

Cornell University

Ithaca, NY • 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

227 ▼

/257

▼ -12 FROM 2024

GRADE

F

— F FROM 2024

SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

3

2 FROM 2025

Overview

Cornell University ranks 227 out of 257 in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. Its score of 52 keeps the university at an F grade for its speech climate. A deplatforming of singer Kehlani and the attempted disruption of an Israeli-Palestinian peace panel led to a four-point penalty, further underscoring a troubled environment. The school still earns a “yellow light” Spotlight rating and has yet to adopt the Chicago Statement or an official commitment to institutional neutrality.

Student perceptions place Cornell in the top 50 for “Political Tolerance” of controversial speakers. Cornell also ranks in the bottom 25 for “Self-Censorship” and the bottom 50 for “Comfort Expressing Ideas,” highlighting a campus where hearing dissenting views is easier than voicing them.

To its credit, though, Cornell worked with FIRE to revise its “Expressive Activity Policy” to exclude broad and vague restrictions on speech. Cornell could continue to improve by revising speech codes to earn a “green light” Spotlight rating, as well as adopting the Chicago Statement and an official commitment to institutional neutrality.

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.

Spotlight Rating

Yellow



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

HIGHLIGHTS



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



80% of students say shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.



36% of students say using violence to stop someone from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.

5.53:1

There are roughly 5.53 liberal students for every one conservative student.

Institutional Neutrality

NOT ADOPTED



Chicago Statement for Free Speech

NOT ADOPTED



SCORE DEEP DIVE

COMFORT EXPRESSING IDEAS

D-

▲ INCREASE

DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT

C+

▼ DECREASE

OPENNESS

C

▲ INCREASE

SELF-CENSORSHIP

F

▼ DECREASE

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

F

▲ INCREASE

POLITICAL TOLERANCE

F

▲ INCREASE

SCHOLARS UNDER FIRE

0

STUDENTS UNDER FIRE

1

DEPLATFORMINGS

2