

2026 College Free Speech Rankings
Princeton University

160
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 254 Princeton University undergraduate students. Key findings include:

- Princeton ranks 160, with an overall score of 56.18 and an F speech climate grade.
- Princeton students remained open to discussing controversial topics, were tolerant toward controversial speech, and confident that the administration would protect free speech.
- Fewer students accepted disruptive conduct to stop speakers compared to last year.
- Fewer students felt comfortable expressing views on controversial issues compared to last year.
- Princeton received a “red light” rating for maintaining policies that clearly and substantially limit protected expression. If Princeton earned a “green light” rating, it would have ranked 18.
- Princeton was penalized for two incidents since 2022, one involving the firing of Joshua Katz and another involving a cancelled event with David French and Sarah Isgur.

Princeton University ranks 160 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 56.18, an F speech climate grade.¹ The following report highlights where Princeton performs comparatively well and is improving and a couple areas that are waning. In addition, it discusses Princeton speech policies and statements, its speech controversies, and what Princeton can do to improve its free speech climate.

PRINCETON STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF FREE SPEECH

Students embrace free speech and think the administrators do so as well

Princeton University maintains its top-50 rankings on multiple metrics. It ranks 17 on “Openness” (22 last year). Compared to students on other campuses, fewer Princetonians found it difficult to have an open and honest conversation about hot-button topics on their campus. One notable exception to this pattern was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: About 6 in 10 Princeton students found the topic difficult to discuss (64%) compared to 5 in 10 nationwide (53%).

FIGURE 1: Topics Identified as Difficult to Have an Open and Honest Conversation About (%)

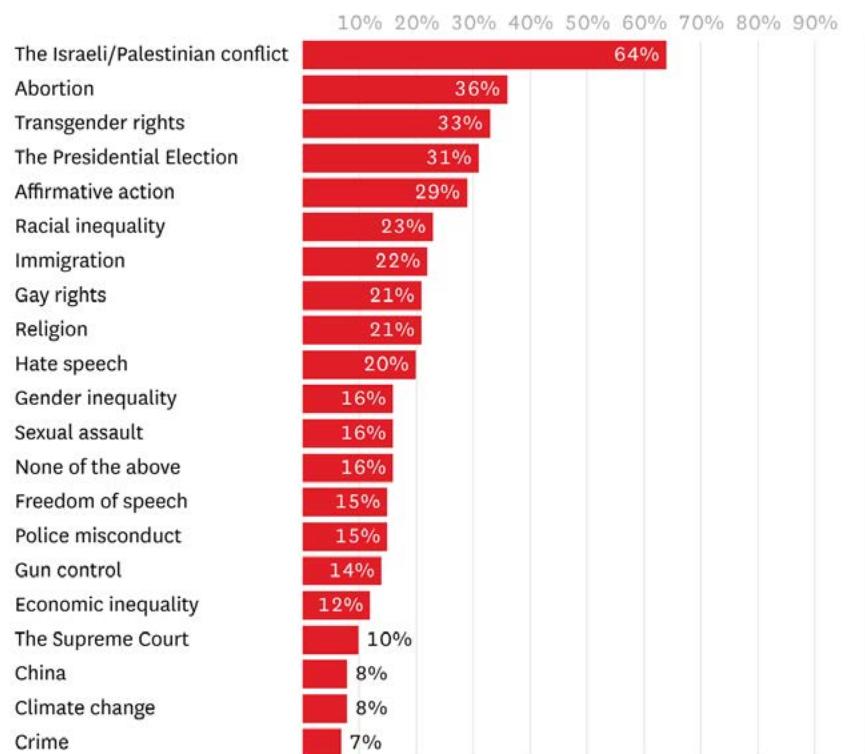


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

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

Princeton ranks 3 on “Political Tolerance.” Students were asked whether six speakers (three liberal and three conservative) who had previously expressed controversial opinions should be allowed to give a campus speech. Princeton students remained relatively tolerant toward both kinds of speech, ranking 14 on “Tolerance of Liberal Speakers” (18 last year) and 3 on “Tolerance of Conservative Speakers” (24 last year). For example, most Princeton students thought the school should allow a speaker who previously said “the police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan” (54%) or “abortion should be completely illegal” (64%).

FIGURE 2: Students Who Said Their School Should Not Allow Each Speaker on Campus

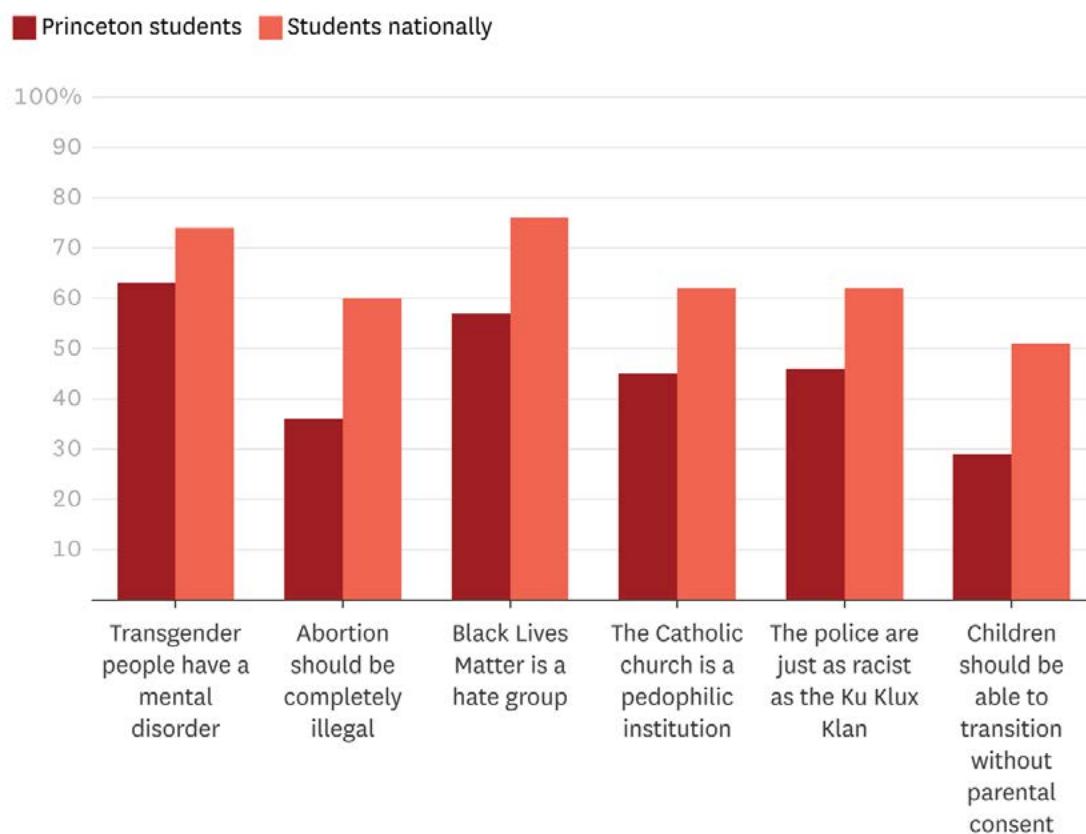


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Princeton also ranks 27 on “Administrative Support” (29 last year). An overwhelming majority of students thought it was at least somewhat clear that the administration protects free speech (83%) and would defend a speaker if a controversy occurred (86%).

FIGURE 3: Student Perceptions of the Administration

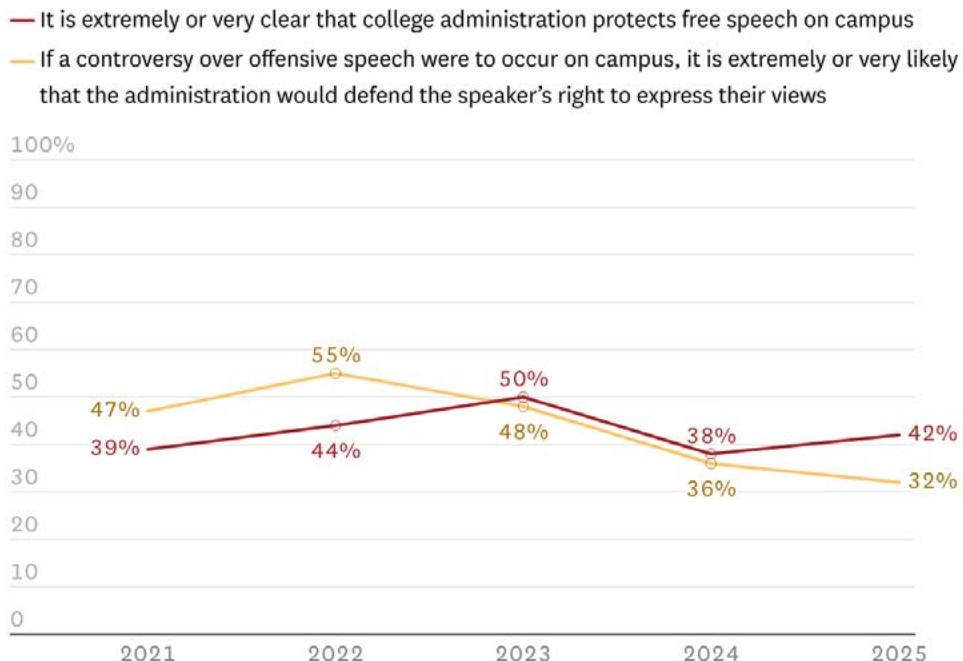


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Princeton students are less accepting of disruptive conduct

Fewer students found disruptions acceptable as a way to protest campus speakers, giving Princeton a rank of 32 on “Disruptive Conduct,” an improvement from 129 last year. Still, most Princeton students found it at least rarely acceptable to shout down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus (70%), while half of them found it acceptable to block other students from attending a campus speech (50%). Worryingly, about 1 in 5 students found it acceptable to use violence to stop a campus speech (22%).

FIGURE 4: Students Who Said Disruptive Conduct Was at Least Rarely Acceptable

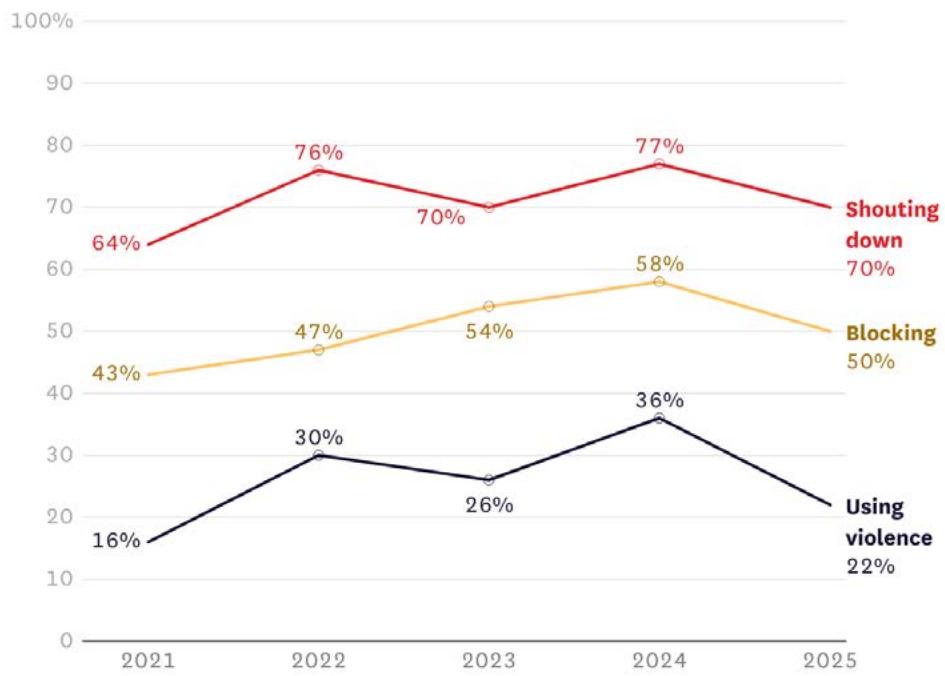


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Princeton students feel less comfortable expressing their views

Fewer students felt comfortable expressing their views on controversial issues compared to last year, which led to a drop in Princeton University's rank for "Comfort Expressing Ideas" (165, compared to 88 last year).

Most students felt comfortable expressing their views in a common campus space, such as a quad, dining hall, or a lounge (63%). But less than half of the students reported feeling comfortable disagreeing with professors in a written assignment (45%) and expressing their views during an in-class discussion (46%). Only about a quarter of them felt comfortable expressing an unpopular opinion to their fellow students on social media (23%).

While the students felt about as comfortable as they did last year in these contexts, we observed the most significant drop in their comfort publicly disagreeing with professors. Only about a third of students felt comfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic this year (36%) whereas about half of them did so last year (44%).

FIGURE 5: Students Who Felt at Least Somewhat Uncomfortable by Context

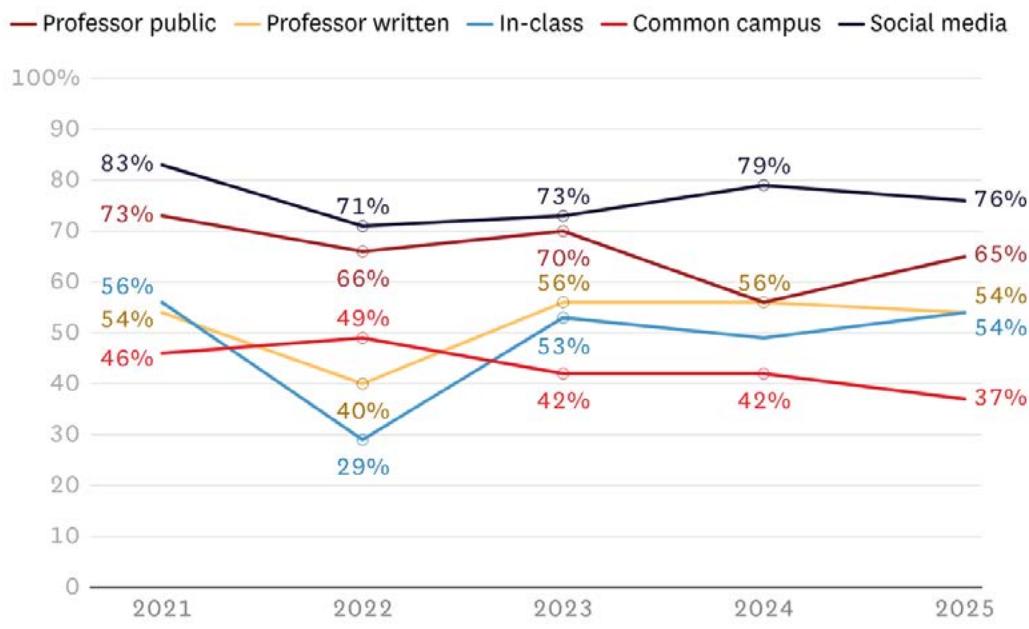


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

A ‘RED LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH FREE SPEECH COMMITMENTS

FIRE awards Princeton University a “red light” rating for its expression-related policies, flagging policies that clearly and substantially restrict protected speech. On the positive side, Princeton received bonus points for adopting the “Chicago Statement.”

Princeton University earns an overall red light rating for its written policies governing student expression. The institution maintains policies on postings, harassment, demonstrations, and internet usage that imperil the expressive rights of students on campus. Three of the university’s four harassment policies fail to meet the legal standard for peer hostile environment harassment in an educational setting. The policies reserve broad discretion to punish offensive but protected speech like “jokes,” “disparaging remarks,” and “negative posters or pictures.”

The university also maintains a restrictive internet usage policy that threatens punishment on broad categories of protected expression. The policy forbids the transmission of “malicious, harassing, or defamatory content,” granting administrators broad discretion to suppress protected campus speech. The university also prohibits digital expression conveyed in “anonymity or pseudonymity” in which the speaker “intends” to cause harm, as determined by administrators. Likewise, material postings community members wish to make must include identifiable information. These bans and restrictions undermine free speech principles, which extend significant protections to pseudonyms and unattributed expression.

Finally, Princeton imposes prior restraints by requiring approval for all protests and demonstrations, functionally prohibiting impromptu expression.

PRINCETON'S SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

Princeton University received penalties for two speech controversies from the past.

The most recent controversy was the successful deplatforming of David French and Sarah Isgur in 2024. The Whig-Cliophilic Society invited French and Isgur to record an episode of their *Advisory Opinions* podcast on campus. Whig-Clio was not allowed to host the event on campus because administrators were concerned that hosting French and Isgur would violate IRS rules for tax-exempt institutions participating in political advocacy. The podcast was recorded off-campus in the local public library. A Princeton administrator later clarified that the event was rejected because student organizations are prevented from hosting events with non-university organizations and not over concerns about the university's tax status. However, that event did not meet the definition of a co-sponsored event, and the policy violates students' associational rights.

Princeton also received a penalty for firing a tenured professor in 2022. Joshua Katz, a professor of classics at the university, authored an essay in *Quillette* criticizing faculty proposals aimed at addressing systemic racism at Princeton in 2020. In this piece, he referred to the Black Justice League (BJL), a former student organization, as "a small local terrorist organization that made life miserable for the students (including the many black students) who did not agree with its members' demands." This characterization drew significant criticism from colleagues and university administrators, including the university's president. However, the university did not initiate a formal investigation into Katz's remarks at that time. Subsequently, in February 2021, *The Daily Princetonian* reported that Katz had previously engaged in a consensual sexual relationship with an undergraduate student, which violated university policy. This revelation led to renewed scrutiny and a second university investigation. The investigation concluded that Katz had misrepresented facts during the initial 2018 inquiry and had discouraged the former student from participating in the investigation and from seeking mental health care. As a result, the university's Board of Trustees voted to dismiss Katz in May 2022.

HOW CAN PRINCETON IMPROVE?

One thing Princeton University can do to improve its ranking is to reform its speech policies to earn a "green light" rating. If Princeton had earned a green light rating this year, it would have pushed its ranking from 160 to 18. If Princeton had adopted institutional neutrality on top of a green light, it would have placed 7.

To be clear, even if Princeton had a flawless policy record, it still would have gotten only a C. Few Princetonians would be satisfied with such a grade. So even though Princeton does well on survey components relative to other schools, there is still a lot to improve.

Overall, by promoting the university's commitment to free speech through training and improved policies and defending free speech during speech controversies, Princeton could improve its speech climate grade in future years by creating a strong culture for free speech on campus.

Princeton's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings Scores by Component

COMPONENT	PRINCETON UNIVERSITY	NATIONAL AVERAGE	MINIMUM VALUE	MAXIMUM VALUE
Comfort Expressing Ideas	9.40	9.53	5	15
Self-Censorship	12.78	12.12	3	20
Disruptive Conduct	16.27	15.50	3	20
Administrative Support	12.40	11.32	2	20
Openness	7.88	7.19	0	10
Political Tolerance	8.45	6.44	3	15
Chicago Statement	3 (Yes)	-	0 (No)	3 (Yes)
Institutional Neutrality	0 (No)	-	0 (No)	3 (Yes)
Spotlight Rating	-10 (Red)	-	-10 (Red)	5 (Green)
Campus Deplatformings	-2	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Scholars Under Fire	-2	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Students Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Overall score	56.18	58.63		

Topline Results

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all clear	5	2
Not very clear	38	15
Somewhat clear	103	41
Very clear	80	31
Extremely clear	29	11

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	2
Not very likely	29	11
Somewhat likely	136	54
Very likely	56	22
Extremely likely	27	10

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	63	25
Somewhat uncomfortable	102	40
Somewhat comfortable	70	28
Very comfortable	20	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	36	14
Somewhat uncomfortable	102	40
Somewhat comfortable	93	36
Very comfortable	23	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	36	14
Somewhat uncomfortable	101	40
Somewhat comfortable	91	36
Very comfortable	25	10

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	25	10
Somewhat uncomfortable	69	27
Somewhat comfortable	126	50
Very comfortable	34	13

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	86	34
Somewhat uncomfortable	106	42
Somewhat comfortable	57	22
Very comfortable	5	2

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	17	7
Rarely	94	37
Occasionally, once or twice a month	95	38
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	43	17
Very often, nearly every day	5	2

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	23	9
Rarely	91	36
Occasionally, once or twice a month	102	40
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	34	13
Very often, nearly every day	4	2

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	21	8
Rarely	81	32
Occasionally, once or twice a month	98	38
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	46	18
Very often, nearly every day	8	3

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	10	4
Sometimes acceptable	58	23
Rarely acceptable	108	43
Never acceptable	78	31

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	7	3
Sometimes acceptable	25	10
Rarely acceptable	94	37
Never acceptable	128	50

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	3	1
Sometimes acceptable	19	8
Rarely acceptable	34	13
Never acceptable	197	78

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	68	27
Probably should not allow this speaker	92	36
Probably should allow this speaker	49	19
Definitely should allow this speaker	45	18

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	32	13
Probably should not allow this speaker	59	23
Probably should allow this speaker	92	36
Definitely should allow this speaker	72	28

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	67	26
Probably should not allow this speaker	79	31
Probably should allow this speaker	63	25
Definitely should allow this speaker	45	18

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	36	14
Probably should not allow this speaker	79	31
Probably should allow this speaker	90	36
Definitely should allow this speaker	49	19

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	33	13
Probably should not allow this speaker	83	33
Probably should allow this speaker	85	33
Definitely should allow this speaker	54	21

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	28	11
Probably should not allow this speaker	44	17
Probably should allow this speaker	122	48
Definitely should allow this speaker	60	24

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	160	63
Yes	91	36

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	177	70
Yes	74	29

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	230	90
Yes	21	8

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	231	91
Yes	20	8

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	234	92
Yes	17	7

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	221	87
Yes	30	12

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	214	84
Yes	38	15

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	197	78
Yes	54	21

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	210	83
Yes	41	16

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	216	85
Yes	35	14

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	201	79
Yes	51	20

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	196	77
Yes	56	22

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	88	35
Yes	163	64

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	173	68
Yes	78	31

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	212	84
Yes	39	15

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	193	76
Yes	58	23

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	198	78
Yes	54	21

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	212	83
Yes	40	16

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	227	89
Yes	25	10

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	169	66
Yes	83	33

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	211	83
Yes	40	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	49	19
Rarely	85	33
Occasionally, once or twice a month	73	29
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	37	15
Very often, nearly every day	7	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I have been disciplined.	1	0
No, but I have been threatened with discipline.	24	9
I have not been disciplined nor threatened with discipline.	225	89

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	92	36
Rarely	96	38
Occasionally, once or twice a month	40	16
Fairly often, a couple times a week	15	6
Very often, nearly every day	7	3

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	35	14
Unlikely	86	34
Neither likely or unlikely	90	35
Likely	30	12
Very likely	9	4

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	9
Unlikely	62	24
Neither likely or unlikely	94	37
Likely	63	25
Very likely	9	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
I have filed a Title IX complaint.	1	0
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.	42	17
I have neither filed a Title IX complaint, nor know anyone who has.”)	205	81

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
A Title IX complaint was filed against someone I know, but not me.	29	12
A Title IX complaint has never been filed against me or someone I know.”)	221	87

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	78	31
Less than once a year	8	3
Once or twice a year	31	12
Several times a year	33	13
Once a month	21	8
2-3 times a month	12	5
About weekly	20	8
Weekly	38	15
Several times a week	10	4

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	1
No	248	98

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	5	2	2
No	245	96	98

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	2	8
Less than half the time	21	8	40
About half the time	10	4	19
Most of the time, nearly every day	17	7	32
Always	0	0	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	13	5	25
Less than half the time	26	10	50
About half the time	10	4	20
Most of the time, nearly every day	3	1	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	6	2	12
Less than half the time	17	7	36
About half the time	9	4	19
Most of the time, nearly every day	11	4	22
Always	5	2	11

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	20	8	45
Less than half the time	12	5	26
About half the time	12	5	27
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	6	2	11
Less than half the time	28	11	53
About half the time	11	4	20
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	2	8
Always	4	2	8



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