

2026 College Free Speech Rankings
Furman University

195

OVERALL
RANK

F

SPEECH
CLIMATE

RED

SPOTLIGHT
RATING

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 151 Furman University undergraduates. Key findings include:

- Furman ranks 195 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 54.5, an F speech climate grade.
- Compared to 34% of students nationwide, 15% of students at Furman find it acceptable to use violence to stop a campus speech.
- Furman students trust that their administration protects free expression at a higher rate than other schools ranked.
- Furman students have a lower tolerance for political speakers compared to students nationally.
- More students at Furman find it challenging to have open and honest conversations about certain campus issues than students at other schools.
- Furman earns a “red light” Spotlight rating for maintaining eight speech restrictive policies, one of which substantially limits free expression. If the school earned a “green light” Spotlight rating this year, it would have ranked 27.
- Furman was penalized for one speech controversy since 2022. The controversy involved the firing of a professor for his alleged connection to white supremacist groups.

Furman ranks 195 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 54.5, an F speech climate grade.¹ The following report highlights where Furman performs relatively well and where it performs poorly. In addition, it discusses Furman's speech policies and statements, its speech controversies, and what Furman can do to improve its free speech climate.

STUDENTS TRUST FURMAN'S COMMITMENT TO FREE EXPRESSION

Furman University ranks 33 on "Administrative Support," placing it in the top 50. Forty-one percent of Furman students said it is "very" or "extremely" clear that the administration protects freedom of speech — another 43% said it is "somewhat" clear, and none of the students surveyed thought that it was "not at all" clear. In terms of the administration's willingness to defend a speaker's rights during controversies, 31% of Furman students believed this is either "very" or "extremely" likely, while 51% saw it as "somewhat" likely — leaving most students with at least some confidence in their administration.

FIGURE 1: Furman Student Perceptions of the Administration

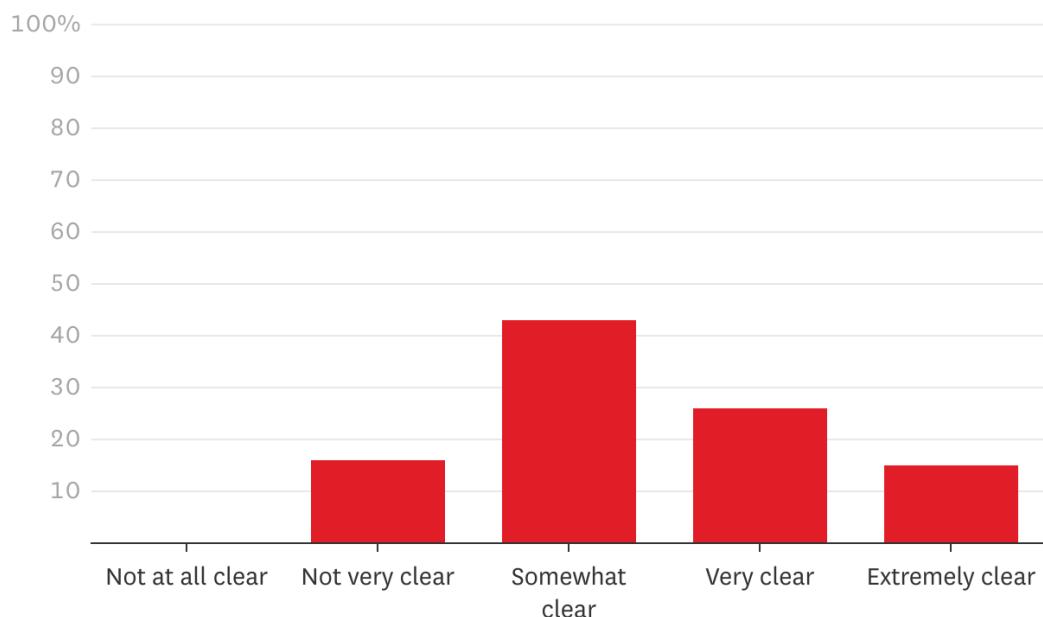


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/ College Pulse

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

FIGURE 2: Furman Student Perceptions of the Administration

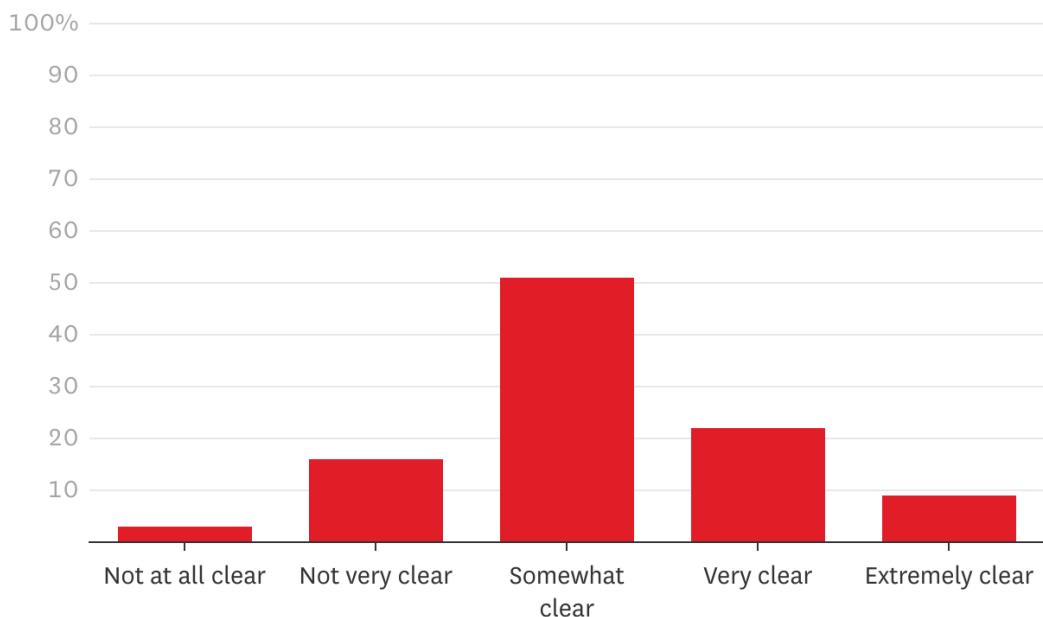


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/ College Pulse

STUDENTS DO NOT WANT CONTROVERSIAL SPEAKERS ON CAMPUS

Students were presented with three liberal and three conservative controversial opinions and asked whether a speaker who had made such a statement should be allowed to speak on campus. Furman ranks a dismal 220 for “Political Tolerance” — meaning, compared to other schools, students generally did not support inviting contentious political speakers to campus. For instance, when students were asked if someone who said that “Black Lives Matter is a hate group” should be allowed to speak on campus, nearly half indicated that the speaker should “definitely not” be allowed.

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

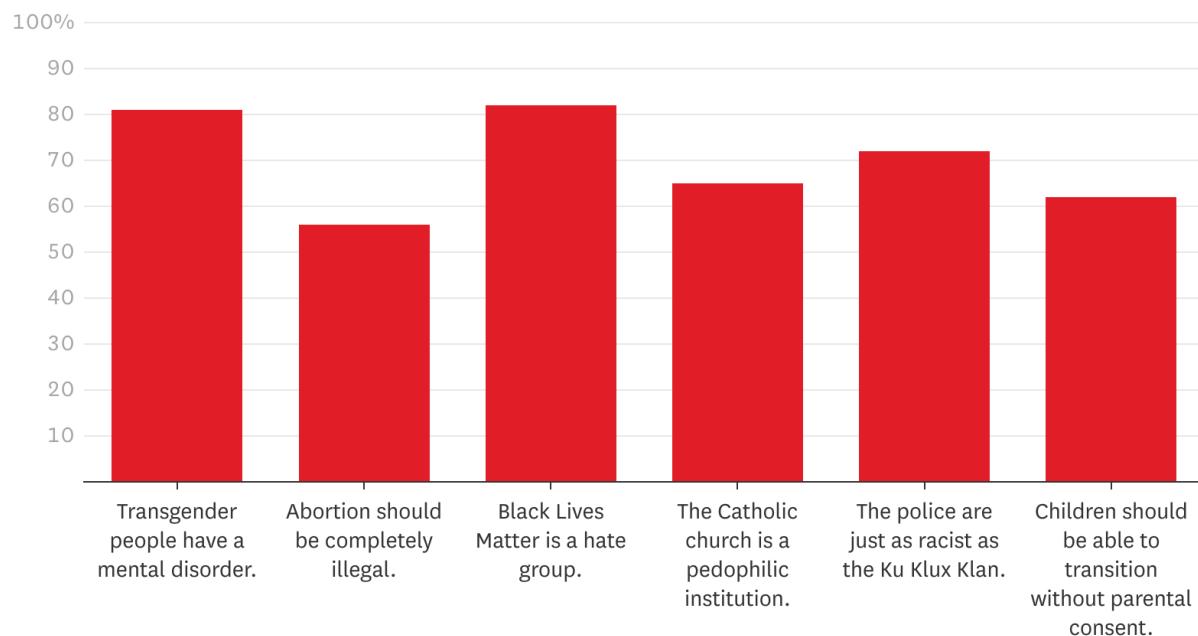


Chart: Emily Nayer · Source: FIRE/ College Pulse

Although the willingness to allow speakers is low, students at Furman generally do not support tactics to stop campus speech. Students were asked how acceptable it would be to use certain tactics to stop a campus speaker. Fifteen percent of students indicated that it is at least “rarely” acceptable to use violence to stop a campus speech. Similarly, 53% stated that it is at least “rarely” acceptable to block other students from attending a campus speech. When it comes to shouting speakers down, 67% indicated that it is at least “rarely” acceptable to do so. For these responses, Furman ranks 38 for “Disruptive Conduct” — placing them in the top 50.

FIGURE 4: Students Who Find Disruptive Tactics Acceptable

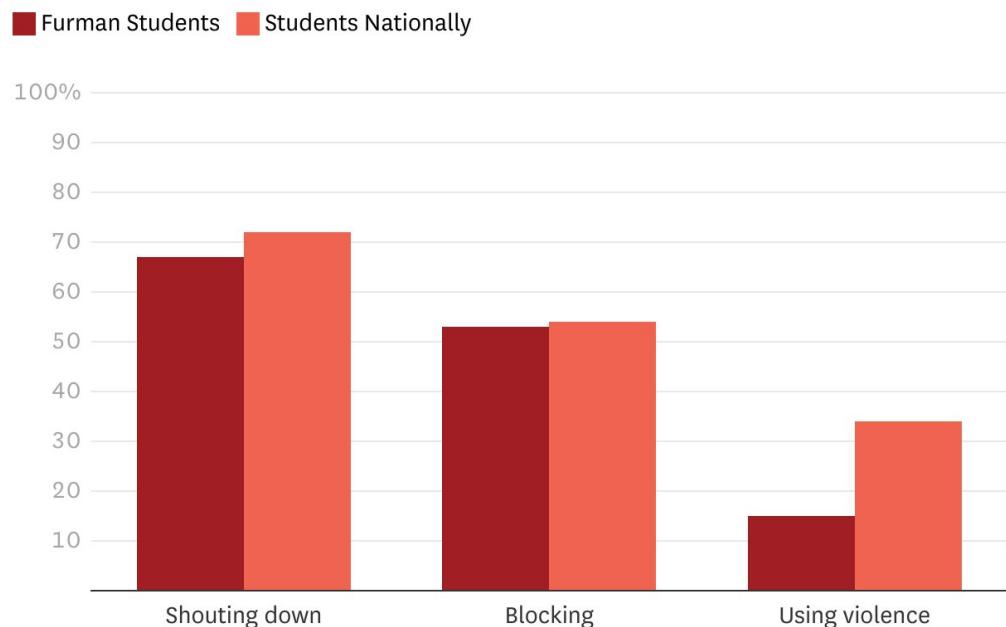


Chart: Emily Nayer · Source: FIRE/ College Pulse

FURMAN STUDENTS HAVE A HARD TIME WITH OPEN AND HONEST CONVERSATIONS ABOUT CERTAIN ISSUES ON CAMPUS

Furman ranks 213 on “Openness.” We asked students which issues are difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus:

- 58% of students indicated the presidential election, compared to 43% nationally.
- 54% of students indicated abortion, compared to 46% nationally.
- 45% of students indicated gay rights, compared to 31% nationally.
- 49% of students indicated transgender rights, compared to 41% nationally.
- 43% of students indicated gun control, compared to 33% nationally.
- 39% of students indicated religion, compared to 32% nationally.

FIGURE 5: Students Who Say It is Difficult to Have an Open and Honest Conversation, by Topic

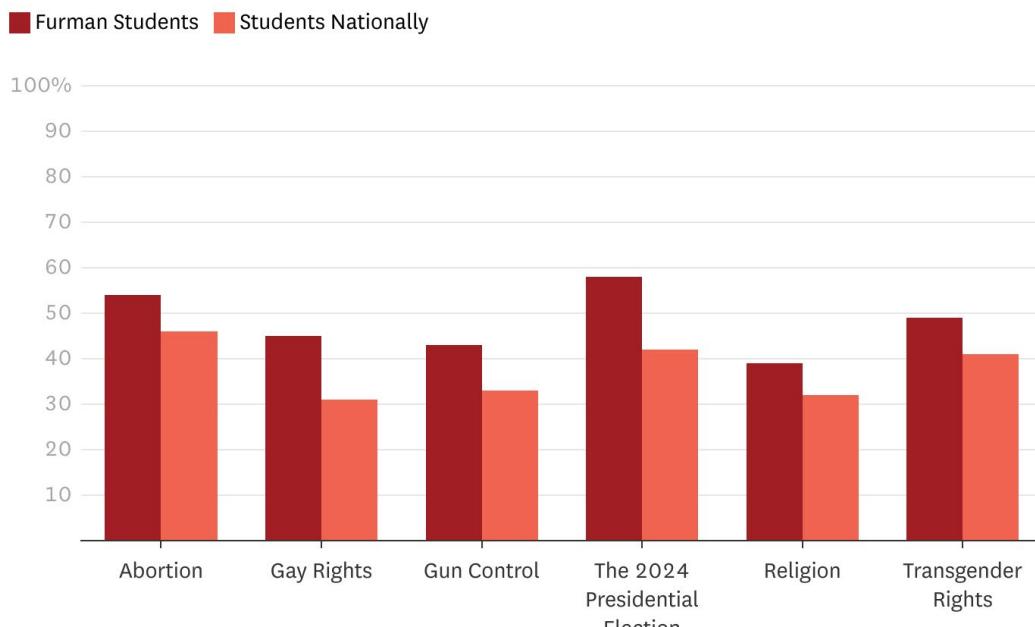


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/ College Pulse

Similarly, when asked to choose from a list of 20 topics, 9 out of 10 students said there was at least one they found difficult to discuss openly and honestly.

A ‘RED LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH CHICAGO COMMITMENT

Furman University earns an overall “red light” rating for its written policies governing student expression. While Furman has committed to the “Chicago Statement,” it also maintains harassment, bullying, posting, civility, and bias policies which imperil the expressive rights of students on campus. The university’s red light harassment policy not only fails to meet the legal standard for peer hostile environment harassment in an educational setting, but also gives the administration the authority to punish conduct that “does not rise to the level of sexual misconduct” but is merely “offensive and/or unwanted.” This subjects a wide range of protected speech to punishment. Furthermore, the university’s restrictive posting policy requires campus postings to receive prior administrative approval and forbids anonymous authorship, chilling expression. The internet usage policy’s vague ban on mass mailings and “unprofessional” content allows administrators to silence speech they disfavor.

Furman also encourages students to report “bias incidents” to the administration. However, concerns related to bias are addressed by existing harassment and discrimination protocols. The administration should instead focus its resources on these established systems and avoid soliciting reports of subjective bias. Similarly, the university bans “demeaning behavior” and bullying, conflating each with harassment. Any expression the university wishes to prohibit under the “bullying” and “demeaning behavior” definitions would best be governed under revised hostile environment harassment policies.

FURMAN'S SPEECH CONTROVERSY

Furman University was penalized two points for a speech controversy that happened in 2022. As time passes, the penalty weighing on Furman's score will continue to decay.

The controversy involved Chris Healy, a professor of computer science. In September 2022, images surfaced online depicting Healy at the 2017 “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, prompting the university to place him on paid administrative leave and initiate an investigation into his conduct. The university’s actions were based on concerns about Healy’s associations with organizations connected to white supremacist groups that promote racism, exclusion, and hatred. This investigation led to Healy being banned by the university administration from campus during the review process. In December 2022, Healy filed a lawsuit against the university, alleging breach of contract and due process violations related to his suspension. Despite a faculty committee recommending against his termination, the university proceeded to terminate Healy’s employment in April 2024. Healy’s lawsuit for wrongful termination is ongoing.

HOW CAN FURMAN IMPROVE?

Furman University can improve its ranking by reforming its “red light” speech policy to earn a “yellow light” or even a “green light” rating. In addition to improving speech policies, we encourage Furman to adopt a statement on institutional neutrality. If Furman earned a green light rating, it would have ranked 27 instead of 195.

But policy changes alone will not build a culture of free speech. The university should take active steps to improve campus culture by publicly defending faculty expression in moments of controversy and clearly communicating the value of free speech in a university setting. Doing so would avoid future legal trouble and boost students’ perception of administrative support for freedom of speech.

In addition, Furman should foster conversation on hot-button, controversial issues. Hosting forums that spark debate, open inquiry, and allow students to challenge one another’s ideas can help foster open and honest discussion. Doing so could improve the university’s poor “Openness” (213) rating. Similarly, the school should make it clear to students that dissenting views are welcome on campus, no matter how politically controversial. This would improve Furman’s “Political Tolerance” (220) rating.

Furman's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings Scores by Component

COMPONENT	FURMAN UNIVERSITY	NATIONAL AVERAGE	MINIMUM VALUE	MAXIMUM VALUE
Comfort Expressing Ideas	9.59	9.53	5	15
Self-Censorship	12.16	12.12	3	20
Disruptive Conduct	16.19	15.50	3	20
Administrative Support	12.32	11.32	2	20
Openness	6.77	7.19	0	10
Political Tolerance	6.44	6.44	3	15
Chicago Statement	3 (Yes)	-	0	3
Institutional Neutrality	0 (No)	-	0	3
Spotlight Rating	-10 (Red)	-	-10 (Red)	5 (Green)
Campus Deplatformings	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Scholars Under Fire	-2	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Students Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Overall score	54.5	58.67		

Topline Results

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not very clear	24	16
Somewhat clear	64	43
Very clear	40	26
Extremely clear	23	15

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	5	3
Not very likely	23	16
Somewhat likely	76	51
Very likely	33	22
Extremely likely	13	9

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	40	26
Somewhat uncomfortable	54	36
Somewhat comfortable	33	22
Very comfortable	23	15

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	40	27
Somewhat uncomfortable	25	17
Somewhat comfortable	57	38
Very comfortable	28	19

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	29	20
Somewhat uncomfortable	39	26
Somewhat comfortable	59	39
Very comfortable	23	15

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	21	14
Somewhat uncomfortable	60	40
Somewhat comfortable	38	25
Very comfortable	31	20

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	50	33
Somewhat uncomfortable	49	33
Somewhat comfortable	34	23
Very comfortable	17	11

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	8	5
Rarely	64	42
Occasionally, once or twice a month	50	34
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	21	14
Very often, nearly every day	7	5

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	7	5
Rarely	49	32
Occasionally, once or twice a month	56	38
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	29	19
Very often, nearly every day	9	6

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	4	2
Rarely	46	30
Occasionally, once or twice a month	64	43
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	29	19
Very often, nearly every day	8	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	4
Sometimes acceptable	46	31
Rarely acceptable	48	32
Never acceptable	50	33

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	6	4
Sometimes acceptable	24	16
Rarely acceptable	50	33
Never acceptable	71	47

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Sometimes acceptable	6	4
Rarely acceptable	17	11
Never acceptable	127	85

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	66	44
Probably should not allow this speaker	55	37
Probably should allow this speaker	21	14
Definitely should allow this speaker	8	5

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	38	25
Probably should not allow this speaker	47	31
Probably should allow this speaker	51	34
Definitely should allow this speaker	14	10

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	70	47
Probably should not allow this speaker	52	35
Probably should allow this speaker	19	12
Definitely should allow this speaker	9	6

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	35	23
Probably should not allow this speaker	63	42
Probably should allow this speaker	42	28
Definitely should allow this speaker	10	7

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	59	39
Probably should not allow this speaker	50	33
Probably should allow this speaker	36	24
Definitely should allow this speaker	6	4

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	23	16
Probably should not allow this speaker	69	46
Probably should allow this speaker	49	32
Definitely should allow this speaker	9	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	69	46
Yes	81	54

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	116	77
Yes	35	23

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	136	90
Yes	15	10

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	121	81
Yes	29	19

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	131	87
Yes	20	13

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	112	74
Yes	39	26

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	119	79
Yes	31	21

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	83	55
Yes	67	45

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	102	68
Yes	48	32

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	86	57
Yes	64	43

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	119	79
Yes	32	21

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	92	61
Yes	58	39

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	79	52
Yes	71	48

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	63	42
Yes	88	58

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	116	77
Yes	34	23

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	100	67
Yes	50	33

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	92	61
Yes	59	39

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	99	66
Yes	51	34

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	124	82
Yes	26	18

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	77	51
Yes	73	49

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	134	89
Yes	17	11

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	23	15
Rarely	58	39
Occasionally, once or twice a month	39	26
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	18	12
Very often, nearly every day	12	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
No, but I have been threatened with discipline.	4	3
I have not been disciplined nor threatened with discipline.	146	97

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	37	25
Rarely	53	35
Occasionally, once or twice a month	37	24
Fairly often, a couple times a week	15	10
Very often, nearly every day	8	5

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	25	16
Unlikely	30	20
Neither likely or unlikely	44	29
Likely	41	27
Very likely	10	7

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	22	15
Unlikely	42	28
Neither likely or unlikely	35	23
Likely	40	27
Very likely	10	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
I have filed a Title IX complaint.	7	5
I both know someone who has and have myself filed a Title IX complaint.	3	2
I have not but I know someone who has filed a Title IX complaint.	64	43
I have neither filed a Title IX complaint, nor know anyone who has.”)	76	50

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.	1	0
A Title IX complaint was filed against someone I know, but not me.	28	19
A Title IX complaint has never been filed against me or someone I know.”)	121	80

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	43	29
Less than once a year	10	7
Once or twice a year	5	3
Several times a year	36	24
Once a month	13	9
2-3 times a month	15	10
About weekly	5	3
Weekly	13	8
Several times a week	9	6

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	0	0
No	149	99

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	1	0	0
No	149	99	100

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	1	1	4
Less than half the time	12	8	33
About half the time	17	12	49
Most of the time, nearly every day	5	3	13

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	3	18
Less than half the time	8	5	34
About half the time	7	5	30
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	3	18

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	1	0	2
Less than half the time	7	5	23
About half the time	15	10	47
Most of the time, nearly every day	5	3	16
Always	4	3	13

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	2	2	6
Less than half the time	17	11	43
About half the time	15	10	39
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	3	11

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Less than half the time	7	5	33
About half the time	8	5	40
Most of the time, nearly every day	5	3	23
Always	1	1	4



FIRE

Foundation for Individual

Rights and Expression

510 Walnut Street

Suite 900

Philadelphia, PA 19106

T: 215.717.3473

www.thefire.org

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