

Vanderbilt University

Nashville, TN • 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

7
/257

▲ 133 FROM 2024

GRADE

C

▲ D- FROM 2024

SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

0

— 0 FROM 2025

Overview

Vanderbilt University ranks 7 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings with a score of 74, a C speech climate grade. This surge from a rank of 140 last year followed a major policy overhaul that moved the school from a “yellow light” to a “green light” Spotlight rating, while having a commitment to both the Chicago Statement and institutional neutrality.

Policy reforms, however, have not fully translated into student sentiment. Vanderbilt ranks outside of the top 50 in each of the survey areas, though student sentiment improved for “Political Tolerance,” “Disruptive Conduct,” and “Administrative Support.”

With Vanderbilt’s Chancellor serving as a strong advocate for institutional neutrality, the school could improve its speech climate by continuing to facilitate programs that encourage substantive dialogue on difficult topics, while reinforcing their stance on free expression when speech controversies arise.

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



51% of students say they have self-censored on campus at least once or twice a month.



73% of students say shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.



32% of students say using violence to stop someone from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.

4.13:1

There are roughly 4.13 liberal students for every one conservative student.

Institutional Neutrality

ADOPTED



Chicago Statement for Free Speech

ADOPTED



SCORE DEEP DIVE

COMFORT EXPRESSING IDEAS

D-

▲ INCREASE

DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT

C+

▲ INCREASE

OPENNESS

C

▲ INCREASE

SELF-CENSORSHIP

D-

▼ DECREASE

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

F

▲ INCREASE

POLITICAL TOLERANCE

F

▲ INCREASE

SCHOLARS UNDER FIRE

0

STUDENTS UNDER FIRE

0

DEPLATFORMINGS

0