

The University of North Carolina Chapel Hill

Chapel Hill, NC • Public 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

19
/257

▲ 43 FROM 2024

GRADE

C-

— C- FROM 2024

SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

1

0 FROM 2025

Overview

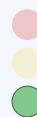
UNC at Chapel Hill ranks 19 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings with a score of 71. The university has a C- speech climate grade while earning a coveted “green light” Spotlight rating and formal commitments to both the Chicago Statement and institutional neutrality through a University of North Carolina System adoption.

Policy strengths, however, are not echoed in student sentiment. Student perceptions place UNC in the bottom 50 for “Comfort Expressing Ideas” and “Disruptive Conduct,” and bottom 25 for perceived “Administrative Support” for free speech. The slide is sharp: each of those areas, except “Administrative Support,” had landed in the top 25 just a year earlier, signaling a sudden erosion in day-to-day speech culture despite strong written protections.

To close the gap between policy and practice, UNC should reinforce its commitments with clear, consistently enforced procedures against shout-downs and expand programming that models constructive debate across ideological lines.

Spotlight Rating

Green



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



54% of students say they have self-censored on campus at least once or twice a month.



79% of students say shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.



38% of students say using violence to stop someone from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.

2.55:1

There are roughly 2.55 liberal students for every one conservative student.

Institutional Neutrality

ADOPTED



Chicago Statement for Free Speech

ADOPTED



SCORE DEEP DIVE

COMFORT EXPRESSING IDEAS

D-

▼ DECREASE

DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT

C

▼ DECREASE

OPENNESS

C-

▲ INCREASE

SELF-CENSORSHIP

F

▼ DECREASE

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

F

▼ DECREASE

POLITICAL TOLERANCE

F

▼ DECREASE

SCHOLARS UNDER FIRE

0

STUDENTS UNDER FIRE

0

DEPLATFORMINGS

1