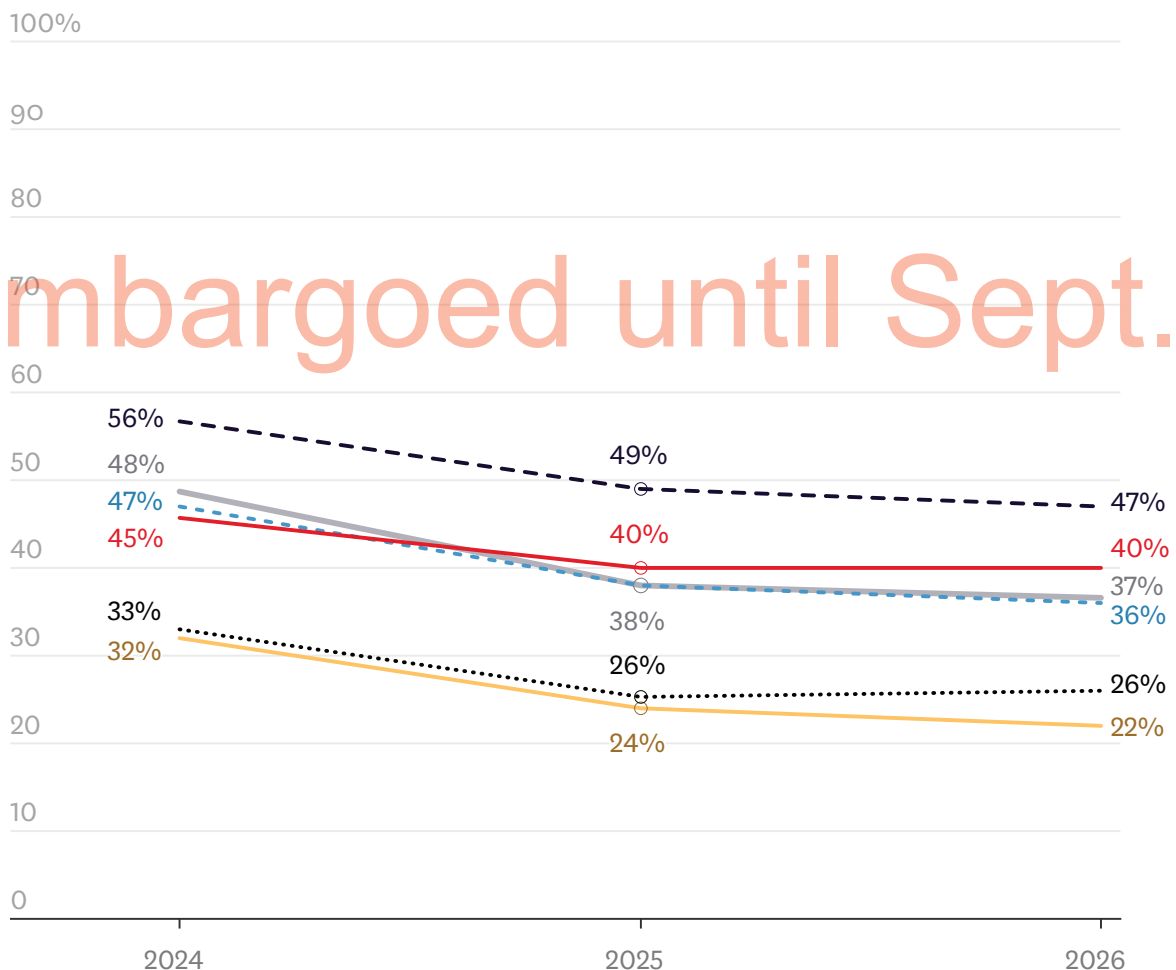


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Conclusion: Reasons For Cautious Optimism

This year's average overall score (61.36) is the highest ever recorded in seven years. Moreover, 140 schools received passing grades, compared to 91 last year. These results offer reasons for cautious optimism.

At the same time, the top two schools — the University of Chicago and Claremont McKenna College — earned the two highest scores ever, 81.42 and 80.13, respectively, and both scores correspond to a B-. The average score among the top five schools is a C+ (79.27). Thus, even the “best” schools for free speech still have plenty of work to do to create a truly open environment for expression on their campuses. When the scope is expanded to all of the 261 schools ranked this year, just 24 receive a C or better, and 121 of them still receive a failing grade.

These results are not solely a reflection of college policies or administrators. Campus speech climates are also shaped by broader cultural forces, including political polarization, intolerance of disagreement, and fear of social consequences. Colleges cannot fully control the attitudes students bring to campus, but their policies, leadership, and responses to controversy can either strengthen or weaken the culture of free expression.

In other words, while there have been improvements at a number of schools, the overall state of affairs for free speech on American college and university campuses remains very concerning.

Over the past seven years, it has become apparent that strong leadership at colleges and universities is needed to establish at the very least the basic conditions of an open expressive environment. Schools that clearly and consistently support First Amendment protections and

do the best they can to establish a campus environment that prioritizes open expression perform better in FIRE's College Free Speech Rankings. This comes not just from sending messages to students and faculty on campus that the school values free and open expression, but also from consistently demonstrating that they mean what they say on this issue when controversy inevitably erupts.

We do not think Harvard's improvement this year — it ranked 245 last year after finishing dead last in the 2024 and 2025 rankings — is a coincidence.⁵³ Its new leadership has made its support of the First Amendment clear.⁵⁴ The school's rise in the rankings is the result of a significant improvement in its score on “Administrative Support,” the decay of penalties imposed for older campus speech controversies, and the absence of new penalties for new controversies.

In many ways, Harvard's story is similar to those of other schools over the past seven years. DePauw University, the University of South Carolina, Vanderbilt University, Dartmouth College, and others have reformed their policies and then, when faced with controversy, continued to stand firm in their reinvigorated support for the First Amendment.

This is the way.

We hope more colleges and universities start to agree with us in the coming years.

53 Stevens, S.T. (2023). 2024 College Free Speech Rankings: What's the Climate for Free Speech on America's College Campuses. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/2024-college-free-speech-rankings>; Stevens, S.T. (2024). 2025 College Free Speech Rankings: What's the Climate for Free Speech on America's College Campuses. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/2025-college-free-speech-rankings>; Stevens, S.T. (2025). 2026 College Free Speech Rankings: What's the Climate for Free Speech on America's College Campuses. The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression. Available online: <https://www.thefire.org/research-learn/2026-college-free-speech-rankings>.

54 Chiasson, H.C., Mahajan, A.S., & Spenner, E.A. (May 28, 2026). Garber opens 375th commencement with defense of academic freedom. Available online: <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2026/5/28/garber-commencement-2026/>; Garber, A. (April 14, 2025). The promise of American higher education. Available online: <https://www.harvard.edu/president/news/2025/the-promise-of-american-higher-education/>; Patel, D. T. & Yoon, G.E. (May 27, 2025). Garber defends international students, pledges continued support amid legal battle. Available online: <https://www.thecrimson.com/article/2025/5/27/garber-international-students/>.

Topline Results

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

Not at all clear	3%
Not very clear	14%
Somewhat clear	42%
Very clear	31%
Extremely clear	9%

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

Not at all likely	4%
Not very likely	20%
Somewhat likely	50%
Very likely	21%
Extremely likely	5%

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

Publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic.

Very uncomfortable	21%
Somewhat uncomfortable	36%
Somewhat comfortable	32%
Very comfortable	12%

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

Very uncomfortable	14%
Somewhat uncomfortable	33%
Somewhat comfortable	39%
Very comfortable	15%

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

Very uncomfortable	15%
Somewhat uncomfortable	33%
Somewhat comfortable	39%
Very comfortable	14%

Expressing your views on a controversial political topic to other students during a discussion in a common campus space such as a quad, dining hall, or lounge.

Very uncomfortable	12%
Somewhat uncomfortable	31%
Somewhat comfortable	40%
Very comfortable	17%

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

Very uncomfortable	27%
Somewhat uncomfortable	35%
Somewhat comfortable	28%
Very comfortable	10%

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

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

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

Never	11%
Rarely	33%
Occasionally, once or twice a month	33%
Fairly often, a couple times a week	18%
Very often, nearly every day	6%

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

Never	10%
Rarely	31%
Occasionally, once or twice a month	33%
Fairly often, a couple times a week	19%
Very often, nearly every day	8%

How often do you self-censor during conversations with school administrators?

Never	13%
Rarely	31%
Occasionally, once or twice a month	30%
Fairly often, a couple times a week	18%
Very often, nearly every day	9%

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Never	8%
Rarely	29%
Occasionally, once or twice a month	35%
Fairly often, a couple times a week	20%
Very often, nearly every day	7%

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

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

Always acceptable	5%
Sometimes acceptable	30%
Rarely acceptable	34%
Never acceptable	31%

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Always acceptable	3%
Sometimes acceptable	17%
Rarely acceptable	30%
Never acceptable	50%

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Always acceptable	3%
Sometimes acceptable	12%
Rarely acceptable	16%
Never acceptable	70%

Student groups often invite speakers to campus to express their views on a range of topics. Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school **ALLOW** or **NOT ALLOW** a speaker on campus who has previously expressed the following idea?

Transgender people have a mental disorder.

Definitely should not allow this speaker	42%
Probably should not allow this speaker	33%
Probably should allow this speaker	17%
Definitely should allow this speaker	9%

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Definitely should not allow this speaker	28%
Probably should not allow this speaker	32%
Probably should allow this speaker	28%
Definitely should allow this speaker	12%

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Definitely should not allow this speaker	47%
Probably should not allow this speaker	31%
Probably should allow this speaker	15%
Definitely should allow this speaker	7%

The Catholic Church is a pedophilic institution.

Definitely should not allow this speaker	26%
Probably should not allow this speaker	37%
Probably should allow this speaker	26%
Definitely should allow this speaker	10%

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

Definitely should not allow this speaker	28%
Probably should not allow this speaker	36%
Probably should allow this speaker	26%
Definitely should allow this speaker	10%

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Definitely should not allow this speaker	20%
Probably should not allow this speaker	33%
Probably should allow this speaker	35%
Definitely should allow this speaker	12%

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 all that apply.)

Abortion	43%
Affirmative action	18%
Charlie Kirk	44%
China	10%
Climate change	13%
Crime	14%
Donald Trump	46%
Economic inequality	18%
Freedom of speech	20%
Gay rights	30%
Gender inequality	26%
Gun control	34%
Hate speech	26%
Immigration	38%
The Israeli-Palestinian conflict	50%
The 2024 presidential election	29%
Police misconduct	27%
Racial inequality	32%
Religion	32%
Sexual assault	27%
The Supreme Court	13%
Transgender rights	38%
None of the above	17%

[Note: The remaining questions below are not factored into the calculation of the College Free Speech Rankings.]

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

Never	22%
Rarely	37%
Occasionally, once or twice a month	25%
Fairly often, a couple times a week	10%
Very often, nearly every day	5%

Have you ever been disciplined by your college's administration for expression on campus?

Yes, I have been disciplined.	3%
No, but I have been threatened with discipline.	12%
I have not been disciplined nor threatened with discipline.	85%

How often, if at all, do you think your college would punish you for saying ...

“Bigots who say hateful things deserve to be shot.”

Never	16%
Rarely	15%
Sometimes	25%
Fairly often	24%
Always	20%

“Gun nuts worship their AR-15s more than they value human lives.”

Never	33%
Rarely	27%
Sometimes	23%
Fairly often	10%
Always	6%

“Illegal immigrants should be arrested and deported.”

Never	25%
Rarely	23%
Sometimes	25%
Fairly often	16%
Always	11%

“Debate me. Prove me wrong.”

Never	59%
Rarely	21%
Sometimes	13%
Fairly often	4%
Always	2%

“If a trans-identified male is in a female-only space, he is committing a violent, abusive act.”

Never	23%
Rarely	23%
Sometimes	28%
Fairly often	16%
Always	9%

If a professor on your campus said any of the following statements on social media after Charlie Kirk's assassination, **SHOULD THEY or SHOULD THEY NOT** be fired from their job?

"It's O.K. to punch a Nazi."

The professor definitely should not be fired from their job	31%
---	-----

The professor probably should not be fired from their job	40%
---	-----

The professor probably should be fired from their job	19%
---	-----

The professor definitely should be fired from their job	10%
---	-----

"These fascist Bible-thumpers want to drag us back to the Dark Ages."

The professor definitely should not be fired from their job	16%
---	-----

The professor probably should not be fired from their job	36%
---	-----

The professor probably should be fired from their job	32%
---	-----

The professor definitely should be fired from their job	15%
---	-----

"We are going to make America great again."

The professor definitely should not be fired from their job	23%
---	-----

The professor probably should not be fired from their job	43%
---	-----

The professor probably should be fired from their job	22%
---	-----

The professor definitely should be fired from their job	11%
---	-----

"Our colleges and universities are progressive indoctrination centers."

The professor definitely should not be fired from their job	16%
---	-----

The professor probably should not be fired from their job	41%
---	-----

The professor probably should be fired from their job	31%
---	-----

The professor definitely should be fired from their job	11%
---	-----

Embargoed until Sept. 9

2027 College Free Speech Rankings

Rank	School	Overall Score	Climate	Students
1	University of Chicago	81.42	B-	272
2	Claremont McKenna College	80.13	B-	152
3	Georgia Institute of Technology-Main Campus	78.98	C+	275
4	Michigan Technological University	78.72	C+	159
5	Vanderbilt University	77.09	C+	213
6	Dartmouth College	76.96	C+	181
7	Purdue University-Main Campus	76.90	C+	312
8	Appalachian State University	76.40	C	290
9	University of Virginia-Main Campus	75.98	C	320
10	George Mason University	75.97	C	312
11	University of North Carolina at Greensboro	75.24	C	287
12	University of North Carolina at Charlotte	75.01	C	277
13	Middle Tennessee State University	73.84	C	262
14	University of South Carolina-Columbia	73.68	C	320
15	East Carolina University	73.55	C	323
16	Eastern Kentucky University	73.53	C	168
17	University of Missouri-St Louis	73.45	C	188
18	North Carolina State University at Raleigh	73.37	C	315
19	Colorado Mesa University	73.25	C	348
20	University of Tulsa	73.12	C	174
21	Florida State University	73.05	C	321
22	University of South Florida	72.69	C	276
23	University of Colorado Boulder	72.60	C	350
24	University of California-Davis	72.55	C	277
25	DePauw University	72.47	C-	161
26	Oregon State University	72.07	C-	283
27	University of Arizona	71.78	C-	278
28	William & Mary	71.60	C-	270
29	Arizona State University Campus Immersion	71.57	C-	278

Rank	School	Overall Score	Climate Grade	Students Surveyed
30	University of Missouri-Columbia	71.44	C-	286
31	University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill	71.21	C-	347
32	Northern Arizona University	70.78	C-	282
33	University of Mississippi	70.68	C-	187
34	Mississippi State University	70.27	C-	244
35	Kansas State University	70.01	C-	227
36	University of Maryland-College Park	69.93	C-	312
37	University of Wyoming	69.01	D+	150
38	University of Louisville	69.00	D+	148
39	Auburn University	68.29	D+	316
40	The University of Alabama	68.28	D+	280
41	University of Alabama in Huntsville	67.96	D+	181
42	Clemson University	67.82	D+	309
43	Virginia Commonwealth University	67.55	D+	285
44	University of New Hampshire-Main Campus	67.38	D+	329
45	University of Alabama at Birmingham	66.99	D+	236
46	Iowa State University	66.94	D+	299
47	The University of Tennessee-Knoxville	66.82	D+	306
48	The University of Texas at El Paso	66.81	D+	207
49	Colgate University	66.78	D+	103
50	Duke University	66.76	D+	225
51	University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire	66.38	D	283
52	Southern Methodist University	66.31	D	182
53	The University of Texas at Arlington	66.00	D	314
54	Utah State University	65.98	D	298
55	Stanford University	65.83	D	294
56	Washington University in St Louis	65.67	D	282
57	Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College	65.29	D	244
58	North Carolina A & T State University	65.26	D	297
59	Boise State University	65.12	D	169

Rank	School	Overall Score	Climate Grade	Students Surveyed
60	Washington and Lee University	65.06	D	103
61	University of Wisconsin-Madison	65.05	D	361
62	Franklin and Marshall College	65.05	D	101
63	Davidson College	64.88	D	100
64	Wright State University-Main Campus	64.82	D	153
65	Syracuse University	64.79	D	344
66	University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee	64.73	D	271
67	The University of Texas at San Antonio	64.71	D	265
68	Emory University	64.64	D	297
69	Clark University	64.61	D	156
70	Michigan State University	64.49	D	318
71	Harvard University	64.42	D	287
72	Yale University	64.13	D	280
73	University of Central Florida	64.09	D	285
74	Northeastern Illinois University	64.05	D	107
75	Oklahoma State University-Main Campus	63.79	D	204
76	Kenyon College	63.57	D	151
77	Miami University-Oxford	63.56	D	294
78	University of Nevada-Las Vegas	63.51	D	270
79	University of Colorado Colorado Springs	63.39	D	220
80	Bowling Green State University-Main Campus	63.38	D	291
81	University of Missouri-Kansas City	63.14	D	271
82	Colorado School of Mines	63.11	D	193
83	Florida International University	63.09	D	169
84	Furman University	63.06	D	202
85	Gettysburg College	63.04	D	211
86	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	63.03	D	290
87	University of Idaho	63.01	D	289
88	Denison University	62.98	D	176

Rank	School	Overall Score	Climate Grade	Students Surveyed
89	Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University	62.91	D	319
90	Northwestern University	62.88	D	358
91	University of Toledo	62.86	D	155
92	Georgia State University	62.84	D	265
93	Washington State University	62.82	D	266
94	University of California-Los Angeles	62.69	D	330
95	Wheaton College (Massachusetts)	62.62	D	155
96	University of Colorado Denver/Anschutz Medical Campus	62.60	D	267
97	University of Georgia	62.59	D	314
98	Brown University	62.54	D	289
99	University of Oklahoma-Norman Campus	62.34	D-	200
100	Florida Atlantic University	62.27	D-	301
101	Ohio University-Main Campus	62.27	D-	307
102	University of Nebraska-Lincoln	62.19	D-	392
103	University of Maine	62.16	D-	277
104	University of Nevada-Reno	62.07	D-	235
105	University of Iowa	62.03	D-	271
106	Amherst College	62.01	D-	84
107	Montana State University	61.93	D-	245
108	University of Cincinnati-Main Campus	61.84	D-	284
109	Williams College	61.79	D-	118
110	Western Michigan University	61.79	D-	293
111	University of Kansas	61.76	D-	291
112	Worcester Polytechnic Institute	61.57	D-	228
113	Chapman University	61.19	D-	285
114	Johns Hopkins University	61.19	D-	262
115	Towson University	61.08	D-	291
116	Carleton College	60.93	D-	112
117	Georgetown University	60.73	D-	150
118	California State University-Los Angeles	60.70	D-	223

Rank	School	Overall Score	Climate Grade	Students Surveyed
119	University of Florida	60.60	D-	283
120	Wesleyan University	60.57	D-	115
121	Case Western Reserve University	60.47	D-	288
122	Berea College	60.44	D-	177
123	Brandeis University	60.39	D-	271
124	The University of Texas at Austin	60.30	D-	339
125	Hamilton College	60.22	D-	112
126	Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute	60.18	D-	287
127	University at Buffalo	60.18	D-	302
128	Lehigh University	60.08	D-	286
129	University of Illinois Chicago	60.04	D-	242
130	Wayne State University	60.01	D-	327
131	University of Utah	59.99	D-	294
132	California Institute of Technology	59.87	D-	76
133	Haverford College	59.86	D-	82
134	Arkansas State University	59.84	D-	309
135	Colorado State University-Fort Collins	59.84	D-	319
136	Skidmore College	59.81	D-	199
137	Southeast Missouri State University	59.80	D-	166
138	California State University-Long Beach	59.75	D-	299
139	New Jersey Institute of Technology	59.57	D-	299
140	Boston University	59.50	D-	326
141	Missouri State University-Springfield	59.49	F	296
142	Eastern Michigan University	59.46	F	214
143	Illinois State University	59.46	F	273
144	University of California-Irvine	59.40	F	294
145	Temple University	59.36	F	293
146	University of California-Merced	59.28	F	275
147	University at Albany	59.25	F	255
147	Colby College	59.25	F	150
149	SUNY College at Geneseo	59.19	F	204

Rank	School	Overall Score	Climate Grade	Students Surveyed
150	University of Denver	59.16	F	158
151	University of California-Riverside	59.14	F	278
152	University of California-Santa Barbara	59.12	F	336
153	West Virginia University	59.11	F	273
154	University of California-Santa Cruz	59.04	F	289
155	American University	59.03	F	192
156	University of New Mexico-Main Campus	59.02	F	279
157	University of Hawaii at Manoa	59.02	F	320
158	North Dakota State University-Main Campus	58.98	F	297
159	Wake Forest University	58.77	F	172
160	Pitzer College	58.77	F	114
161	Colorado College	58.71	F	102
162	Tufts University	58.68	F	216
163	Pennsylvania State University-Main Campus	58.60	F	291
164	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	58.56	F	361
165	Central Michigan University	58.56	F	284
166	University of Michigan-Ann Arbor	58.46	F	327
167	Scripps College	58.40	F	154
168	University of Memphis	58.37	F	310
169	Dakota State University	58.37	F	150
170	Vassar College	58.31	F	150
171	James Madison University	58.26	F	298
172	Knox College	58.26	F	81
173	Fordham University	58.20	F	165
174	Ohio State University-Main Campus	58.18	F	333
175	New Mexico State University-Main Campus	58.18	F	155
176	Princeton University	58.13	F	212
177	University of Delaware	58.07	F	283
178	University of Vermont	57.97	F	240
179	University of Oregon	57.96	F	315
180	University of Massachusetts-Amherst	57.93	F	302

Rank	School	Overall Score	Climate Grade	Students Surveyed
181	Duquesne University	57.88	F	294
182	Fort Lewis College	57.85	F	150
183	University of Houston	57.82	F	274
184	Harvey Mudd College	57.79	F	100
185	Montclair State University	57.75	F	198
186	Bowdoin College	57.72	F	152
187	Carnegie Mellon University	57.68	F	232
188	San Diego State University	57.67	F	206
189	Kent State University at Kent	57.65	F	338
190	Binghamton University	57.56	F	277
191	Bard College	57.48	F	88
192	Texas A&M University-College Station	57.37	F	298
193	Texas Tech University	57.30	F	250
194	Oberlin College	57.19	F	86
195	University of Connecticut	57.01	F	334
196	Stony Brook University	57.00	F	313
197	George Washington University	56.96	F	318
198	University of Southern California	56.84	F	293
199	College of Charleston	56.79	F	213
200	University of California-San Diego	56.61	F	288
201	Bucknell University	56.52	F	171
202	University of Kentucky	56.51	F	292
203	University of Rhode Island	56.50	F	279
204	University of Minnesota-Twin Cities	56.49	F	288
205	University of Pittsburgh-Pittsburgh Campus	56.36	F	317
206	Clarkson University	56.28	F	89
207	Macalester College	56.01	F	102
208	California State University-Fresno	55.98	F	299
209	Connecticut College	55.97	F	155
210	Utah Valley University	55.81	F	246

Rank	School	Overall Score	Climate Grade	Students Surveyed
211	Santa Clara University	55.75	F	259
212	Wellesley College	55.73	F	179
213	Tulane University of Louisiana	55.66	F	217
214	Rowan University	55.63	F	185
215	University of California-Berkeley	55.58	F	293
216	Stevens Institute of Technology	55.57	F	297
217	Swarthmore College	55.49	F	110
218	Occidental College	55.48	F	117
219	Cornell University	55.48	F	289
220	Illinois Institute of Technology	55.46	F	175
221	Barnard College	55.45	F	101
222	University of Alaska Anchorage	55.17	F	105
223	Trinity College	55.16	F	161
224	Smith College	55.04	F	167
225	Adams State University	54.70	F	101
226	Pomona College	54.59	F	153
227	University of Pennsylvania	54.42	F	297
228	Mount Holyoke College	54.36	F	151
229	University of Rochester	54.29	F	181
230	Bates College	54.22	F	83
231	Marquette University	54.05	F	272
232	University of Notre Dame	54.04	F	243
233	California Polytechnic State University-San Luis Obispo	53.99	F	234
234	University of San Francisco	53.96	F	187
235	Lafayette College	53.88	F	177
236	Creighton University	53.79	F	227
237	University of Dayton	53.75	F	275
238	Portland State University	53.72	F	178
239	Southern Illinois University-Carbondale	53.71	F	201
240	San Jose State University	53.44	F	229
241	DePaul University	53.39	F	215

Rank	School	Overall Score	Climate Grade	Students Surveyed
242	University of Arkansas	53.26	F	177
243	Southern Illinois University Edwardsville	53.11	F	278
244	Grinnell College	53.06	F	118
245	Middlebury College	52.93	F	150
246	Columbia University in the City of New York	52.77	F	185
247	Villanova University	52.50	F	172
248	University of North Texas	52.49	F	266
249	Drexel University	52.39	F	337
250	Rice University	52.37	F	208
251	The University of Texas at Dallas	52.30	F	330
252	Howard University	51.40	F	326
253	University of Miami	51.39	F	311
254	Loyola University Chicago	51.21	F	270
255	Boston College	50.86	F	291
256	Indiana University-Bloomington	50.60	F	341
257	Rutgers University-New Brunswick	49.91	F	381
258	Northeastern University	49.78	F	252
259	Texas State University	47.82	F	349
260	University of Washington-Seattle Campus	47.50	F	293
261	New York University	44.97	F	245

Appendix

TABLE 1. SPEECH CONTROVERSIES AND OUTCOMES AT LOWEST-RANKED SCHOOLS

School	Year	Speech controversy	Current penalty
Rutgers University	2026	Campus security removed multiple individuals who attempted to disrupt an event featuring Yossi Hertz, a former Israel Defense Forces soldier. ⁵⁵	-1 point
Rutgers University	2026	Rescinding an invitation to Rami Elghandour, an alumnus and the chairman and CEO of Arcellx, to deliver the School of Engineering's commencement convocation address because of social media posts he made accusing Israel of war crimes and apartheid. ⁵⁶	-3 points
Rutgers University	2025	Cancellation of a virtual mini-conference featuring multiple presidents from historically black colleges and universities after Trump's executive orders restricting the use of federal funds on DEI initiatives. ⁵⁷	-2 points
Rutgers University	2024	Disruption of a presidential town hall by pro-Palestinian protesters. ⁵⁸	-1 point

55 Wallin, J. (April 24, 2026). Protest unfolds outside IDF soldier event's campus venue. Available online: <https://dailytargum.com/article/protest-unfolds-outside-idf-soldier-speech-campus-venue-20260424>.

56 Quinn, R. (May 7, 2026). Rutgers disinvites engineering graduation speaker after he criticizes Israel. Available online: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2026/05/07/rutgers-disinvites-grad-speaker-after-he-criticizes-israel>.

57 Blake, J. (January 24, 2025). Rutgers center cancels conference in response to Trump DEI orders. Available online: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2025/01/24/rutgers-cancels-hbcu-event-align-trump-dei-orders#>.

58 Stimson, B. (April 6, 2024). Jewish students at Rutgers speak out in wake of latest anti-Israel incident on campus: 'Horrible experience': Video of the incident showed pro-Palestinian protesters chanting after Rutgers' president said the school wouldn't sever ties with Tel Aviv University. Available online: <https://www.foxnews.com/us/jewish-students-rutgers-speak-latest-anti-israel-incident-campus-horrifying-experience>.

School	Year	Speech controversy	Current penalty
Northeastern University	2025	Organizers canceled a planned lecture by Raz Segal, an Israeli historian and genocide scholar, after the Northeastern University Police Department demanded a list of names of all the registered attendees. ⁵⁹	-2 points
Texas State University	2025	The termination of Thomas Alter, a tenured professor of history, for delivering an online talk during the Revolutionary Socialism Conference in which he critiqued capitalism, called for organizing a “revolutionary socialist party,” and posed a rhetorical challenge about how to overthrow the U.S. government. ⁶⁰	-4 points
Texas State University	2025	The expulsion of a student after a video went viral showing him mocking the assassination of Charlie Kirk during a campus vigil. The video drew national attention, including from Texas Governor Greg Abbott and Rudy Giuliani, both of whom publicly called for the student’s expulsion. ⁶¹	-2 points

59 Zullo, D. (April 30, 2025). Northeastern under fire for allegedly demanding guest list for talk by Israeli historian: The guest speaker event with Raz Segal, an Israeli historian, was scheduled to take place March 27 before the talk was canceled. Available online: <https://www.boston.com/news/local-news/2025/04/30/northeastern-faces-condemnation-after-allegedly-demanding-attendee-list-for-talk-by-israeli-historian/>.

60 Runnels, A. (September 10, 2025). Texas State fires professor accused of trying to incite political violence in video. Thomas Alter’s lawyer said the professor would seek legal action for being fired after allegedly violating university policy in a video posted on social media. Available online: <https://www.texastribune.org/2025/09/10/texas-state-university-professor-fired/>.

61 Quinn, R. (September 18, 2025). Texas Governor targets students who allegedly mocked Kirk’s death: Republican Greg Abbott called online for Texas State to expel a student. He says it did, raising further alarm from higher ed observers about the conservative crackdown on people denigrating the slain activist. Available online: <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/free-speech/2025/09/18/abbott-targets-students-who-allegedly-mocked-kirks-death>.

School	Year	Speech controversy	Current penalty
Texas State University	2025	The hosting of Dr. Khalid el-Hakim's Black History 101 Mobile Museum on campus was canceled following consultation with "supervisors and the leadership team" who cited "Senate Bill 17 (88R), the climate of our State, and certain topics covered as part of the museum" as reasons for the cancellation. ⁶²	-2 points
Texas State University	2025	Idris Robinson, a professor of philosophy, was first placed on leave and then later informed his contract would not be renewed nearly a year after he was accused on social media for inciting violence by delivering a talk titled "Strategic Lessons from the Palestinian Resistance" at the Another Carolina Anarchist Book Fair in Asheville, North Carolina. ⁶³	-2 points
University of Washington	2026	Investigating Mara Maughan, a research scientist and engineer at the university, after public backlash over her comment on an X post by school-choice activist Corey DeAngelis that said "may there be tyler robinsons for you all." ⁶⁴	-1 point

62 Solomon, T. (December 18, 2025). Texas State University cancels Black History 101 Mobile Museum visit, prompting ACLU challenge. Available online: <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/news/txst-black-history-101-mobile-museum-visit-aclu-challenge-1234767478/>.

63 Priest, J. (March 25, 2026). Texas State University professor's firing after Israeli-Palestinian comments blocked: Philosophy professor Idris Robinson argued that his comments, made in an off-campus setting, were protected speech. Available online: <https://www.texastribune.org/2026/03/25/texas-state-university-professor-lawsuit-fired-israel-palestine/>.

64 Gill, J. (January 15, 2026). UW investigates researcher over alleged violent social media post targeting conservatives. Available online: <https://seattlered.com/culture/uw-scientist-investigation/4116104>.

School	Year	Speech controversy	Current penalty
University of Washington	2026	Repeated attempts to disrupt a TPUSA event featuring Nick Freitas, a former member of the Virginia House of Delegates. Before and during the event, opposing student-side actors sought to interfere with it. Counterprotesters gathered outside the event tent, chanting and using drums to drown out the speaker, and the campus chapter of Students for a Democratic Society had urged students beforehand to “shut down” and “yell [Turning Point USA] off our campus.” ⁶⁵	-2 points
University of Washington	2026	The cancellation of an event featuring Noa Cochva, a former Israel Defense Forces (IDF) combat medic and Miss Israel 2021, due to public opposition and anticipated safety concerns. ⁶⁶	-3 points
University of Washington	2026	The postponement of an event featuring Chloe Cole, a detransitioner and opponent of gender-affirming care, following public opposition to Cole’s appearance on campus in the aftermath of the killing of a 19-year-old transgender student connected to university-affiliated housing. ⁶⁷	-1 point

65 Collins, T. & Hull, A. (April 29, 2026). Student arrested for disrupting Turning Point USA event on HUB Lawn. Available online: <https://www.dailyuw.com/article/student-arrested-for-disrupting-turning-point-usa-event-on-hub-lawn-20260429>.

66 Gallagher, N. & Hull, A. (April 24, 2026). Organizers rally against event with IDF soldier, event preemptively canceled amid ‘safety concerns’. Available online: <https://www.dailyuw.com/article/organizers-rally-against-event-with-idf-soldier-event-preemptively-cancelled-amid-safety-concerns-20260424>.

67 Taheri, M. (May 14, 2026). TPUSA cancels event after alleged antifa threats: “I hope you get killed.” Available online: <https://www.news-week.com/tpusa-cancels-event-college-antifa-threats-11951576>.

School	Year	Speech controversy	Current penalty
University of Washington	2025	Protesters surrounded a room where Olivia Krolczyk was speaking about women's rights to the campus's TPUSA chapter and pulled the fire alarm in the building. Krolczyk and members of TPUSA barricaded themselves inside the room before they were escorted out by university police and security. ⁶⁸	-2 points
University of Washington	2024	The disruption of a Board of Regents meeting during which protesters affiliated with UW Divest for Palestine shouted down speakers during the public comment period of a proposal to form a committee to consider university divestment from "weapons companies" that do business with Israel. ⁶⁹	-1 point
University of Washington	2024	The repeated disruption of the final lecture in the university's War in the Middle East Lecture Series delivered by Daniel Kurtzer, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel. ⁷⁰	-1 point

68 Davidson, P. & Hull, A. (January 21, 2025). UW Turning Point USA event cancelled following counter-rallies: Saw fire alarm evacuation and Thomson Hall window broken. Available online: <https://www.dailyuw.com/article/deb300a0-d87b-11ef-af6d-1f2a10c10816>.

69 Richardson, V. (September 15, 2024). Anti-Israel protesters shut down University of Washington board meeting by disrupting speakers. Available online: <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2024/sep/15/anti-israel-protesters-shut-down-university-of-was/>.

70 Hull, A. & Kab, A. (February 29, 2024). Pro-Palestinian protesters disrupt final War in the Middle East Lecture Series event: Students oppose UW-hosted lecturer Daniel Kurtzer, former US Ambassador to Israel. Available online: <https://www.dailyuw.com/article/c06571d6-d6c5-11ee-90da-cb15b955f86e>.

School	Year	Speech controversy	Current penalty
New York University	2026	Administrators barred students from inviting multiple performers affiliated with No Music For Genocide to the university's annual V100 concert, which is organized and planned by students and student organizations. ⁷¹	-3 points
New York University	2026	Administrators directed the campus chapter of Jews Against Zionism to "immediately remove" an Instagram post advertising a Passover Seder and investigated the campus chapter of Law Students for Justice in Palestine, despite the group claiming to not be involved in the event or its promotion. ⁷²	-1 point
New York University	2025	The university's law school canceled a Federalist Society event featuring Ilya Shapiro, a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, that had been scheduled for October 7, days before it was scheduled to occur. Following criticism from civil-liberties advocates, including FIRE, the university reversed course and reinstated the event in a larger room with additional security. ⁷³	-2 points

71 Dev, K. (March 13, 2026). NYU censored V100 artist booking process, Program Board says: Students claim administrators offered an extra \$30,000 after barring them from working with artists boycotting Israel. Available online: <https://nyunews.com/news/2026/03/13/program-board-statement/>.

72 Saadah, Y. (May 7, 2026). NYU investigates Instagram post advertising anti-Zionist Passover Seder: The Jewish students and faculty who organized the Seder are demanding the investigation be halted and calling for a boycott of NYU Hillel. Available online: <https://nyunews.com/news/2026/05/07/nyu-investigates-anti-zionist-seder-instagram-post/>.

73 Sibarium, A. (October 1, 2025). NYU axes Federalist Society event scheduled for Oct. 7, citing security concerns. Available online: <https://freebeacon.com/campus/nyu-axes-federalist-society-event-scheduled-for-oct-7-citing-security-concerns/>; Wilewicz, A. (October 10, 2025). Opinion: NYU cares more about image than free speech: The university's speedy response to restoring a Federalist Society panel shows that moral consistency takes a back seat to public relations. Available online: <https://nyunews.com/opinion/2025/10/10/federalist-society-speaker-free-speech/>.

School	Year	Speech controversy	Current penalty
New York University	2025	The cancellation of a panel discussion hosted by the NYU College Republicans titled “Immigrant Invasion: You don’t have to go home but you can’t stay here,” due to safety concerns and what it described as a “call to arms” made by one of the scheduled panelists in a now-deleted tweet. ⁷⁴	-2 points
New York University	2025	The cancellation of a presentation by Joanne Liu, the former international head of Doctors Without Borders, the night before it was scheduled to occur. Liu was informed by the university’s vice chair of the education department that they had concerns about the content of some of her slides, including those mentioning casualties in Gaza as a result of the Israel-Hamas war, and those discussing cuts at USAID. ⁷⁵	-2 points
New York University	2024	Administrators rejected a request by the campus chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine to open an event featuring a discussion between Rashid Khalidi, a professor at Columbia University, and Sinan Antoon, a professor at NYU, because of concerns about “contentious speakers.” ⁷⁶	-1 point

74 Chen, A. (April 10, 2025). NYU cancels College Republicans event after panelist requests ‘armed security’: Thousands signed a petition criticizing the panel, titled “Immigrant Invasion,” which was set to feature influencers known for “white supremacist, xenophobic and hateful rhetoric.” Available online: <https://nyunews.com/news/2025/04/10/college-republicans-panel-canceled/>.

75 Betts, A. (March 31, 2025). NYU canceled talk on USAID cuts for being ‘anti-governmental’, doctor says: University called Dr Joanne Liu, ex-head of Doctors Without Borders, after planning to speak on Gaza and federal cuts. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/31/doctor-nyu-usaid-gaza-presentation-canceled>.

76 Gonzalez, M. (March 14, 2024). NYU restricts SJP event access, citing admin concerns of ‘contentious speakers’ on college campuses: The university closed public access to a Students for Justice in Palestine event last week, and a similar event was postponed by another student-led organization earlier this month. Available online: <https://nyunews.com/news/2024/03/14/nyu-responds-to-event-cancellations/>.

About us

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 1,000,000 college students and recent alumni from more than 1,500 two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states.

For more information,
visit collegepulse.com or @CollegeInsights on X.

FIRE

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to defending and sustaining the individual rights of all Americans to free speech and free thought. These rights include freedom of speech, freedom of association, due process, legal equality, religious liberty, and sanctity of conscience — the most essential qualities of liberty. FIRE also recognizes that colleges and universities play a vital role in preserving free thought within a free society. To this end, we place a special emphasis on defending these rights of students and faculty members on our nation's campuses.

For more information,
visit fire.org or @thefireorg on X.

Acknowledgments and suggested citation

Our gratitude goes to Sean Stevens for questionnaire design, scoring methodology, data analysis, and authorship of this report. Nathan Honeycutt, Chapin Lenthall-Cleary, Angela C. Erickson, and Sam Abrams also provided support with questionnaire design, scoring methodology, data analysis, data validation, and editing. Emily Nayyer designed the figures and also contributed to data validation and editing. We would additionally like to thank Keelyn M. Gallagher, Logan Dougherty, Sheridan Macy, and Ryne Weiss for support with data validation and editing; and Christine Henke for designing this report. Finally, FIRE is a nonprofit organization and these rankings would not be possible without the generous support of our donors.

Greg Lukianoff
President and CEO, FIRE

Recommended Citations:

Report: Stevens, S.T. (2026). 2027 College Free Speech Rankings: What Is the State of Free Speech on America's College Campuses? The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression.

<https://www.fire.org/rankings>

Website: Stevens, S.T. (2026). College Free Speech Rankings.
rankings.fire.org



P.O. Box 40128
Philadelphia, PA 19106
T: 215.717.3473
www.fire.org

[@thefireorg](https://www.instagram.com/thefireorg)



Embargoed until Sept.9