

2026 College Free Speech Rankings

Bucknell University

133

OVERALL
RANK

F

SPEECH
CLIMATE

YELLOW

SPOTLIGHT
RATING



FIRE

Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

Executive Summary

THE COLLEGE FREE SPEECH RANKINGS are the most comprehensive comparison of free speech climates at U.S. colleges and universities. Developed by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, the rankings combine student survey data, written speech policies, and school responses to recent speech-related controversies to evaluate how well institutions uphold free expression. Schools earn higher scores when they protect open debate and viewpoint diversity and lose points when they restrict it.

To understand the student experience of free speech on campus, our survey partner, College Pulse, surveyed 68,510 student respondents from 257 colleges and universities from Jan. 3 through June 5, 2025. The College Free Speech Rankings are available online (rankings.thefire.org) for easy comparison between institutions.

We surveyed 265 Bucknell University undergraduate students. Key findings include:

- Bucknell ranks 133 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 57.16, an F speech climate.
- Bucknell experienced some dramatic shifts over the past year in its placement in several components, falling in the “Comfort” (-54 spots) and “Self-Censorship” (-67 spots) components while rising in the “Disruptive Conduct” (+61 spots), “Openness” (+64 spots), and “Administrative Support” (+49 spots) components.
- Bucknell students are less accepting of disruptive protest tactics than students nationally. The school ranks 4 on “Disruptive Conduct.”
- Bucknell students are uncomfortable expressing controversial ideas and they self-censor more than their peers nationally.
- Bucknell students do not want controversial speakers on campus.
- Bucknell earns a “yellow light” rating for maintaining four speech restrictive policies. If the university revised these policies and earned a “green light” rating, it would have ranked 14 overall.

Bucknell ranks 133 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 57.16, an F speech climate.¹ Bucknell saw some big improvements over the past year, rising considerably in both the “Administrative Support” (+49 spots) and “Openness” (+64 spots) components. Most notably, however, it ascended to fourth overall in the “Disruptive Conduct” component after ranking 65 last year. However, it also saw setbacks, particularly in the “Comfort” (-54 spots) and “Self-Censorship” (-67 spots) components.

The following report highlights one area where Bucknell excels and three where it performs poorly. In addition, it discusses Bucknell’s speech policies and what Bucknell can do to improve its free speech climate. No campus speech controversies influenced its ranking.

BUCKNELL STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF FREE SPEECH

Students are less accepting of disruptive protest tactics

Bucknell University ranks 4 on “Disruptive Conduct,” after ranking 65 last year.

Compared to students nationally, fewer Bucknell students said disruptive tactics were acceptable, if only rarely, in response to a campus speech:

- 59% said shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus was acceptable (compared to 71% among students nationally).
- 38% said blocking other students from attending a campus speech was acceptable (compared to 54% among students nationally).
- 20% said using violence to stop a campus speech was acceptable (compared to 33% among students nationally).

Students are uncomfortable expressing controversial ideas and self-censor

Ranking 249 of 257, Bucknell University is among the bottom 10 schools in the “Comfort Expressing Ideas” component. Bucknell ranks 197 on the “Self-Censorship” component after placing 130 last year.

Majorities of Bucknell students reported being either “somewhat” or “very” uncomfortable expressing themselves across five contexts. Furthermore, more students were uncomfortable compared to last year, particularly when expressing their views in a common campus space and publicly disagreeing with a professor.

¹ The detailed methodology can be found at rankings.thefire.org/methodology.

FIGURE 1: Students Who Felt at Least Somewhat Uncomfortable by Context (%)

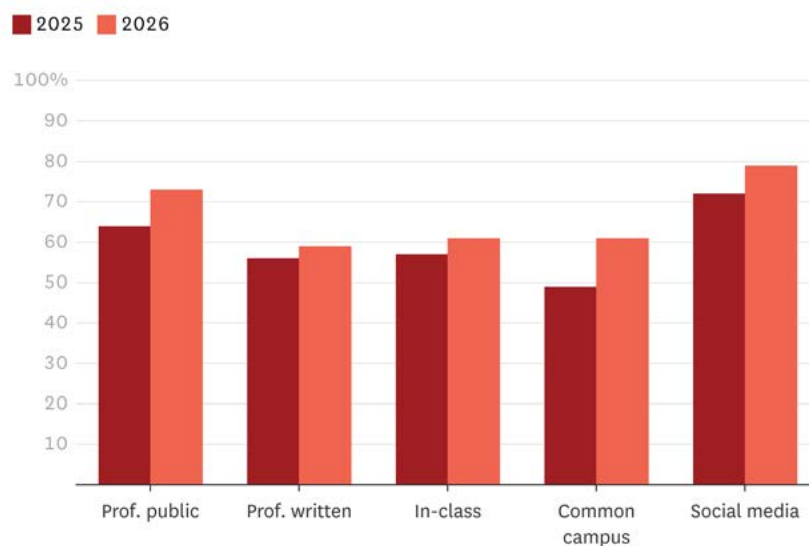


Chart: Emily Nayer • Source: College Pulse/FIRE

Additionally, a quarter or more of Bucknell students said they self-censor either “fairly” or “very” often during conversations with other students on campus (28%), during conversations with professors (28%), and during classroom discussions (25%).

While levels of self-censorship have remained relatively steady at Bucknell since last year, levels decreased among students nationally in all three contexts, resulting in the school’s drop in ranking.

FIGURE 2: Self-Censorship at Bucknell vs. Nationally (%)

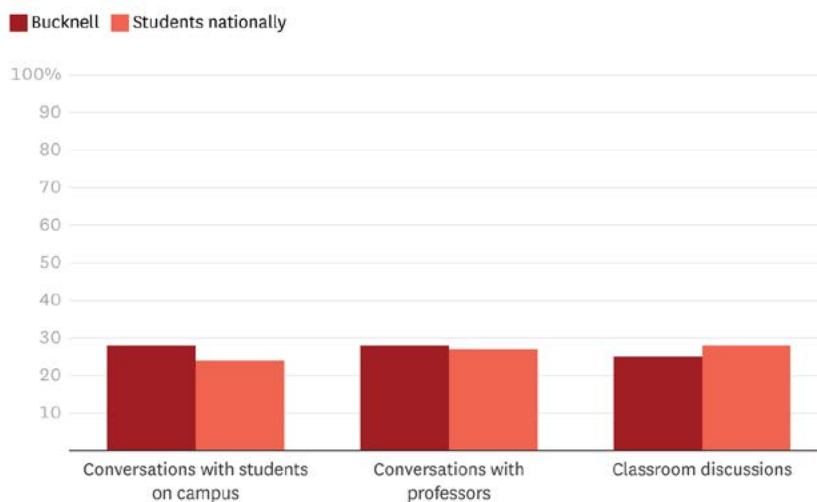


Chart: Emily Nayer • Source: College Pulse/FIRE

Students do not want controversial speakers on campus

Bucknell University ranks 157 on “Political Tolerance.”

Students were asked whether six speakers (three liberal, three conservative) who had previously expressed controversial opinions should be allowed to give a campus speech. Alarming, Bucknell ranks in the bottom quartile on three of the four subcomponents: “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” (246), “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers” (200), and “Mean Tolerance” (249). Its saving grace was the “Tolerance Difference” subcomponent, where it ranked 60, which might be attributed to the ideological balance among the student body.

When it comes to conservative speakers, most students said their school should not allow someone who claims that “abortion should be completely illegal” (69%), “transgender people have a mental disorder” (76%), or that “Black Lives Matter is a hate group” (80%).

As for liberal speakers, students said the same about someone who claims that “children should be able to transition without parental consent” (63%), “the Catholic church is a pedophilic institution” (76%), or that “the police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan” (82%).

Opposition increased among Bucknell students for each of the six speakers since last year, but more so for the liberal speakers.

FIGURE 3: Students Who Oppose Allowing Each Controversial Speaker on Campus (%)

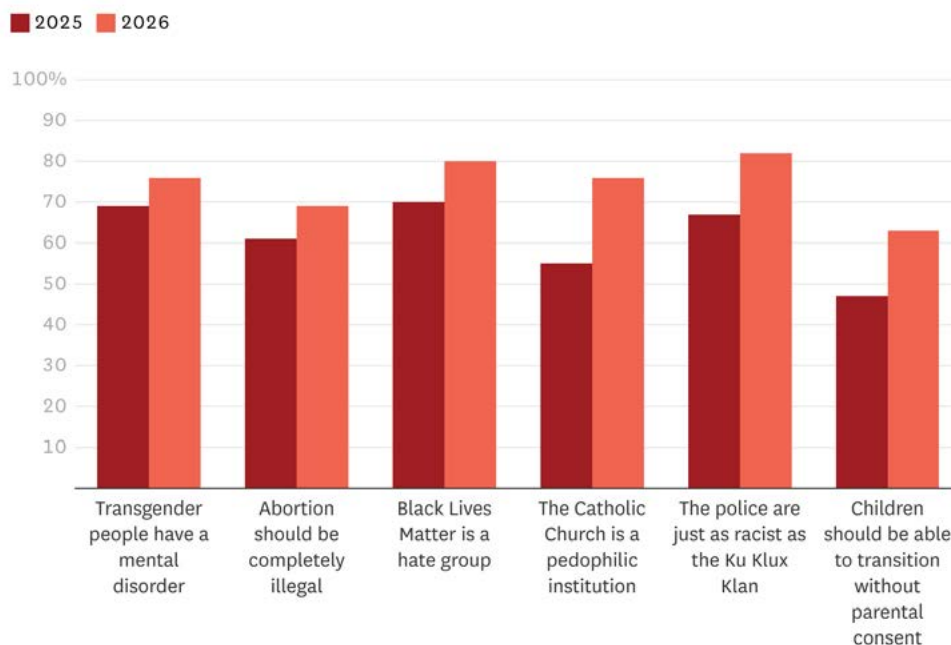


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: College Pulse/FIRE

A ‘YELLOW LIGHT’ SCHOOL

Bucknell University earns an overall “yellow light” rating for its written policies governing student expression. The university maintains four yellow light policies and four “green light” policies. Two of Bucknell’s three harassment policies fail to meet the legal standard for peer hostile environment harassment in an educational setting, significantly undermining Bucknell’s free speech promises. The university also broadly defines bullying, opening up an array of speech protected by First Amendment principles to punishment. Any expression the university wishes to prohibit under the “bullying” definition would best be governed under revised hostile environmental harassment policies.

Bucknell also regulates “bias incidents” and encourages students to report them to the administration, threatening to chill and punish speech protected by free speech principles. Concerns related to bias are already addressed by existing harassment and discrimination policies. When soliciting reporting, the administration should limit its focus to conduct that violates existing policies on discrimination and harassment and the law.

Bucknell has not adopted the “Chicago Statement” or an official commitment to institutional neutrality.

HOW CAN BUCKNELL IMPROVE?

To foster a more comfortable climate and a culture of free expression, Bucknell University can reform its “yellow light” speech policies to earn an overall “green light” rating, which alone would have raised its ranking from 133 to 37. Ideally, Bucknell would pair these reforms with official statements committing to free expression and institutional neutrality similar to those seen in the Chicago Statement and “Kalven Report,” which would raise its score even further.

By improving and publicizing its speech policies and institutional commitments, Bucknell can show students that it cares about free speech, which in turn could improve the university’s middling “Administrative Support” (154) ranking. Additionally, by pairing improved policies with free speech training, Bucknell could further improve its campus climate by teaching students the value of freedom of expression and open inquiry, thereby leading to improved rankings in “Comfort Expressing Ideas” (249), “Tolerance of Liberal Speakers” (246), “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers” (200), “Self-Censorship” (197), and “Mean Tolerance” (249).

Overall, by promoting the university’s commitment to free speech through training and improved policies, Bucknell could likely improve its future rankings.

Bucknell's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings Scores by Component

COMPONENT	NEW YORK UNIVERSITY	NATIONAL AVERAGE	MINIMUM VALUE	MAXIMUM VALUE
Comfort Expressing Ideas	8.81	9.53	5	15
Self-Censorship	11.73	12.12	3	20
Disruptive Conduct	16.91	15.50	3	20
Administrative Support	11.26	11.32	2	20
Openness	7.13	7.19	0	10
Political Tolerance	6.28	6.44	3	15
Chicago Statement	0	-	0	3
Institutional Neutrality	0	-	0	3
Spotlight Rating	-5 (Yellow)	-	-10 (Red)	5 (Green)
Campus Deplatformings	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Scholars Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Students Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Overall score	57.16	58.67		

Topline Results

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all clear	7	3
Not very clear	35	13
Somewhat clear	139	53
Very clear	65	25
Extremely clear	18	7

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all likely	14	5
Not very likely	63	24
Somewhat likely	130	49
Very likely	48	18
Extremely likely	10	4

How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? [Presented in randomized order]

Publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	76	29
Somewhat uncomfortable	116	44
Somewhat comfortable	56	21
Very comfortable	16	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	59	22
Somewhat uncomfortable	98	37
Somewhat comfortable	81	30
Very comfortable	27	10

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	66	25
Somewhat uncomfortable	94	36
Somewhat comfortable	80	30
Very comfortable	25	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	39	15
Somewhat uncomfortable	121	46
Somewhat comfortable	83	31
Very comfortable	22	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	121	46
Somewhat uncomfortable	86	33
Somewhat comfortable	42	16
Very comfortable	16	6

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

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

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	15	6
Rarely	84	32
Occasionally, once or twice a month	91	34
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	57	21
Very often, nearly every day	18	7

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	11	4
Rarely	73	27
Occasionally, once or twice a month	108	41
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	55	21
Very often, nearly every day	17	7

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	14	5
Rarely	70	26
Occasionally, once or twice a month	113	43
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	53	20
Very often, nearly every day	14	5

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

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	6	2
Sometimes acceptable	39	15
Rarely acceptable	110	42
Never acceptable	109	41

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	4	1
Sometimes acceptable	31	12
Rarely acceptable	67	25
Never acceptable	162	61

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	0	0
Sometimes acceptable	27	10
Rarely acceptable	28	10
Never acceptable	209	79

Student groups often invite speakers to campus to express their views on a range of topics. Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school **ALLOW** or **NOT ALLOW** a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea? [Presented in randomized order]

Transgender people have a mental disorder.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	119	45
Probably should not allow this speaker	83	31
Probably should allow this speaker	51	19
Definitely should allow this speaker	12	4

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	93	35
Probably should not allow this speaker	90	34
Probably should allow this speaker	64	24
Definitely should allow this speaker	17	7

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	123	47
Probably should not allow this speaker	88	33
Probably should allow this speaker	42	16
Definitely should allow this speaker	11	4

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	99	37
Probably should not allow this speaker	104	39
Probably should allow this speaker	49	18
Definitely should allow this speaker	13	5

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	107	40
Probably should not allow this speaker	111	42
Probably should allow this speaker	32	12
Definitely should allow this speaker	15	6

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	53	20
Probably should not allow this speaker	113	43
Probably should allow this speaker	83	31
Definitely should allow this speaker	15	6

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

Abortion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	135	51
Yes	129	49

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	209	79
Yes	56	21

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	247	93
Yes	17	7

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	222	84
Yes	42	16

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	239	90
Yes	26	10

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	210	79
Yes	55	21

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	225	85
Yes	39	15

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	176	66
Yes	89	34

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	200	76
Yes	64	24

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	178	67
Yes	87	33

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	199	75
Yes	66	25

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	177	67
Yes	87	33

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	126	48
Yes	138	52

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	121	46
Yes	144	54

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	189	71
Yes	76	29

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	168	64
Yes	96	36

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	203	77
Yes	61	23

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	193	73
Yes	71	27

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	228	86
Yes	36	14

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	129	49
Yes	136	51

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	223	84
Yes	41	16

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	33	13
Rarely	102	39
Occasionally, once or twice a month	91	34
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	27	10
Very often, nearly every day	10	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I have been disciplined.	8	3
No, but I have been threatened with discipline.	34	13
I have not been disciplined nor threatened with discipline.	222	84

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	86	32
Rarely	73	28
Occasionally, once or twice a month	49	19
Fairly often, a couple times a week	30	11
Very often, nearly every day	27	10

How likely or unlikely is it that a student on campus would be reported to the administration by another student for saying something controversial?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very unlikely	28	11
Unlikely	81	31
Neither likely or unlikely	93	35
Likely	55	21
Very likely	7	3

How likely or unlikely is it that a professor on campus would be reported to the administration by a student for saying something controversial?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very unlikely	27	10
Unlikely	83	32
Neither likely or unlikely	85	32
Likely	58	22
Very likely	11	4

Have you or anyone you know filed a Title IX complaint?

Response	Frequency	Percent
I have filed a Title IX complaint.	4	2
I both know someone who has and have myself filed a Title IX complaint.	12	4
I have not but I know someone who has filed a Title IX complaint.	90	34
I have neither filed a Title IX complaint, nor know anyone who has.”)	157	60

Has a Title IX complaint ever been filed against you or someone you know?

Response	Frequency	Percent
A Title IX complaint was filed against me.	0	0
A Title IX complaint was filed against me and someone I know.	5	2
A Title IX complaint was filed against someone I know, but not me.	60	23
A Title IX complaint has never been filed against me or someone I know.”)	198	75

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	56	21
Less than once a year	33	13
Once or twice a year	49	18
Several times a year	50	19
Once a month	17	7
2-3 times a month	22	8
About weekly	18	7
Weekly	16	6
Several times a week	4	2

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	4	2
No	260	98

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	0	0	0
No	264	100	100

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	2	1	3
Less than half the time	29	11	42
About half the time	21	8	31
Most of the time, nearly every day	14	5	20
Always	3	1	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	28	11	48
Less than half the time	24	9	40
About half the time	3	1	5
Most of the time, nearly every day	3	1	5
Always	1	0	2

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	3	1	7
Less than half the time	11	4	24
About half the time	19	7	40
Most of the time, nearly every day	11	4	24
Always	2	1	5

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	11	4	35
Less than half the time	17	6	56
About half the time	2	1	7
Most of the time, nearly every day	0	0	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	2	1	3
Less than half the time	22	8	39
About half the time	18	7	32
Most of the time, nearly every day	10	4	17
Always	6	2	10



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Foundation for Individual
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510 Walnut Street
Suite 900
Philadelphia, PA 19106
T: 215.717.3473
www.thefire.org

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