

2026 College Free Speech Rankings
Villanova University

237

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 Jan. 3 through June 5, 2025. The rankings are available online (rankings.thefire.org) for easy comparison.

We surveyed 276 Villanova University undergraduates. Key findings include:

- Villanova ranks 237 out of 257 schools with an overall score of 50.59 and an F speech climate grade.
- Villanova ranks 242 out of 257 for “Self-Censorship” and 235 out of 257 for “Comfort Expressing Ideas.”
- Villanova ranks 105 on “Political Tolerance.” Of 6 hypothetical controversial speakers, there was not a single one that a majority of students would allow.
- Roughly 7 in 10 Villanova students say it is at least rarely acceptable to shout down a speaker; nearly 4 in 10 say violence to stop a speech can be acceptable at least rarely.
- Only 31% say it is very or extremely clear the administration protects free speech, and only 18% say the administration would be very or extremely likely to defend a speaker’s rights.
- Villanova earns a “red light” spotlight rating. The university has not adopted the “Chicago Statement” or a policy of institutional neutrality. If Villanova had revised its red light policies and earned a “yellow light” instead, it would have ranked 179.
- No speech controversies were counted this year; the low score reflects survey results showing a poor speech climate and restrictive policies rather than recent events.

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Villanova University ranks 237 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 50.59 and an F speech climate grade.¹ The following report highlights Villanova's middling to poor performance across the student survey. In addition, it discusses Villanova's speech policies and what Villanova can do to improve its free speech climate.

VILLANOVA STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF FREE SPEECH

Students are reluctant to voice their views

Villanova University students reported reluctance to voice controversial views. Villanova ranks 242 on "Self-Censorship." A majority (52%) said they have felt they could not express an opinion at least once a month because of how others would respond. Self-censorship is routine: 66% said they self-censored at least monthly in conversations with other students, 66% with their professors, and 72% during classroom discussions.

Comfort levels track this pattern. Villanova ranks 235 on "Comfort Expressing Ideas." Villanova students reported being more uncomfortable ("very" or "somewhat") publicly disagreeing with a professor (67%) than their peers nationally (60%). They were similarly more uncomfortable disagreeing in a written assignment (60%) and expressing views during an in-class discussion (54%) than their peers nationally (49% and 52%, respectively).

FIGURE 1: Students Who Were Uncomfortable Expressing Views by Setting

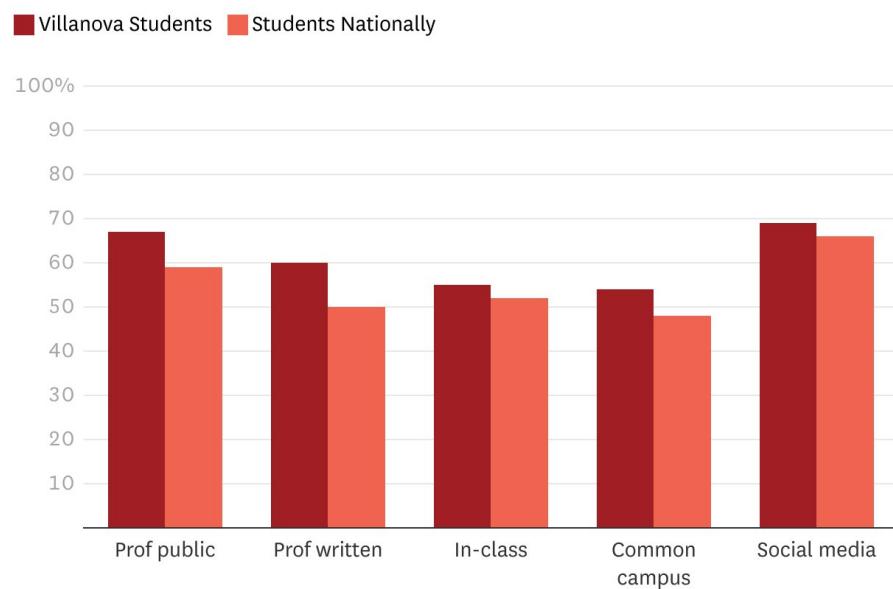


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

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

STUDENTS DON'T WANT CONTROVERSIAL SPEAKERS ON CAMPUS

Villanova University ranks 105 on “Political Tolerance” (across six scenarios featuring controversial speakers (three liberal, three conservative)), majorities of students said the speakers should not be allowed to speak on campus. This pattern holds across issues such as abortion, transgender rights, the Catholic Church, Black Lives Matter, and police racism. Given that Villanova is roughly evenly balanced between liberal and conservative students, this uniformity is unsurprising.

FIGURE 2: Students Who Support Allowing Controversial Speakers

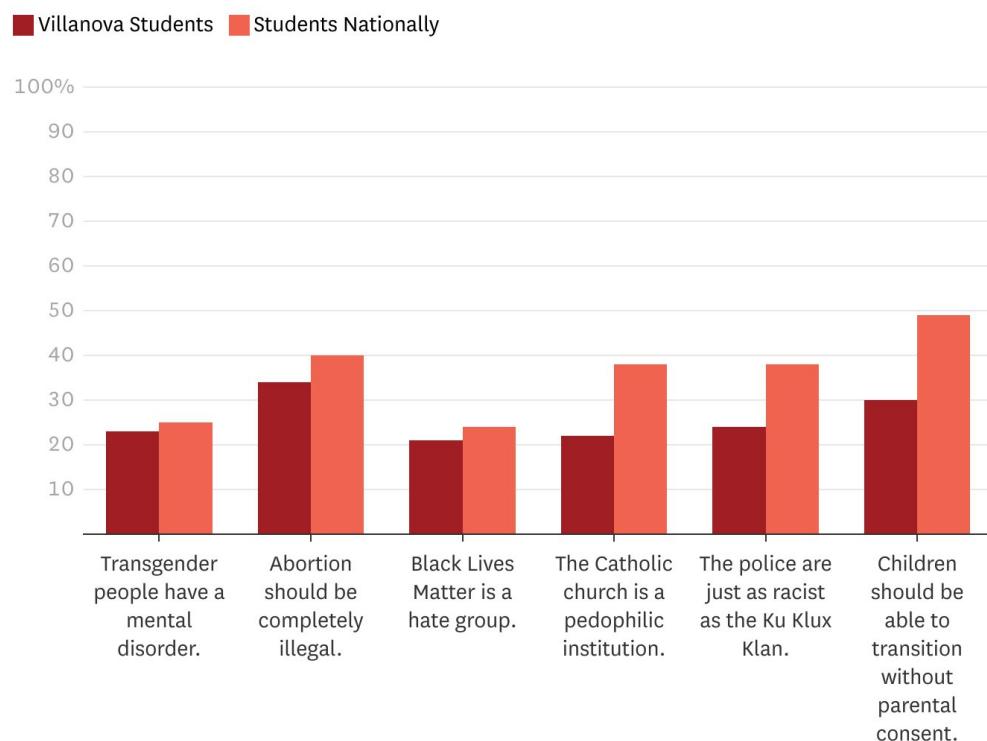


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Students don't trust their administration to protect free speech

Perceptions of administrative backing are weak. Only about a third of students said it is “very” or “extremely” clear that the administration protects free speech, and fewer than 1 in 5 believed the administration would be “very” or “extremely” likely to defend a speaker’s rights during a controversy. These views led to Villanova’s poor “Administrative Support” component ranking (173).

7 in 10 students are okay with shouting down a speaker

Acceptance of disruptive tactics was widespread. Villanova ranks 187 on “Disruptive Conduct.” Roughly 7 in 10 Villanova University students said it is at least rarely acceptable to shout down a speaker to prevent them from speaking. Over half said blocking other students from attending a campus speech can be acceptable at least rarely, and almost 2 in 5 said the same about using violence to stop a speech.

FIGURE 3: Students Who Find Each Disruptive Tactic at Least Rarely Acceptable

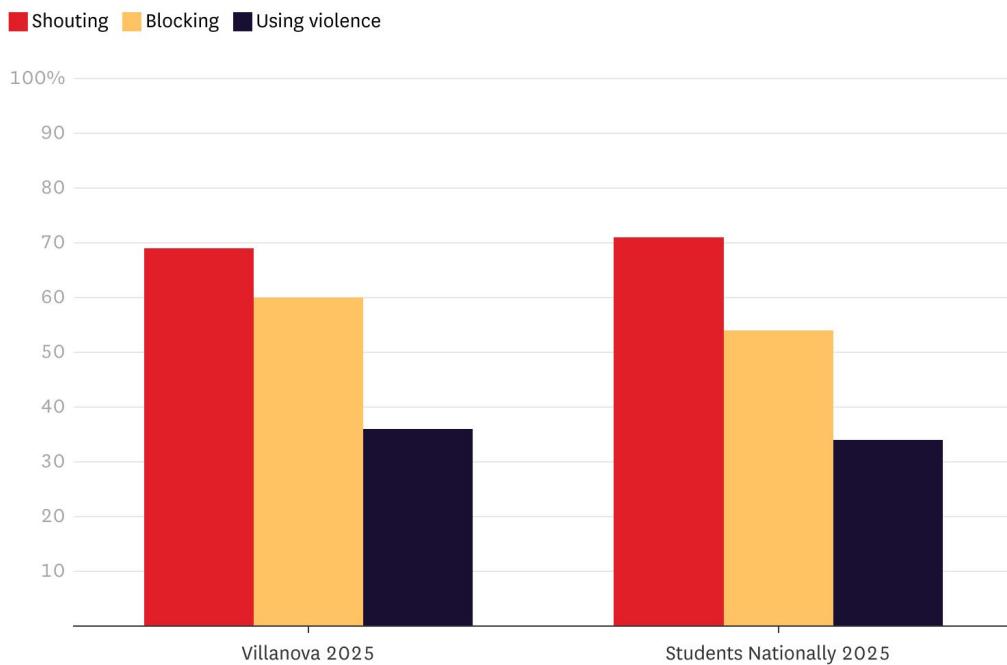


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/ College Pulse

Students have difficulty talking about current events

Villanova ranks 142 on “Openness.” Many Villanova University students reported that it is difficult to have open and honest conversations about several current events and social issues, including abortion, the presidential election, transgender rights, gay rights, racial inequality, religion, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, immigration, and gun control. On several of these topics, difficulty levels were higher at Villanova than they were nationally.

FIGURE 4: Students Who Have Difficulty Talking About Each Topic

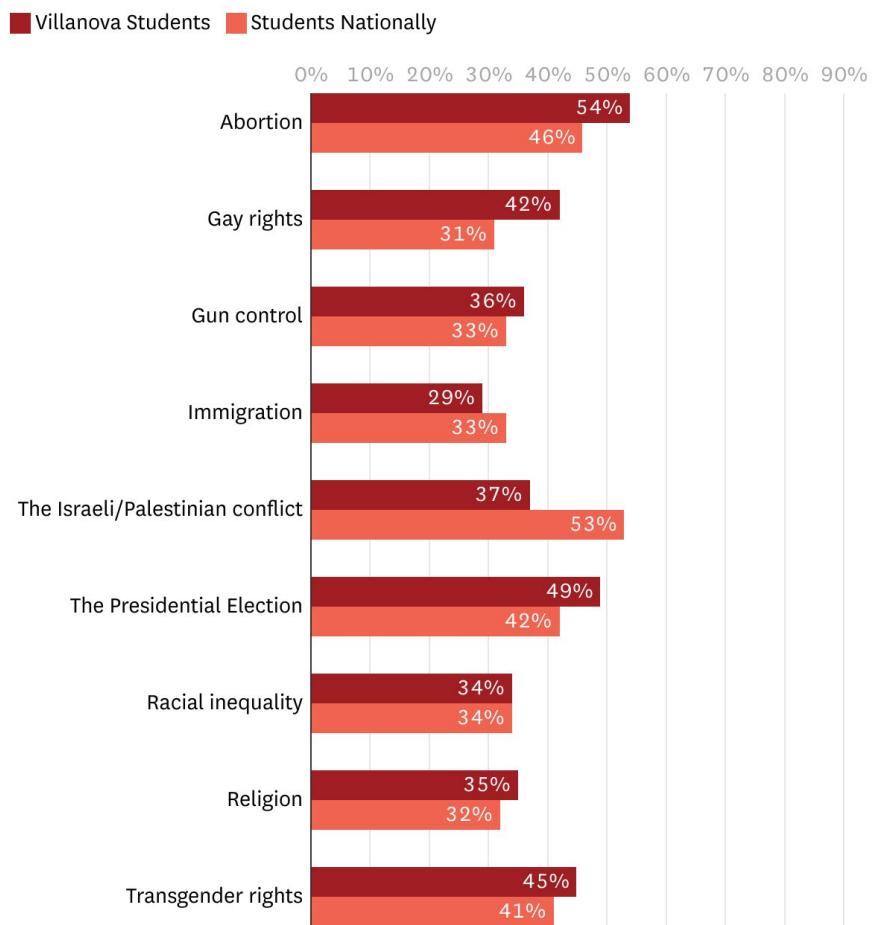


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

A ‘RED LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH NO FREE SPEECH COMMITMENTS

Villanova University earns a “red light” Spotlight rating, indicating at least one written policy that clearly and substantially restricts free speech. The university has not adopted the Chicago Statement on free expression or made a formal commitment to institutional neutrality. While Villanova had no speech controversies recorded this year, its low overall score primarily reflects student survey outcomes and policy shortcomings.

Villanova maintains more than ten restrictive policies on various topics including postings, harassment, civility, and internet usage, all of which imperil the expressive rights of students on campus. One of the university’s harassment policies fails to meet the legal standard for peer hostile environment harassment in an educational setting, putting protected speech that does not reach that threshold at risk.

Villanova also restricts expressive activities by requiring campus postings to receive prior approval, forbidding anonymous authorship, and engaging in viewpoint discrimination by banning any posters that

deny “respect of the dignity of individuals” or “offend[]...good taste.” Under this policy, the university could suppress speech that administrators find objectionable, risking the suppression of protected expression. The same can be said for the institution’s publication and protest policies, which forbid students from expressing views administratively deemed “offensive” on various subject matters.

The university also encourages students to report incidents of “climate concern” to the administration. Concerns related to bias are already addressed by existing harassment and discrimination protocols; therefore, the administration should focus its resources on these established systems and avoid soliciting reports of subjective bias.

Further, Villanova broadly mandates civility in its residence policies by requiring room decorations to “align with the University’s values of mutual love and respect” and barring “insensitive” or “disrespectful” expression by residents. While civility is a laudable goal for students to aspire to, mandates on civility can all too easily be applied by administrators to punish disfavored speech.

Speech is further stifled by Villanova’s internet usage policies, which place broad bans on activities such as “hate speech,” “bullying,” and “abusive” messaging. This gives the administration significant authority to regulate widely unfavorable but protected expression.

HOW CAN VILLANOVA IMPROVE?

Villanova can improve its ranking by reforming its “red light” speech policies to earn a “green light” rating. If Villanova had earned a green light rating this year, its overall rank would have risen to 42 from its current 237. In addition to advising improved speech policies, we encourage Villanova to adopt the Chicago Statement to reaffirm its commitment to open inquiry and make a commitment to institutional neutrality. Paired with green light policies, these commitments would have placed Villanova 17 in this year’s College Free Speech Rankings.

Because it was not penalized for any incidents in our databases, we do not have specific suggestions of how Villanova might change its behavior in response to attempts to sanction speakers, scholars, and students. However, the high levels of student self-censorship and low levels of student comfort with expressing themselves on various topics show that cultural change is needed.

Policy changes alone do not change a campus’ free speech culture. Administrators need to communicate policy changes directly to students in a way that emphasizes Villanova’s commitment to free expression. Students would benefit from orientation, training, or high-profile university-sponsored events on freedom of expression and civil dialogue on campus. The situation could also be helped by clear communication from university leadership that dialogue and freedom of expression are not just allowed but encouraged, and are central to the university experience.

Villanova's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings Scores by Component

COMPONENT	VILLANOVA UNIVERSITY	NATIONAL AVERAGE	MINIMUM VALUE	MAXIMUM VALUE
Comfort Expressing Ideas	9.03	9.53	5	15
Self-Censorship	11.46	12.12	3	20
Disruptive Conduct	15.17	15.50	3	20
Administrative Support	11.02	11.32	2	20
Openness	7.15	7.19	0	10
Political Tolerance	6.76	6.44	3	15
Chicago Statement	0 (No)	-	0	3
Institutional Neutrality	0 (No)	-	0	3
Spotlight Rating	-10 (Red)	-	-10 (Red)	5 (Green)
Campus Deplatformings	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Scholars Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Students Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Overall score	50.59	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	6	2
Not very clear	34	12
Somewhat clear	149	54
Very clear	73	26
Extremely clear	13	5

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	17	6
Not very likely	76	27
Somewhat likely	134	48
Very likely	42	15
Extremely likely	8	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	66	24
Somewhat uncomfortable	119	43
Somewhat comfortable	74	27
Very comfortable	17	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	52	19
Somewhat uncomfortable	113	41
Somewhat comfortable	94	34
Very comfortable	17	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	68	25
Somewhat uncomfortable	82	30
Somewhat comfortable	106	38
Very comfortable	20	7

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	60	22
Somewhat uncomfortable	89	32
Somewhat comfortable	101	37
Very comfortable	25	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	98	35
Somewhat uncomfortable	93	34
Somewhat comfortable	73	27
Very comfortable	12	4

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	19	7
Rarely	75	27
Occasionally, once or twice a month	121	44
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	47	17
Very often, nearly every day	13	5

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	11	4
Rarely	83	30
Occasionally, once or twice a month	98	35
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	52	19
Very often, nearly every day	32	12

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	14	5
Rarely	64	23
Occasionally, once or twice a month	94	34
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	81	29
Very often, nearly every day	24	9

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	11	4
Sometimes acceptable	92	33
Rarely acceptable	87	32
Never acceptable	86	31

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	9	3
Sometimes acceptable	56	20
Rarely acceptable	101	37
Never acceptable	109	40

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	14	5
Sometimes acceptable	35	13
Rarely acceptable	49	18
Never acceptable	178	64

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	122	44
Probably should not allow this speaker	90	33
Probably should allow this speaker	47	17
Definitely should allow this speaker	16	6

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	76	28
Probably should not allow this speaker	105	38
Probably should allow this speaker	69	25
Definitely should allow this speaker	26	9

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	115	42
Probably should not allow this speaker	101	37
Probably should allow this speaker	45	16
Definitely should allow this speaker	15	5

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	106	39
Probably should not allow this speaker	108	39
Probably should allow this speaker	45	16
Definitely should allow this speaker	17	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	114	41
Probably should not allow this speaker	95	34
Probably should allow this speaker	45	16
Definitely should allow this speaker	23	8

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	65	24
Probably should not allow this speaker	128	46
Probably should allow this speaker	66	24
Definitely should allow this speaker	17	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	127	46
Yes	149	54

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	223	81
Yes	52	19

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	258	94
Yes	17	6

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	227	82
Yes	49	18

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	241	87
Yes	35	13

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	213	77
Yes	63	23

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	237	86
Yes	39	14

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	161	58
Yes	115	42

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	193	70
Yes	83	30

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	178	64
Yes	98	36

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	210	76
Yes	66	24

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	196	71
Yes	80	29

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	173	63
Yes	102	37

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	141	51
Yes	135	49

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	205	74
Yes	71	26

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	182	66
Yes	93	34

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	179	65
Yes	97	35

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	199	72
Yes	76	28

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	248	90
Yes	28	10

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	151	55
Yes	125	45

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	250	91
Yes	26	9

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	42	15
Rarely	91	33
Occasionally, once or twice a month	95	34
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	36	13
Very often, nearly every day	12	4

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I have been disciplined.	9	3
No, but I have been threatened with discipline.	36	13
I have not been disciplined nor threatened with discipline.	231	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	64	23
Rarely	73	27
Occasionally, once or twice a month	77	28
Fairly often, a couple times a week	35	13
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	31	11
Unlikely	82	30
Neither likely or unlikely	106	38
Likely	46	17
Very likely	11	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	23	8
Unlikely	63	23
Neither likely or unlikely	84	30
Likely	85	31
Very likely	21	7

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.	13	5
I have not but I know someone who has filed a Title IX complaint.	80	29
I have neither filed a Title IX complaint, nor know anyone who has.”)	182	66

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.	7	3
A Title IX complaint was filed against someone I know, but not me.	72	26
A Title IX complaint has never been filed against me or someone I know.”)	197	71

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	43	16
Less than once a year	26	9
Once or twice a year	50	18
Several times a year	52	19
Once a month	27	10
2-3 times a month	14	5
About weekly	19	7
Weekly	38	14
Several times a week	7	2

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	14	5
No	261	95

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	4	1	1
No	271	98	99

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	1	6
Less than half the time	18	7	31
About half the time	20	7	33
Most of the time, nearly every day	13	5	22
Always	5	2	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	16	6	31
Less than half the time	28	10	54
About half the time	5	2	10
Most of the time, nearly every day	2	1	5
Always	0	0	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	9	3	19
Less than half the time	16	6	33
About half the time	13	5	27
Most of the time, nearly every day	6	2	12
Always	5	2	10

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	17	6	34
Less than half the time	21	8	42
About half the time	10	4	20
Most of the time, nearly every day	1	0	3
Always	0	0	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	1	6
Less than half the time	22	8	33
About half the time	20	7	30
Most of the time, nearly every day	17	6	26
Always	3	1	5



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