

University of Southern California

Los Angeles, CA • Private School



The most comprehensive guide to free speech on campus — anywhere

Because a true university education requires freedom of expression.

The College Free Speech Rankings are based on student surveys, campus policies, and recent speech-related controversies.

OVERALL RANK

216 ▲

/257

▲ 29 FROM 2024

GRADE

F

— F FROM 2024

SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

3

1 FROM 2025

Overview

University of Southern California ranks 216 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings with a score of 52, up 8 points from last year. That increase moved USC 29 places higher and coincided with the university restoring a “yellow light” Spotlight rating after a “red light” rating the past two years and formally adopting a statement on institutional neutrality. Even so, continuing speech-related investigations cost the school 5 points.

Student perceptions remain bleak. USC places in the bottom 25 for “Administrative Support,” mirroring last year’s poor showing and underscoring widespread doubt that leaders protect controversial expression.

USC could improve by revising its written speech policies to earn a “green light” Spotlight rating and adopting a free speech statement based on the Chicago Statement.

Spotlight Rating

Yellow

FIRE’s Spotlight database annually rates regulations on student expression based on the extent to which they restrict free speech.

If you are a school administrator and would like to discuss your rating, reach out to speechcodes@thefire.org.

Visit our website: <https://rankings.thefire.org/> for more information.

HIGHLIGHTS



45% of students say they have self-censored on campus at least once or twice a month.



74% of students say shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.



35% of students say using violence to stop someone from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.

5.38:1

There are roughly 5.38 liberal students for every one conservative student.

Institutional Neutrality

ADOPTED



Chicago Statement for Free Speech

NOT ADOPTED



SCORE DEEP DIVE

COMFORT EXPRESSING IDEAS

D-

▲ INCREASE

DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT

C+

▲ INCREASE

OPENNESS

C-

▲ INCREASE

SELF-CENSORSHIP

F

▼ DECREASE

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

F

▼ DECREASE

POLITICAL TOLERANCE

F

▼ DECREASE

SCHOLARS UNDER FIRE

0

STUDENTS UNDER FIRE

1

DEPLATFORMINGS

2