



2022 College Free Speech Rankings: Harvard University

Overall Rank: 170th

Overall Score: 34.52

Speech Climate: Below Average



Executive Summary	3
The College Free Speech Rankings	4
Full Report	5
How Comfortable are Students Expressing Their Views on Controversial Topics?	5
What Topics are Difficult to Have Conversations About?	6
Which Speakers are Controversial?	6
What kinds of Disruptive Conduct are Acceptable?	7
How is the Administration Perceived?	7
A Yellow Light School With Plenty of Controversy	8
How Can Harvard University Improve?	8
Survey Questions and Topline Results for Harvard University	10
Methodology	18
Free Speech Rankings	19
Student Perceptions	19
Administrative Behavior	21
Overall Score	22



Executive Summary

The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), a nonprofit organization committed to free and open inquiry at colleges and universities in the United States, in partnership with RealClearEducation, commissioned College Pulse to survey students at 208 colleges about students' perceptions and experiences regarding free speech on their campuses. Fielded from January 13 to May 31, 2022, via the College Pulse mobile app and web portal, the survey included 44,847 student respondents who were currently enrolled in four-year degree programs.

Harvard University was one of the 208 schools surveyed, between January 19, 2022 and May 28, 2022. Key findings from this school include:

- Harvard University ranks 170th overall with a score of 34.52. The speech climate on campus is below average when compared to the other schools surveyed.
- Among Ivy League schools, Harvard is in the middle-of-the-pack, ranking ahead of Yale University, the University of Pennsylvania, and Columbia University, and ranking just behind Princeton University (169th).
- Harvard performed fairly well on Tolerance for Liberal Speakers, ranking 29th, Tolerance for Conservative Speakers (32nd), and Mean Tolerance (9th). They also did reasonably well on Openness (53rd).
- Harvard's performance on Administrative Support (101st) and Tolerance Difference (125th) were middling, and its performance on Disruptive Conduct (189th) was poor.
- A number of campus controversies over free expression occurred from 2019 to present, including one successful disinvitation (Devin Buckley in 2022), and three incidents where a scholar was sanctioned for their expression.



The College Free Speech Rankings

The College Free Speech Rankings are based on a composite score of ten sub-components. Six of these assess student perceptions of different aspects of the speech climate on their campus:

- Comfort Expressing Ideas
- Tolerance for Liberal Speakers
- Tolerance for Conservative Speakers
- Acceptability of Disruptive Conduct
- Administrative Support for Free Expression
- Openness to Discussion of Specific Political Topics

Two additional constructs, “Mean Tolerance” and “Tolerance Difference,” were computed from the “Tolerance for Liberal/Conservative Speaker” subcomponents. “Tolerance Difference” was calculated by subtracting “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers” from “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” and then taking the absolute value (so that a bias on either side would be treated the same).

The other four assess administrative behavior in regards to free expression on campus:

- Scholars supported by the administration during a free expression controversy from 2019 to present.
- Scholars sanctioned during a free expression controversy from 2019 to present.
- Successful disinivitations from 2019 to present.
- FIRE’s rating of the school’s speech code policies.

The overall score for each school is standardized so that the average score is 50 and the standard deviation is 10. Scores are then adjusted according to each school’s FIRE speech code rating. A full explanation of the methodology and scoring is provided in the appendix. A school’s overall score can range from 0 to 100.



Full Report

In 2020, the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE), College Pulse, and RealClearEducation published the first-ever comprehensive student assessment of free speech on 55 American college campuses: the College Free Speech Rankings. For the first time, prospective college students and their parents could systematically compare current students' understandings of the level of tolerance for free speech on campus.

In 2022, FIRE surveyed and ranked 203 schools.¹ Harvard University has a below average speech climate, ranking 170th, with an overall score of 34.52. The student body itself is predominantly liberal, with 67% of students describing their political beliefs as “slightly,” “somewhat,” or “very” liberal. 13% of students described themselves as “slightly,” “somewhat,” or “very” conservative, and 15% described themselves as moderate. The liberal to conservative student ratio was 5.2:1. In other words, for every conservative student on campus there are roughly five liberal students.

How Comfortable are Students Expressing Their Views on Controversial Topics?

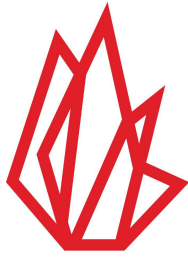
“I have to be careful with my views on controversial topics. This mainly occurs in my classes.”

“The moment I was introduced to cancel culture particularly on campus freshman year, it became clear that individuals are forever associated with opinions, especially if they are unpopular. So the consequences don't seem worth that stigmatization, especially when just starting a college career.”

“Sometimes in class I feel like I can not critique the argument of an author because the professor clearly respects and supports their views and other students also go along with supporting it too.”

Students at Harvard closely mirror the responses of students nationally when asked about their comfort expressing disagreement with their professor: 39% of students said they feel “somewhat” or “very” comfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial topic, compared to 40% nationally; and, 59% said this about disagreeing with a professor during a written assignment (60% nationally). Harvard students are particularly comfortable expressing their views in a common campus space such as a lounge, with over seven-in-ten saying (71%) they are comfortable compared to 61% nationally. In contrast, just over one-in-four Harvard students (26%) are comfortable

¹ A total of 208 schools were surveyed, however 5 of them received a “warning” rating from FIRE for their speech policies. An overall score was calculated for these schools but they were not assigned a ranking.



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“expressing an unpopular opinion to your fellow students on a social media account tied to your name,” compared to 40% of students nationally.

Additionally, 22% of students reported that they self-censored “fairly” or “very” often, and 75% said they were worried “a lot” or “a little” about damaging their reputation because someone misunderstood something they have said or done.

Overall, Harvard ranked 132nd on Comfort Expressing Ideas out of the 203 ranked schools.

What Topics are Difficult to Have Conversations About?

“It is generally hard to have conversations about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I deplore anti-semitism but sometimes that is equated to being anti-Right wing Israel.”

“Anything on Palestine is censored here either directly or indirectly.”

“I felt I could not express my disagreement with the Israeli state’s continued mistreatment and denial of rights to Palestinians as this can be easily manipulated into an ‘anti-Semitic position.’ Specifically, the idea that Zionism is tantamount to religious and cultural supremacy.”

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict was clearly the most difficult topic to have an open and honest conversation about, with 60% of Harvard students selecting this option, nearly double the percentage of students nationally who selected this option (31%). Affirmative action (49%) and police misconduct (46%) were also identified by a notable portion of students as difficult to discuss.

Overall, Harvard ranked 53rd on Openness.

Which Speakers are Controversial?

“Most views are default-liberal here, any conservative or even more moderate opinion can often feel challenging to express.”

“It seems like the school sometimes supports a very specific idea, and does not quite accept other ideas. I am indifferent towards the school’s ideologies, but it sometimes seems like it is too much. For example, there are often very specific political views that are deemed ‘right,’ and everything else is viewed as wrong.”

“My campus is really liberal and I’m a bit conservative in some areas and I definitely couldn’t open up about that.”



Students at Harvard were fairly tolerant of both kinds of speakers, when compared to most of the other schools surveyed, but at the same time still demonstrated a fairly large ideological bias when asked about allowing controversial speakers on campus. A majority of students said that all five controversial liberal speakers should be allowed on campus, with the percentages supportive ranging from 75% (“Religious liberty is used as an excuse to discriminate against gays and lesbians.”) to 87% (“Undocumented immigrants should be given the right to vote.”). In contrast, a majority of students opposed allowing three of the four controversial conservative speakers on campus, with percentages in opposition ranging from 65% (“The 2020 Election was stolen”) to 71% (“Transgender people have a mental disorder.”). The one conservative speaker that a majority of Harvard students (58%) would allow on campus promotes the idea that “abortion should be completely illegal.” This bias is reflected in Harvard’s mediocre ranking on Tolerance Difference (125th).

Overall, Harvard ranked 29th on Tolerance for Liberal Speakers, 32nd on Tolerance for Conservative Speakers, 9th on Mean Tolerance, and 125th on Tolerance Difference.

What kinds of Disruptive Conduct are Acceptable?

Students at Harvard, when compared to students nationally, were more supportive of disruptive conduct to stop a campus speech. Over three-in-four students (73%) said shouting down a speaker or trying to prevent them from speaking on campus was acceptable to some degree, compared to 62% of students nationally. Close to two-thirds (63%) said it was acceptable to some degree to block other students from attending a campus speech, compared to 37% nationally; and, roughly one-in-four (26%) said that using violence to stop a campus speech was acceptable to some degree, compared to 20% of students nationally.

Overall, Harvard ranked 189th on Disruptive Conduct.

How is the Administration Perceived?

“I don’t have a particular instance in mind. But I don’t think that my school’s administration would like me voicing my views on the pro-life/pro-choice debate in a very public and open way through speech.”

Most students at Harvard did not perceive the administration’s stance on free speech as clear, with just 30% saying it was “extremely” or “very” clear that the administration protects free speech on campus. Even worse, just 24% of Harvard students think it is “extremely” or “very” likely that the administration would defend a speaker’s rights if a speech controversy occurred on campus.



Overall, Harvard ranked 101st on Administrative Support for Free Speech.

A Yellow Light School With Plenty of Controversy

Since 2019, Harvard experienced one successful disinvitation and sanctioned three scholars. They did also support a scholar during a sanction attempt.

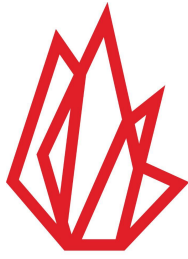
The one disinvitation occurred in 2022. Devin Buckley, a feminist philosopher, had her speaking invitation revoked because she had taken the position that there are immutable biological characteristics that differentiate females and males.

Harvard has also sanctioned three scholars for their expression since 2019. Law professor Ronald Sullivan was forced to step down from his position as dean of Winthrop House because of his decision to represent Harvey Weinstein and Harvard professor Roland Fryer, both of whom were accused of sexual harassment and misconduct. In 2020, students demanded the termination of professor David Kane over blog posts in which he compared Identity Evropa, now known as the American Identity Movement, to Black Lives Matter. Finally in 2021, students successfully lobbied Harvard to cancel Kit Parker's course on evaluating the use of a policing technique known as Counter-Criminal Continuum policing, or C3.

Harvard University also supported one prominent scholar's expression during a controversy. Over 600 faculty, graduate students, and undergraduates signed a petition to the Linguistic Society of America (LAS) demanding that Steven Pinker be removed from the LSA's list of distinguished academic fellows and its list of media experts because of tweets he sent about scholarship and various social issues. For instance, on October 17, 2015, Pinker [tweeted](#): "Data: Police don't shoot blacks disproportionately. Problem: Not race, but too many police shootings." A few years later, on March 28, 2017, Pinker [tweeted](#): "The Bell Curve: I don't agree with it on race, but public discussion of the book has been ignorant and dishonest." These tweets and others were highlighted by those demanding Pinker's removal.

How Can Harvard University Improve?

Harvard can improve their ranking if the administration takes a clear and strong stance in support of free expression. This can be done through public statements, defending scholars if a controversy over their expression erupts, or by revising its yellow light speech code policies to better protect free expression. Public statements and actions – like not sanctioning scholars – would send a message to



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the students on campus, potentially boosting Harvard's middling Administrative Support score. Not sanctioning scholars would also prevent Harvard from being penalized when determining its ranking. Finally, a strong administrative display of amending one or more of [the yellow light policies](#) on the books would help clarify the administration's stance on free speech and provide a boost in next year's rankings through the possible improvement of their spotlight rating.



Survey Questions and Topline Results for Harvard University

Are your current courses all online, mostly online, mostly in person, all in person, or an equal mix of online and in person?

- 4% All online
- 3% Mostly online
- 26% Mostly in person
- 63% All in person
- 4% Equal mix of online and in-person

How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? [Presented in randomized order]

Publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial topic.

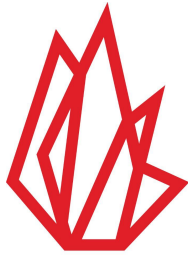
- 10% Very comfortable
- 29% Somewhat comfortable
- 35% Somewhat uncomfortable
- 25% Very uncomfortable

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

- 17% Very comfortable
- 43% Somewhat comfortable
- 32% Somewhat uncomfortable
- 9% Very uncomfortable

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

- 12% Very comfortable
- 33% Somewhat comfortable
- 41% Somewhat uncomfortable
- 14% Very uncomfortable



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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.

- 20% Very comfortable
- 51% Somewhat comfortable
- 19% Somewhat uncomfortable
- 10% Very uncomfortable

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

- 5% Very comfortable
- 21% Somewhat comfortable
- 31% Somewhat uncomfortable
- 43% Very uncomfortable

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.

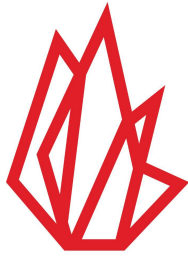
- 12% Definitely should allow this speaker
- 17% Probably should allow this this speaker
- 25% Probably should not allow this speaker
- 46% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Abortion should be completely illegal.

- 19% Definitely should allow this speaker
- 39% Probably should allow this this speaker
- 19% Probably should not allow this speaker
- 23% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

- 10% Definitely should allow this speaker
- 20% Probably should allow this this speaker
- 33% Probably should not allow this speaker
- 37% Definitely should not allow this speaker



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The 2020 Presidential election was stolen.

- 11% Definitely should allow this speaker
- 24% Probably should allow this speaker
- 27% Probably should not allow this speaker
- 38% Definitely should not allow this speaker

The Second Amendment should be repealed so that guns can be confiscated.

- 24% Definitely should allow this speaker
- 52% Probably should allow this this speaker
- 16% Probably should not allow this speaker
- 7% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Undocumented immigrants should be given the right to vote.

- 46% Definitely should allow this speaker
- 41% Probably should allow this this speaker
- 8% Probably should not allow this speaker
- 5% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Getting rid of inequality is more important than protecting the so-called “right” to free speech.

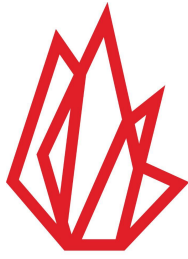
- 27% Definitely should allow this speaker
- 54% Probably should allow this this speaker
- 14% Probably should not allow this speaker
- 5% Definitely should not allow this speaker

White people are collectively responsible for structural racism and use it to protect their privilege.

- 33% Definitely should allow this speaker
- 47% Probably should allow this this speaker
- 15% Probably should not allow this speaker
- 5% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Religious liberty is used as an excuse to discriminate against gays and lesbians.

- 32% Definitely should allow this speaker
- 43% Probably should allow this this speaker
- 16% Probably should not allow this speaker
- 9% Definitely should not allow this speaker



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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.

- 6% Always acceptable
- 39% Sometimes acceptable
- 28% Rarely acceptable
- 27% Never acceptable

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

- 2% Always acceptable
- 20% Sometimes acceptable
- 41% Rarely acceptable
- 37% Never acceptable

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

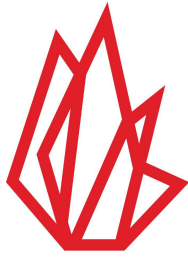
- 0% Always acceptable
- 8% Sometimes acceptable
- 17% Rarely acceptable
- 74% Never acceptable

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

- 3% Extremely clear
- 27% Very clear
- 50% Somewhat clear
- 16% Not very clear
- 5% Not at all clear

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?

- 3% Extremely likely
- 21% Very likely
- 44% Somewhat likely
- 27% Not very likely
- 5% Not at all likely



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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?

- 15% Never
- 33% Rarely
- 29% Occasionally
- 19% Fairly often
- 3% Very often

How worried are you about damaging your reputation because someone misunderstands something you have said or done?

- 25% Worried a lot
- 50% Worried a little
- 19% Not very worried
- 5% Not at all worried

How much pressure do you feel to avoid discussing controversial topics in your classes?

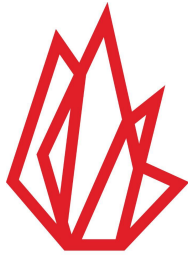
- 18% No pressure at all
- 36% Slight pressure
- 29% Some pressure
- 13% A good deal of pressure
- 4% A great deal of pressure

[Next two questions presented in random order] How would you describe the climate on your campus towards people who do not share your political beliefs?

- 10% Very supportive
- 37% Somewhat supportive
- 38% Somewhat hostile
- 14% Very hostile

How would you describe the climate on your campus towards people who share your political beliefs?

- 35% Very supportive
- 41% Somewhat supportive
- 14% Somewhat hostile
- 9% Very hostile



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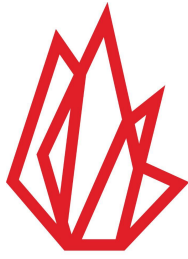
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Where do you think the political views of the average student on campus are on the following scale?

- 16% Very liberal
- 52% Somewhat liberal
- 20% Slightly liberal
- 5% Moderate, middle-of-the-road
- 4% Slightly conservative
- 0% Somewhat conservative
- 0% Very conservative
- 1% Haven't thought much about this
- 2% Something else

Where do you think the political views of the average faculty member on campus are on the following scale?

- 14% Very liberal
- 36% Somewhat liberal
- 24% Slightly liberal
- 15% Moderate, middle-of-the-road
- 5% Slightly conservative
- 1% Somewhat conservative
- 2% Very conservative
- 3% Haven't thought much about this
- 0% Something else



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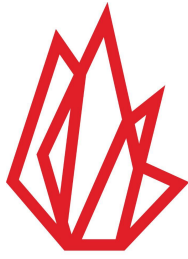
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Some students say it can be difficult to have conversations about certain issues on campus. Which of the following issues, if any, would you say are difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on your campus? [Percentage selecting each option]

- 39% Abortion
- 49% Affirmative action
- 17% China
- 9% Climate change
- 29% COVID-19 vaccine mandates
- 27% Economic inequality
- 25% Freedom of speech
- 23% Gender inequality
- 32% Gun control
- 27% Immigration
- 60% The Israeli/Palestinian conflict
- 36% Mask mandates
- 46% Police misconduct
- 37% Racial inequality
- 30% Religion
- 32% Sexual assault
- 31% Transgender issues
- 5% None of the above

What campus changes would make you feel that you can express yourself? [Percentage selecting each option]

- 14% If there were more people of my race.
- 15% If there were more people of different races than me.
- 9% If there were more people of my gender.
- 5% If there were more people of a different gender than me.
- 12% If there were more people of my religion.
- 4% If there were more people of different religions than me.
- 26% If there were more people with my political views.
- 14% If there were more people with different political views from me.
- 30% If there were more tolerance of views that some consider hateful.
- 22% If there were less tolerance for views that some consider hateful.
- 22% None of the above



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In politics today, do you consider yourself a Republican, Democrat, or something else?

- 31% Strong Democrat
- 22% Weak Democrat
- 19% Independent, lean Democrat
- 10% Independent
- 7% Independent, lean Republican
- 2% Weak Republican
- 5% Strong Republican
- 4% Something else

Using the following scale, how would you describe your political beliefs?

- 25% Very liberal
- 33% Somewhat liberal
- 9% Slightly liberal
- 15% Moderate, middle-of-the-road
- 4% Slightly conservative
- 6% Somewhat conservative
- 3% Very conservative
- 3% I do not identify as a liberal or a conservative
- 2% Haven't thought much about this

[If "I do not identify as a liberal or a conservative" is selected]: Which of the following best describes your political beliefs?

- 1% Democratic Socialist
- 0% Libertarian
- 2% Something else [write-in]



Methodology

The College Free Speech Survey was developed by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, RealClearEducation, and College Pulse. College Pulse administered the survey. No donors to the project took part in the design or conduct of the survey. The survey was fielded from January 13 to May 31, 2022. These data come from a sample of 44,847 undergraduates who were currently enrolled full-time in four-year degree programs at 208 colleges and universities in the United States. The margin of error for the U.S. undergraduate population is +/- 1 percentage point, and the margin of error for college student sub-demographics ranges from 2 to 5 percentage points.

The initial sample was drawn from College Pulse's American College Student Panel™, which includes more than 630,000 verified undergraduate students and recent alumni at more than 1,500 different two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states. Panel members are recruited by a number of methods to help ensure student diversity in the panel population, including web advertising, permission-based email campaigns, and partnerships with university-affiliated organizations. To ensure the panel reflects the diverse backgrounds and experiences of the American college population, College Pulse recruits panelists from a wide variety of institutions. The panel includes students attending large public universities, small private colleges, online universities, historically Black colleges such as Howard University, women only colleges such as Smith College, and religiously-affiliated colleges such as Brigham Young University.

College Pulse uses a two-stage validation process to ensure that all its surveys include only students currently enrolled in two-year or four-year colleges or universities. Students are required to provide an .edu email address to join the panel and, for this survey, had to acknowledge that they were currently enrolled full-time in a four-year degree program. All invitations to complete surveys are sent using the student's .edu email address or through notification in the College Pulse app that is available on iOS and Android platforms.

College Pulse applies a post-stratification adjustment based on demographic distributions from multiple data sources, including the 2017 Current Population Survey (CPS), the 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the 2019-20 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The post-stratification weight rebalances the sample based on a number of important benchmark attributes, such as race, gender, class year, voter registration status, and financial aid status. The sample weighting is accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting



(IFP) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables. Weights are trimmed to prevent individual interviews from having too much influence on the final results.

The use of these weights in statistical analysis ensures that the demographic characteristics of the sample closely approximate the demographic characteristics of the target populations. Even with these adjustments, surveys may be subject to error or bias due to question wording, context, and order effects. For further information, please see <https://collegepulse.com/methodology>.

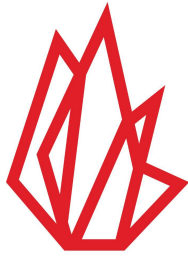
Free Speech Rankings

The College Free Speech Rankings are based on a composite score of ten sub-components. Six of these assessed student perceptions of different aspects of the speech climate on their campus. The other four assessed administrative behavior in regards to free expression on campus.

Student Perceptions

The student perception sub-components included:

- **Comfort Expressing Ideas:** Students were asked about how comfortable they felt expressing their views on controversial topics in five different campus settings (e.g., in class, in the dining hall). Options ranged from “very uncomfortable” to “very comfortable.” They were also asked about how often they felt they could not express their opinion because of how other students, faculty, or the administration would respond (options ranged from “never” to “very often”); if they were worried about damaging their reputation because someone misunderstands something they have said or done (options ranged from “worried a lot” to “not at all worried”); and, if they felt pressure to avoid discussing controversial topics in their classes (options ranged from “no pressure at all” to “a great deal of pressure”). Responses were coded so that higher scores indicated greater comfort expressing ideas. The maximum number of points was 34.
- **Tolerance for Liberal Speakers:** Students were asked whether four speakers espousing views offensive to conservatives (e.g., “Undocumented immigrants should be given the right to vote”) should be allowed on campus, regardless of whether they personally agreed with the speaker’s message. Options ranged from “definitely should not allow this speaker” to “definitely should allow this speaker,” and responses were coded so that higher scores



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indicated more tolerance of the speaker (i.e., they should be allowed on campus). The maximum number of points was 16.

- **Tolerance for Conservative Speakers:** Students were also asked whether four speakers espousing views offensive to liberals (e.g., “Black Lives Matter is a hate group”) should be allowed on campus, regardless of whether they personally agreed with the speaker’s message. Scoring was done in the same manner as the Tolerance for Liberal Speakers sub-component, thus the maximum number of points was 16.
- **Disruptive Conduct:** Students were asked how acceptable or unacceptable it is to engage in different methods of protest against a campus speaker. These included “Shouting down a speaker or trying to prevent them from speaking on campus,” “Blocking other students from attending a campus speech,” and “Using violence to stop a campus speech.” Options ranged from “always acceptable” to “never acceptable,” and were coded so that higher scores were indicative of less acceptance of disruptive conduct. The maximum number of points was 12.
- **Administrative Support:** Students were asked about how clear their campus administration’s stance on free speech was and how likely the administration would be to defend a speaker’s right to express their views if a controversy over speech occurred on campus. For the administrative stance question, response options ranged from “not at all clear” to “extremely clear”; for the administrative controversy question, response options ranged from “not at all likely” to “extremely likely.” Options were coded so that higher scores were indicative of greater clarity and greater likelihood of defending a speaker’s rights. The maximum number of points was 10.
- **Openness:** Finally, students were asked which topics (e.g., abortion, freedom of speech, gun control, racial inequality) were difficult to have open conversations about on campus. Students also could select an option stating that none of these issues were difficult to discuss. These options were coded so that higher scores were indicative of fewer issues being selected. Seventeen issues (including “None of the above”) were asked about, so the maximum number of points was 17.

Two additional constructs, Mean Tolerance and Tolerance Difference, were computed from the Tolerance for Liberal/Conservative Speaker sub-components. Tolerance Difference was calculated by subtracting Tolerance for Conservative Speakers from Tolerance for Liberal Speakers and then taking the absolute value.



Administrative Behavior

The administrative behavior sub-components included:

- **Supported Scholars 2019 to 2022:** The number of scholars whose speech rights were supported by the administration at a school during a free expression controversy over a four-year time period as recorded by FIRE’s Scholar’s Under Fire Database.² This support was unequivocal; if an administration condemned the speech, apologized for the scholar’s expression, or sanctioned the scholar, despite issuing a statement of support, it was not included in a school’s total.
- **Sanctioned Scholars 2019 to 2022:** The number of scholars sanctioned (e.g., placed under investigation; suspended; terminated) at a school over a four-year time period as recorded by FIRE’s Scholar’s Under Fire Database.³
- **Successful Disinvitations 2019 to 2022:** The number of successful disinvitations that occurred at a school over a four-year time period as recorded by FIRE’s Campus Disinvitation Database.⁴
- **FIRE Speech Code Rating:** FIRE rates the written policies governing student speech at more than 475 institutions of higher education in the United States. Three substantive ratings are possible: “Red,” “Yellow,” and “Green” (termed “red light,” “yellow light,” and “green light,” respectively). A “red light” rating indicates that the institution has at least one policy that both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech. Colleges with “yellow light” ratings have policies that restrict a more limited amount of protected expression or, by virtue of their vague wording, could too easily be used to restrict protected expression. The policies of an institution with a “green light” rating do not seriously threaten speech, although this rating does not indicate whether a college actively supports free expression. Finally, a fourth rating, “warning,” is assigned to a private college or university when its policies clearly and consistently state that it prioritizes other values over a commitment to

² Scholars Under Fire Database:

<https://www.thefire.org/research/publications/miscellaneous-publications/scholars-under-fire/>

³ Scholars Under Fire Database:

<https://www.thefire.org/research/publications/miscellaneous-publications/scholars-under-fire/>

⁴ Campus Disinvitation Database: <https://www.thefire.org/research/disinvitation-database/>



freedom of speech. “Warning” schools, therefore, were not ranked, and their overall scores are presented separately in this report.⁵

Overall Score

To create an overall score for each college, we sum the student sub-components of Comfort Expressing Ideas, Mean Tolerance, Disruptive Conduct, Administrative Support, and Openness. Then we subtract from this sum the Tolerance Difference. By including Mean Tolerance (as opposed to Tolerance for Liberal Speakers and Tolerance for Conservative Speakers) and subtracting Tolerance Difference, we are adjusting each school’s score to account for the possibility that ideologically homogeneous student bodies may result in a campus that *appears* to have a strong culture of free expression, but is actually hostile to the views of an ideological minority – whose views students may almost never encounter on campus.

To account for how the administration handles speech controversies on campus, we incorporated three administrative behavior sub-components. We gave a bonus point to each school’s score when the administration successfully supported (i.e., did not sanction and/or offer conflicting messaging) a scholar during a free expression controversy. We decreased this bonus by a quarter of a point each year, so we awarded a full point for support given in 2022, three quarters of a point for support given in 2021, half a point for support given in 2020, and one quarter of a point for support given in 2019.

We also applied penalties when the administration sanctioned a scholar or when a speaker was disinvited from campus. Each time a scholar was sanctioned (e.g., investigated, suspended, terminated) we subtracted one point from a school’s score. If the administration terminated a scholar, we subtracted two points, and if that scholar was tenured, we subtracted three points. When the sanction did not result in termination, we decreased the penalty by a quarter of a point each year, so a full point was subtracted for a sanction in 2022, while three quarters of a point was subtracted for a sanction in 2021, half a point was subtracted for sanction in 2020, and one quarter of a point for sanction in 2019. Finally, for each successful disinvitation, we subtracted one point from a school’s score.⁶

⁵ The Spotlight Database is on FIRE’s website at <https://www.thefire.org/resources/spotlight/>.

⁶ In the 2023 College Free Speech Rankings, penalties for terminations and successful disinvitations will begin to decay in the same manner that the penalty for a sanctioned scholar decays.



After we applied the bonuses and penalties, we standardized each school's score so that the average score was 50.00 and the standard deviation was 10.00. Following standardization, we added one standard deviation to the final score of colleges whose speech codes received a Green rating, we subtracted half a standard deviation from the final score of colleges that received a Yellow rating, and we subtracted one standard deviation from the final score of schools that received a Red or Warning rating.

$$\text{Overall Score} = (50 + (Z_{\text{Raw Overall Score}})(10)) + \text{FIRE Rating}$$