

2026 College Free Speech Rankings
Georgetown University

129

OVERALL
RANK

F

SPEECH
CLIMATE

YELLOW

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 211 Georgetown University undergraduates. Key findings include:

- Georgetown University ranks 129 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 57.3, an F speech climate grade.
- Georgetown students are more comfortable expressing controversial ideas and are less accepting of disrupting speakers than they have been in the past.
- Georgetown students are self-censoring more this year than last year.
- Georgetown improved to earn a “yellow light” Spotlight rating. If Georgetown kept working to improve two speech restrictive policies and earned a “green light” rating, it would have ranked 37.
- Georgetown was penalized for three speech controversies since 2024, all of which involved invited speakers.

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Georgetown University ranks 129 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 57.3, an F speech climate grade.¹ The university jumped 111 places and gained 7 points since last year, thanks in part to upgrading its Spotlight rating from “red light” to “yellow light.”

The following report highlights two survey areas where Georgetown has improved, one area where it worsened, and three areas with minor to no improvement. In addition it discusses Georgetown’s speech policies and statements, its speech controversies, and what Georgetown can do to improve its free speech climate.

GEORGETOWN STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF FREE SPEECH

Students are more comfortable sharing ideas and less accepting of disruption

Georgetown University students were more comfortable expressing controversial ideas than they have been historically. This year Georgetown ranks 44 on “Comfort Expressing Ideas” compared to 197 last year. Likewise, Georgetown has improved on the “Disruptive Conduct” component (from a rank of 202 last year to 121 this year), meaning that students are less accepting of tactics that disrupt speakers than they have been in the past.

More Georgetown students reported comfort expressing their views on a controversial topic during a discussion in-class, in a common campus space, on social media, and when disagreeing with a professor in a written assignment. On the high- and low-end, 2 out of 3 students were comfortable conversing with fellow students on campus while just 1 out of 3 felt comfortable doing the same on social media.

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

FIGURE 1: Georgetown Students Who Felt at Least Somewhat Comfortable by Context

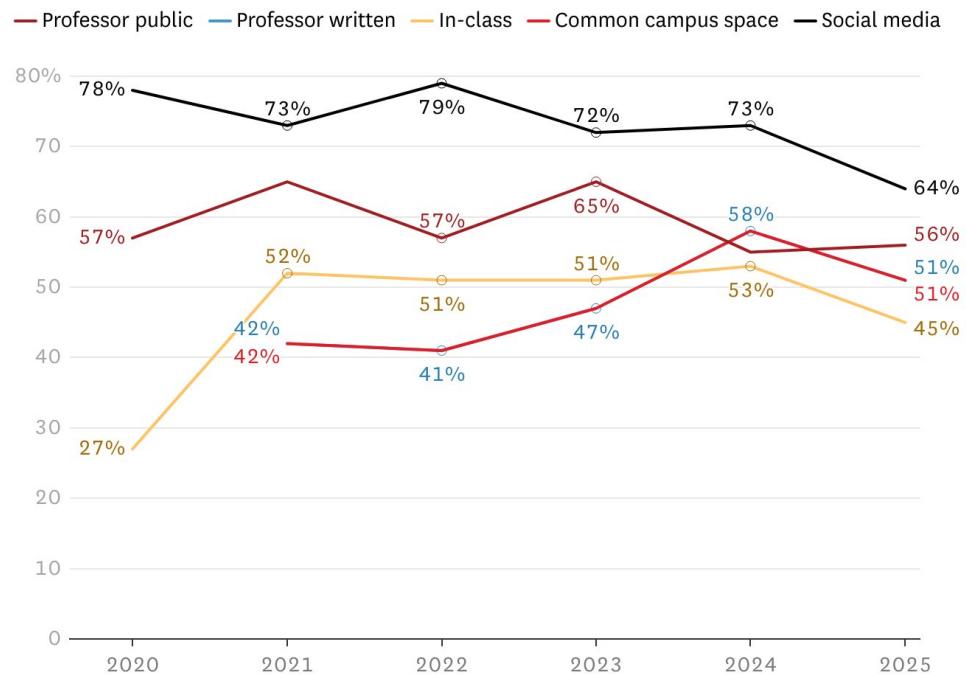


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

In 2023 and 2024, increasing numbers of Georgetown students found tactics that disrupt speakers acceptable in at least rare instances. All those numbers came down this year. When compared to students nationally, more Georgetown students (76%) said that it is at least “rarely” acceptable to shout down a speaker (71% nationally) and 59% of Georgetown students deemed blocking other students from attending a campus speech to be acceptable (54% nationally). However, 27% of Georgetown students viewed violence to stop a speech as acceptable compared to 34% of students nationally.

FIGURE 2: Students Who Found Disruptive Conduct at Least Rarely Acceptable (%)

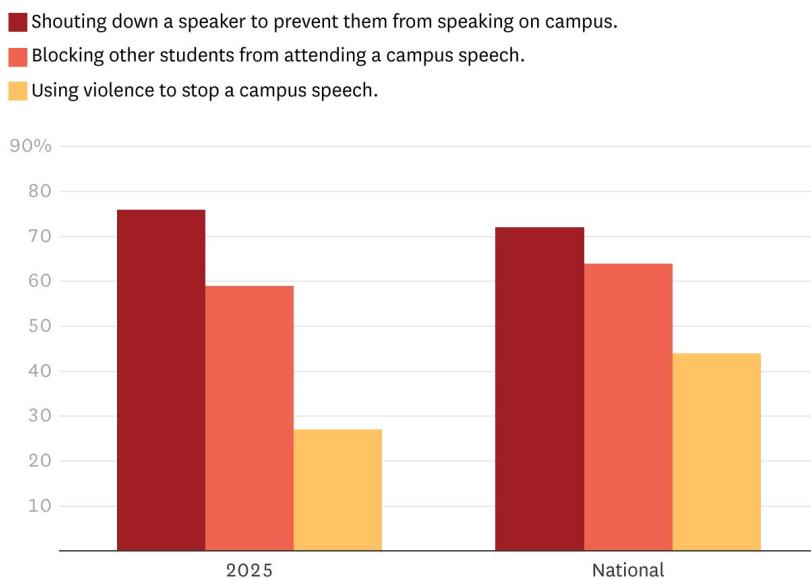


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Students self-censor more

“As a Jewish student, I have been hesitant to share opinions about Israel/Palestine for fear of backlash from both fellow Jewish students and anti-Zionist students”

Georgetown University students found themselves self-censoring more often this year. Georgetown ranks 85 on “Self-Censorship,” falling from 20 last year.

This year 7 in 10 Georgetown students reported censoring themselves at least once a month in classroom discussions and 6 out of 10 reported doing so with professors, compared to just 5 out of 10 students doing either of those last year. The only bright spot is that students continued to self-censor less with each other.

FIGURE 3: Georgetown Students Who Self-Censored at Least Once a Month by Situation

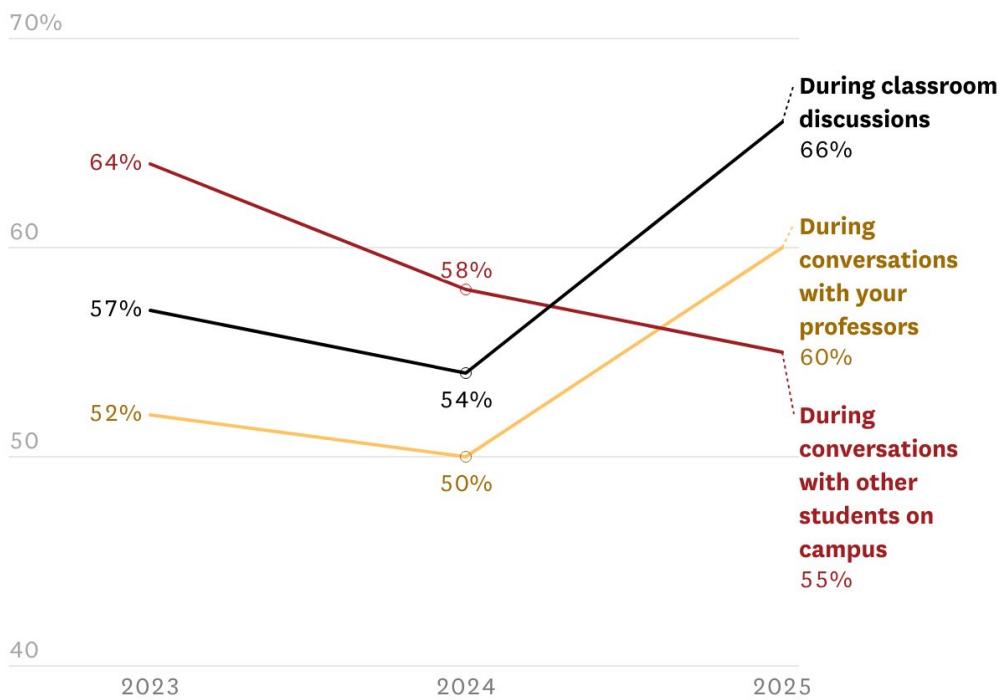


Chart: Emily Nayer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Student perceptions are unchanged in other areas

For the other survey components, student perceptions didn't significantly change at Georgetown University this year compared to last. Georgetown performed above average on "Administrative Support" and "Openness," ranking 93 and 58, respectively, and below average on "Political Tolerance," ranking 143.

On a positive note, roughly 4 in 10 Georgetown students, up from 3 in 10 last year, said it is "extremely" or "very" clear that their administration protects freedom of speech on campus.

Increasing rates of Georgetown students found it hard to have an open and honest conversation about current events. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the most difficult with 8 in 10 students finding it difficult to talk about. The next closest was abortion, with 5 in 10 students finding it difficult, followed by the presidential election, affirmative action, transgender rights, and economic inequality.

FIGURE 4: Georgetown Students Who Identified a Topic as Difficult to Discuss

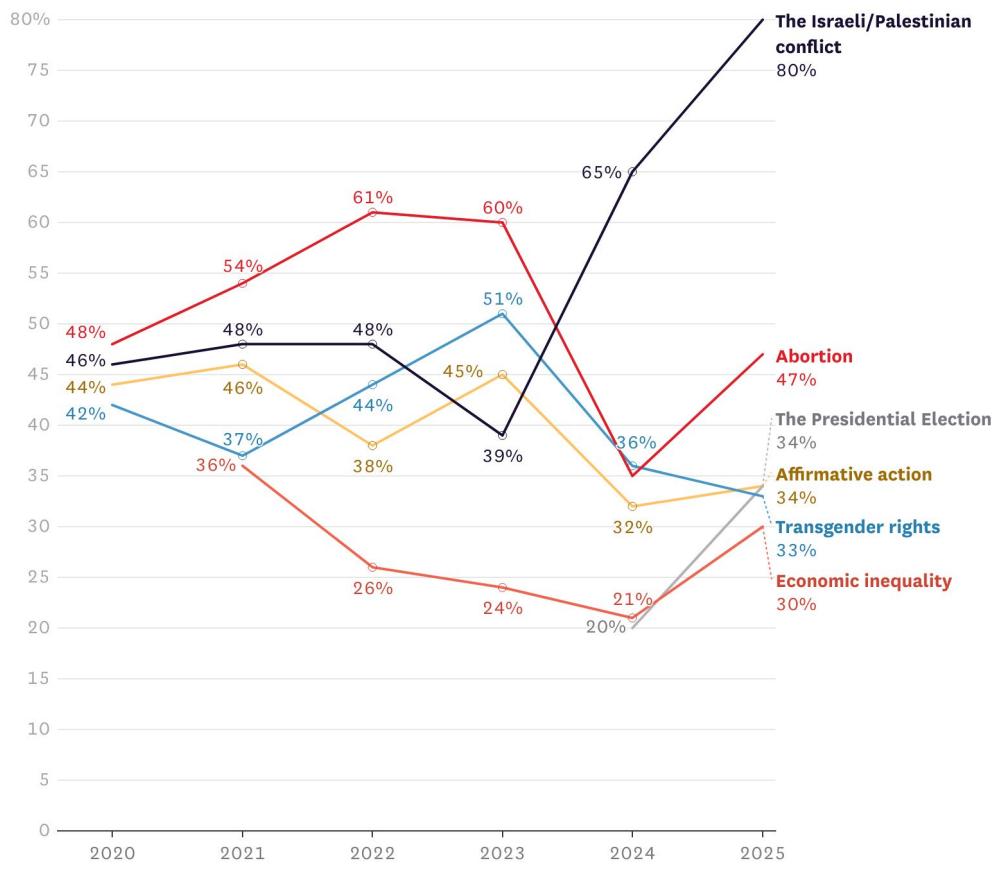


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

With one exception, a majority of Georgetown students believed that each of the controversial speakers asked about should be allowed to speak on campus. The one exception to this was a speaker who had said, “The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan” — more students said this speaker should probably or definitely not be allowed to speak on campus compared to last year (56% and 48%, respectively).

A ‘YELLOW LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH A CHICAGO STATEMENT

In June 2017, Georgetown University officially adopted a statement on free speech like the Chicago Statement. And since last year’s College Free Speech Rankings, it revised a “red light” policy.

Georgetown now earns an overall “yellow light” rating for its written policies governing student expression. The university maintains two yellow light policies and five “green light” policies. The university’s harassment policies do not meet the legal standard for peer hostile environment harassment in an educational setting, putting protected speech that does not reach that threshold at risk. Both

policies use a “purpose or effect” standard for defining harassing conduct, which does not align with the legal standard for the educational environment because that standard makes punishable conduct that was intended as harassing but does not have a harassing effect. Further, because the policies deviate from the legal standard, they grant administrators broad discretion over campus speech and could result in speech being chilled on campus.

GEORGETOWN’S SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

Georgetown University had three speech controversies since 2024, all of which involved invited speakers.

This year the university’s Students for Justice in Palestine chapter invited Ribhi Karajah, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, to speak on campus. Karajah spent three and a half years in prison for his involvement in a roadside bombing that killed a 17-year-old Israeli girl and injured her father and brother. Two days before the talk was scheduled to take place, the university asked Students for Justice in Palestine to postpone it so the university “could conduct a thorough investigation into serious safety and security concerns that had arisen in connection with the event.” Karajah’s talk was postponed and has not yet been rescheduled. After the postponement, The Lawfare Project, a legal advocacy group that supports students who face antisemitism on campus, called on the university to cancel the event entirely.

Previous events included an attempted disruption of Rudy Rochman, an Israeli Defense Force reservist, by Georgetown Law Students for Justice in Palestine. In addition, after imposing last-minute security fees, Georgetown allegedly canceled an event hosted by the College Republicans featuring activists Brandon Straka, Gothix, Natalie Beisner, and Shemeka Michelle.

HOW CAN GEORGETOWN IMPROVE?

Georgetown University can improve its ranking by reforming its “yellow light” speech policies to earn a “green light” rating. If Georgetown earned a green light rating this year, it would rank 37 instead of 129. We encourage Georgetown to improve its speech policies make an official commitment to institutional neutrality.

But policy changes alone do not change a campus’ free speech culture. The university should take active steps to improve campus culture by continuing to publicly defend speakers during controversy and by clearly communicating the value of free speech in a university setting. These are also opportunities to teach the campus community about the difference between free speech and civil disobedience.

By doing so Georgetown can demonstrate to students that it cares about free speech and its students’ rights to listen. Not only would these changes improve their policy and controversy scores, but they could also improve the university’s “Administrative Support” and “Disruptive Conduct” scores.

In addition, Georgetown could embed expressive rights training into first-year orientation so freshmen can learn when expression crosses into unprotected conduct. This training may reduce the penalties for disruption based speech controversies. It may also improve Georgetown’s middling rank on “Disruptive Conduct” (121) along with scores on other components.

Georgetown's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings Scores by Component

COMPONENT	GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY	NATIONAL AVERAGE	MINIMUM VALUE	MAXIMUM VALUE
Comfort Expressing Ideas	9.87	9.53	5	15
Self-Censorship	12.31	12.12	3	20
Disruptive Conduct	15.52	15.50	3	20
Administrative Support	11.70	11.32	2	20
Openness	7.52	7.19	0	10
Political Tolerance	6.39	6.44	3	15
Chicago Statement	3 (Yes)	-	0	3
Institutional Neutrality	0 (No)	-	0	3
Spotlight Rating	-5 (Yellow)	-	-10 (Red)	5 (Green)
Campus Deplatformings	-4	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Scholars Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Students Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Overall score	57.32	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	4	2
Not very clear	37	18
Somewhat clear	77	38
Very clear	71	35
Extremely clear	16	8

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	6	3
Not very likely	49	24
Somewhat likely	89	43
Very likely	54	26
Extremely likely	7	3

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	42	21
Somewhat uncomfortable	72	35
Somewhat comfortable	74	36
Very comfortable	17	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	32	16
Somewhat uncomfortable	72	35
Somewhat comfortable	77	38
Very comfortable	24	12

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	24	12
Somewhat uncomfortable	69	34
Somewhat comfortable	87	43
Very comfortable	24	12

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	9	5
Somewhat uncomfortable	59	29
Somewhat comfortable	86	42
Very comfortable	51	25

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	61	30
Somewhat uncomfortable	70	34
Somewhat comfortable	60	29
Very comfortable	13	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	8	4
Rarely	85	41
Occasionally, once or twice a month	70	34
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	35	17
Very often, nearly every day	7	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	10	5
Rarely	71	35
Occasionally, once or twice a month	83	40
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	28	14
Very often, nearly every day	13	6

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	12	6
Rarely	58	28
Occasionally, once or twice a month	91	44
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	33	16
Very often, nearly every day	10	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	15	8
Sometimes acceptable	73	36
Rarely acceptable	68	33
Never acceptable	48	24

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	1	1
Sometimes acceptable	34	17
Rarely acceptable	86	42
Never acceptable	83	41

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	1	0
Sometimes acceptable	9	4
Rarely acceptable	45	22
Never acceptable	149	73

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	94	46
Probably should not allow this speaker	54	26
Probably should allow this speaker	40	20
Definitely should allow this speaker	16	8

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	32	16
Probably should not allow this speaker	63	31
Probably should allow this speaker	82	40
Definitely should allow this speaker	28	14

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	82	40
Probably should not allow this speaker	64	31
Probably should allow this speaker	47	23
Definitely should allow this speaker	11	5

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	23	11
Probably should not allow this speaker	68	33
Probably should allow this speaker	79	39
Definitely should allow this speaker	34	16

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	28	14
Probably should not allow this speaker	86	42
Probably should allow this speaker	66	32
Definitely should allow this speaker	25	12

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	7	3
Probably should not allow this speaker	46	22
Probably should allow this speaker	105	51
Definitely should allow this speaker	47	23

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	105	52
Yes	95	46

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	132	65
Yes	68	33

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	181	88
Yes	20	10

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	195	95
Yes	6	3

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	185	91
Yes	15	7

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	139	68
Yes	61	30

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	172	84
Yes	29	14

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	162	79
Yes	39	19

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	169	82
Yes	32	16

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	172	84
Yes	29	14

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	156	76
Yes	44	22

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	153	75
Yes	47	23

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	40	20
Yes	160	78

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	131	64
Yes	69	34

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	150	73
Yes	51	25

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	143	70
Yes	57	28

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	166	81
Yes	35	17

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	159	78
Yes	42	20

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	171	83
Yes	30	15

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	135	66
Yes	66	32

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	187	91
Yes	14	7

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	35	17
Rarely	92	45
Occasionally, once or twice a month	48	23
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	24	12
Very often, nearly every day	2	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I have been disciplined.	1	1
No, but I have been threatened with discipline.	13	6
I have not been disciplined nor threatened with discipline.	186	91

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	50	24
Rarely	91	44
Occasionally, once or twice a month	37	18
Fairly often, a couple times a week	15	7
Very often, nearly every day	8	4

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	21	11
Unlikely	69	34
Neither likely or unlikely	60	30
Likely	43	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	15	7
Unlikely	66	32
Neither likely or unlikely	56	27
Likely	55	27
Very likely	8	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
I both know someone who has and have myself filed a Title IX complaint.	2	1
I have not but I know someone who has filed a Title IX complaint.	45	22
I have neither filed a Title IX complaint, nor know anyone who has.”)	154	75

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 me and someone I know.	1	0
A Title IX complaint was filed against someone I know, but not me.	32	16
A Title IX complaint has never been filed against me or someone I know.”)	166	81

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	49	24
Less than once a year	24	12
Once or twice a year	30	15
Several times a year	37	18
Once a month	20	10
2-3 times a month	21	10
About weekly	8	4
Weekly	11	5
Several times a week	1	1

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	1
No	199	97

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No	200	98	100

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	2	10
Less than half the time	13	6	33
About half the time	13	7	35
Most of the time, nearly every day	8	4	20
Always	1	0	2

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	12	6	28
Less than half the time	25	12	55
About half the time	5	3	12
Most of the time, nearly every day	2	1	5

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	5	2	11
Less than half the time	14	7	34
About half the time	12	6	28
Most of the time, nearly every day	10	5	24
Always	1	0	2

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	13	7	28
Less than half the time	16	8	33
About half the time	8	4	16
Most of the time, nearly every day	8	4	16
Always	3	1	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	5	2	17
Less than half the time	9	4	30
About half the time	9	5	33
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	2	14
Always	1	1	5



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