

2026 College Free Speech Rankings
Yale University

58
OVERALL
RANK

D-
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 270 Yale University undergraduates. Key findings include:

- Yale ranks 58, with an overall score of 62.46 and a D- speech climate.
- A significant rise in the rankings for the second year in a row, after finishing 155 last year and 234 the year before.
- Among its Ivy League peers, Yale (58) ranks below only Dartmouth (35), but well ahead of Princeton (161), Brown (187), Cornell (227), UPenn (231), Harvard (245), and Columbia (256).
- Yale students are more comfortable than in the past couple of years expressing their views on controversial subjects, ranking 20 on “Comfort Expressing Ideas.”
- Yale students have lower rates of difficulty talking about a variety of topics, ranking 31 on “Openness” and 38 on “Self-Censorship.”
- Yale students are among the most tolerant in the nation toward controversial speakers, though are biased toward liberals — ranking 2 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” and 21 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers.”
- Compared to prior years, Yale students trust the administration more and are less accepting of disruptive conduct, but still have room to grow — ranking 136 on “Administrative Support” and 122 on “Disruptive Conduct.” However, 4 in 5 Yale students said it is at least “rarely” acceptable to shout down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus.
- Yale maintains 5 speech policies that earn it a “yellow light” rating from FIRE. If Yale revised these policies and earned a “green light” rating, it would have ranked 2 overall.

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Yale University scored 62.46, a D- speech climate, and ranks 58 overall in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings.¹ This marks a second consecutive year of significant improvement for Yale, which ranked 155 last year and 234 the year before.

The following report highlights Yale's improvement on "Comfort Expressing Ideas," its strengths in "Openness" and "Self-Censorship," and its mild performances on the other survey components. In addition, it discusses Yale's speech policies and what Yale can do to improve its free speech climate.

YALE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF FREE SPEECH

More Yale students are comfortable sharing their views on controversial topics

Yale University ranks 20 on the "Comfort Expressing Ideas" component, after finishing 95 last year and 147 the year before.

Students were asked how comfortable they would be expressing themselves in five contexts. For each context, the percentage of Yale students who reported feeling either "somewhat" or "very comfortable" increased from last year (by an average of 7 percentage points). Further, for each context, the percentage who reported feeling "very comfortable" increased (by an average of 5 points) while those who reported feeling "very uncomfortable" decreased (by an average of 5 points).

Yale's students also expressed greater comfort levels than students nationally, particularly during in-class discussions (+10 points) and during a discussion in a common campus space such as a quad, dining hall, or lounge (+16 points). In common campus spaces, Yale students were more likely to feel "very comfortable" (+12 points), and less likely to feel "very uncomfortable" (-9 points).

FIGURE 1: Yale Students Who Felt Either "Somewhat" or "Very" Comfortable by Context (%)

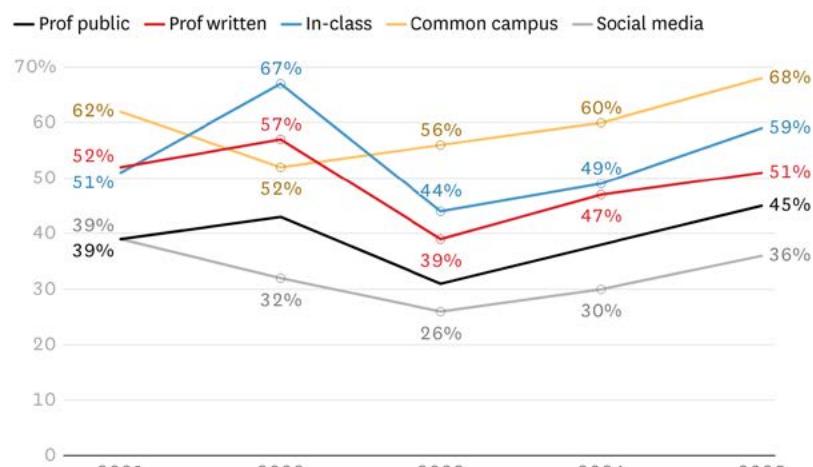


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE/College Pulse

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

Students are generally comfortable talking about most topics in various settings

Yale University ranks 38 on the “Self-Censorship” component.

Students were presented the following definition of self-censorship:

“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.”

They were then asked about the frequency with which they self-censor in three campus contexts. In two of the three, fewer Yale students reported self-censoring at least “a couple of times a week” than students nationally.

- 27% during conversations with other students on campus (compared to 24% of students nationally).
- 20% during conversations with professors (compared to 27% of students nationally).
- 21% during classroom discussions (compared to 28% of students nationally).

Yale ranks 31 on the “Openness” component; essentially unchanged from previous years — 28 last year and 47 the year before.

Students were presented a list of 20 topics and asked which, if any, were difficult to have an open and honest conversation about. Notable changes since last year include the topics of economic inequality (-8 points), abortion (+8 points), and the presidential election (+10 points). Despite rises for abortion and the presidential election, these topics were identified far less frequently than among students nationally (-12 points and -11 points, respectively).

In fact, Yale students identified 18 of 20 topics less frequently than students nationally, and eight by more than 10 points. However, the remaining two topics were identified far more frequently by Yale students: affirmative action (31%, +10 points) and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (70%, +17 points).

FIGURE 2: Topics Identified as Difficult to Have and Open and Honest Conversation About (%)

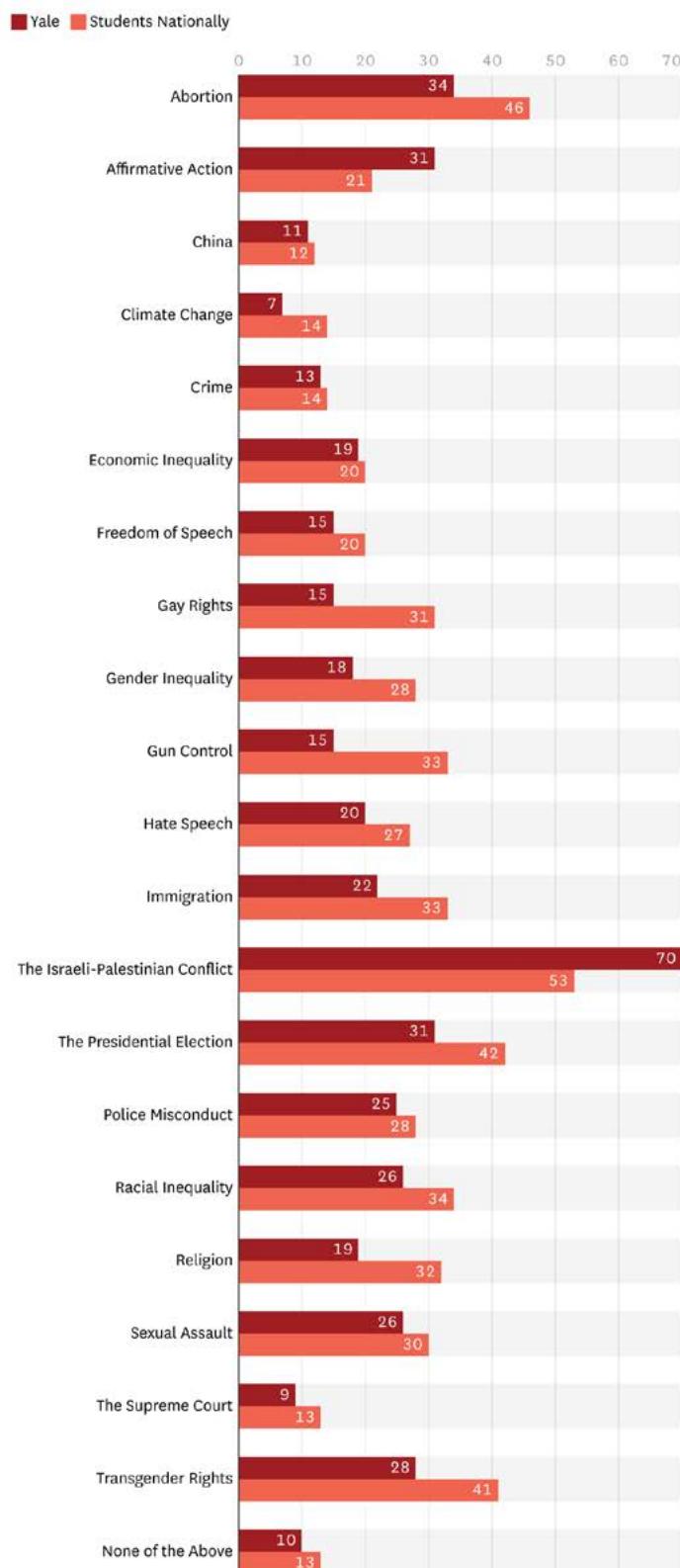


Chart: Emily Nayyer - Source: College Pulse/ FIRE

Overall, findings from the “Openness” and “Self-Censorship” components (for which Yale ranks 31 and 38, respectively) suggest that students are generally comfortable talking about most topics in various settings.

Yale students are more tolerant of controversial speakers though biased toward liberals

Yale University ranks 70 on “Political Tolerance.” Students were asked whether six speakers (three liberal, three conservative) who had previously expressed controversial opinions should be allowed to give a campus speech.

Impressively, Yale ranks 2 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers,” 21 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers,” and 3 on “Mean Tolerance.” However, despite high marks on these subcomponents, students demonstrated a heavy bias toward liberal speakers compared to conservative ones, as evidenced by a 226 ranking on the “Tolerance Difference” subcomponent. This is unsurprising, considering liberal students outnumber conservative students at Yale at a ratio of 6:1.

When it came to controversial conservative speakers, the percentage of Yale students who said they “probably” or “definitely should” be allowed ranged from 33% to 58%. Controversial liberal speakers, meanwhile, were much more supported, with percentages ranging from 60% to 80%.

FIGURE 3: Students Who Said Their School “Probably” or “Definitely” Should Allow Controversial Speakers (%)

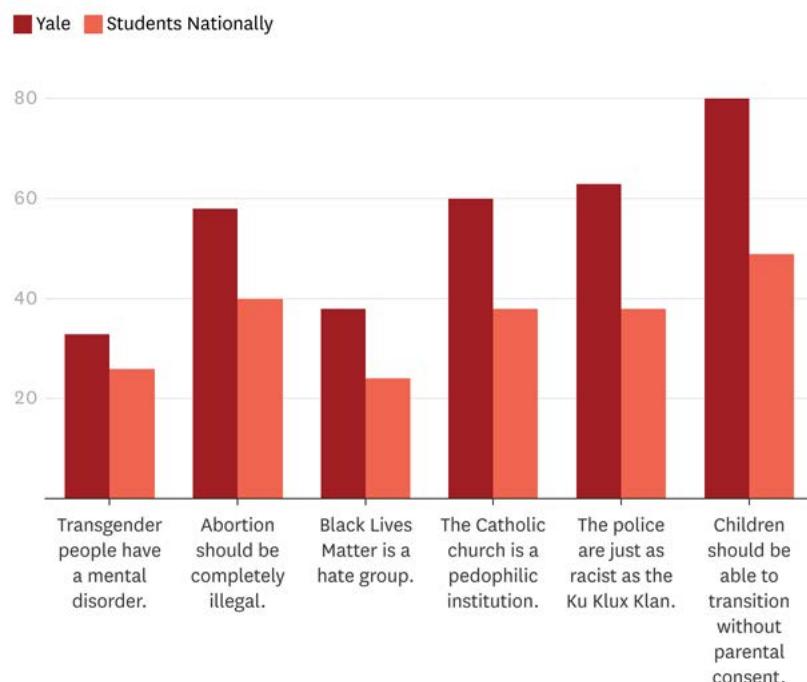


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: College Pulse/ FIRE

Despite their clear preference in speakers, Yale students were on average much more supportive of both controversial conservative (+13 points) and controversial liberal speakers (+26 points) than students nationally. They are also more firm in their support on average (saying a speaker “definitely should” be allowed) than students nationally for both sets of speakers (by +9 and +16 points, respectively). Since last year, support for both sets of speakers among Yale students has remained mostly steady. Among students nationally, however, levels of support have fallen for controversial conservative speakers (-4 points on average) and, especially, controversial liberal speakers (-9 points on average).

Overall, while tolerance for controversial speakers (particularly liberal speakers) has fallen among students nationally, things are actually improving steadily at Yale, which has climbed in each of the past three years in its “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers,” “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers,” and “Mean Tolerance” rankings. However, with a liberal supermajority on campus, the difference of tolerance between liberal and conservatives “Political Tolerance” remains middling.

4 in 5 students believe shouting down a speaker is acceptable

Yale University recovered from last year’s dip and now ranks 122 on the “Disruptive Conduct” component after finishing 208 last year.

When it comes to students’ support for disruptive conduct, it’s a mixed bag at Yale. On the one hand, support for violence has fallen since last year (-8 points) and is lower than among students nationally (also -8 points). On the other hand, support for shouting down a speaker is unchanged over the past year, and is greater than among students nationally (+7 points).

Unlike in recent years, no event disruptions factored into Yale’s ranking this year. Still, acceptance of such behavior, even if only “rarely,” remains at concerning levels.

- 78% – shout down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus.
- 56% – blocking other students from attending a campus speech.
- 26% – using violence to stop a campus speech.

2 in 5 students believe the administration would defend a speaker’s rights

Yale University ranks 136 on the “Administrative Support” component.

Thirty-four percent of Yale students said that it is either “very” or “extremely” clear that the administration protects free speech on campus, with another 42% having said it is “somewhat” clear. When it comes to whether students think the administration would defend a speaker’s rights during a controversy, 28% said it was either “very” or “extremely” likely, with another 53% having said it was “somewhat” likely that it would.

A ‘YELLOW LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH INSTITUTIONAL NEUTRALITY

Last October, Yale University made an official commitment to institutional neutrality with its Report of the Committee on Institutional Voice. While this is certainly a positive development (earning the university 3 bonus points), the administration has yet to adopt the “Chicago Statement” or a similar commitment to free expression, and the university maintains a “yellow light” rating. FIRE has flagged five policies that pose either impermissibly vague or clear but narrow restrictions on protected speech.

Yale earns an overall yellow light rating for its written policies governing student expression. The university maintains five yellow light policies and two “green light” policies. Two of the university’s harassment policies fail to meet the legal standard for peer hostile environment harassment, risking suppressing protected speech. The internet usage policy broadly bans the display of “offensive, sexual material,” opening a wide range of protected speech to punishment.

In the introduction to the Undergrad Regulations, Yale further stifles student expression by threatening punishment against actions that “imperil the integrity and values” of the community. Although upholding a university’s integrity and values may be a noble goal, this broad regulation can all too easily be applied by administrators to punish disfavored speech.

HOW CAN YALE IMPROVE?

The easiest thing Yale University can do to improve its ranking in next year’s College Free Speech Rankings is revising its “yellow light” speech policies. If Yale had revised them to “green light” policies this year, it would have ranked 2 overall. Additionally, the school could adopt the Chicago Statement to pair with its commitment to institutional neutrality.

But changing policies would only be a half measure. These changes would also need to be communicated to students in such a way that emphasizes Yale’s commitment to free expression and explains what sorts of behaviors and forms of protest are and are not acceptable. With 78% of students believing it is at least “rarely” acceptable to shout down a speaker and 26% saying the same about using violence to stop a campus speech, administrators should not only make policy changes but also communicate and explain these changes directly to the student body. By demonstrating a commitment to free expression with policy change and explaining to students what sorts of behavior and activities are and are not acceptable, Yale could potentially improve in the “Administrative Support” (136) and “Disruptive Conduct” (122) components, which are currently among its worst rankings.

Yale's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings Scores by Component

COMPONENT	YALE UNIVERSITY	NATIONAL AVERAGE	MINIMUM VALUE	MAXIMUM VALUE
Comfort Expressing Ideas	10.10	9.53	5	15
Self-Censorship	12.62	12.12	3	20
Disruptive Conduct	15.52	15.50	3	20
Administrative Support	11.40	11.32	2	20
Openness	7.73	7.19	0	10
Political Tolerance	7.10	6.44	3	15
Chicago Statement	0	-	0	3
Institutional Neutrality	3	-	0	3
Spotlight Rating	-5 (Yellow)	-	-10 (Red)	5 (Green)
Campus Deplatformings	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Scholars Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Students Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Overall score	62.46	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	15	6
Not very clear	55	20
Somewhat clear	113	42
Very clear	65	24
Extremely clear	21	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	10	4
Not very likely	43	16
Somewhat likely	142	53
Very likely	62	23
Extremely likely	13	5

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	56	21
Somewhat uncomfortable	92	34
Somewhat comfortable	75	28
Very comfortable	46	17

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	38	14
Somewhat uncomfortable	93	35
Somewhat comfortable	94	35
Very comfortable	43	16

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	38	14
Somewhat uncomfortable	72	27
Somewhat comfortable	116	43
Very comfortable	43	16

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	17	6
Somewhat uncomfortable	68	25
Somewhat comfortable	111	41
Very comfortable	73	27

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	71	26
Somewhat uncomfortable	103	38
Somewhat comfortable	66	25
Very comfortable	29	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	24	9
Rarely	96	36
Occasionally, once or twice a month	76	28
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	66	24
Very often, nearly every day	7	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	24	9
Rarely	92	34
Occasionally, once or twice a month	99	37
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	46	17
Very often, nearly every day	6	2

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	20	8
Rarely	90	33
Occasionally, once or twice a month	102	38
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	49	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	13	5
Sometimes acceptable	95	35
Rarely acceptable	103	38
Never acceptable	58	22

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	6	2
Sometimes acceptable	52	19
Rarely acceptable	95	35
Never acceptable	116	43

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	2	1
Sometimes acceptable	14	5
Rarely acceptable	55	20
Never acceptable	198	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	97	36
Probably should not allow this speaker	84	31
Probably should allow this speaker	51	19
Definitely should allow this speaker	37	14

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	50	18
Probably should not allow this speaker	64	24
Probably should allow this speaker	89	33
Definitely should allow this speaker	66	25

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	92	34
Probably should not allow this speaker	74	28
Probably should allow this speaker	62	23
Definitely should allow this speaker	40	15

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	23	9
Probably should not allow this speaker	83	31
Probably should allow this speaker	93	34
Definitely should allow this speaker	70	26

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	22	8
Probably should not allow this speaker	78	29
Probably should allow this speaker	104	39
Definitely should allow this speaker	65	24

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	13	5
Probably should not allow this speaker	43	16
Probably should allow this speaker	128	48
Definitely should allow this speaker	86	32

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	176	66
Yes	92	34

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	184	68
Yes	85	31

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	238	89
Yes	30	11

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	250	93
Yes	18	7

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	234	87
Yes	34	13

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	216	80
Yes	52	19

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	227	84
Yes	42	15

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	229	85
Yes	39	15

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	220	82
Yes	48	18

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	229	85
Yes	39	15

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	214	80
Yes	54	20

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	209	78
Yes	59	22

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	81	30
Yes	187	70

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	185	69
Yes	83	31

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	201	75
Yes	67	25

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	198	74
Yes	70	26

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	217	81
Yes	51	19

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	198	74
Yes	70	26

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	244	91
Yes	24	9

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	193	72
Yes	75	28

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	241	89
Yes	27	10

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	45	17
Rarely	134	50
Occasionally, once or twice a month	49	18
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	34	13
Very often, nearly every day	6	2

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.	36	13
I have not been disciplined nor threatened with discipline.	229	85

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	117	43
Rarely	87	33
Occasionally, once or twice a month	49	18
Fairly often, a couple times a week	11	4
Very often, nearly every day	4	1

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	41	15
Unlikely	95	35
Neither likely or unlikely	64	24
Likely	52	19
Very likely	15	6

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	8
Unlikely	68	25
Neither likely or unlikely	81	30
Likely	73	27
Very likely	24	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
I have filed a Title IX complaint.	3	1
I both know someone who has and have myself filed a Title IX complaint.	5	2
I have not but I know someone who has filed a Title IX complaint.	91	34
I have neither filed a Title IX complaint, nor know anyone who has.”)	167	62

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 and someone I know.	1	0
A Title IX complaint was filed against someone I know, but not me.	75	28
A Title IX complaint has never been filed against me or someone I know.”)	191	71

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	107	40
Less than once a year	39	14
Once or twice a year	42	16
Several times a year	22	8
Once a month	7	3
2-3 times a month	4	1
About weekly	19	7
Weekly	16	6
Several times a week	11	4

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	2	1
No	265	98

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	1	1	1
No	266	99	99

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	1	7
Less than half the time	23	9	45
About half the time	18	7	36
Most of the time, nearly every day	1	0	3
Always	4	2	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	12	5	18
Less than half the time	48	18	70
About half the time	8	3	12
Most of the time, nearly every day	0	0	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	1	0	1
Less than half the time	27	10	50
About half the time	20	7	37
Most of the time, nearly every day	5	2	10
Always	1	0	2

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	10	4	24
Less than half the time	24	9	53
About half the time	9	3	20
Most of the time, nearly every day	1	0	2
Always	0	0	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	2	1	4
Less than half the time	16	6	33
About half the time	21	8	41
Most of the time, nearly every day	8	3	15
Always	4	1	8



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