

How We Rank Colleges on Free Speech



The most comprehensive guide to free speech on campus — anywhere

Because a true university education requires freedom of expression



We Survey Students

We seek to understand the student experience of free speech on campus. This year, over 68,000 students at 257 schools shared their experiences with and attitudes in these six areas.

COMFORT EXPRESSING IDEAS

5–15 POINTS

How comfortable students feel sharing views on controversial political topics in various campus settings.

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

2–20 POINTS

How clearly students believe their school administration supports free speech and whether it would defend a speaker's rights during a controversy.

SELF-CENSORSHIP

3–20 POINTS

How often students hold back their views due to fear of social or professional consequences.

OPENNESS

0–10 POINTS

How many controversial topics students feel they can openly discuss on campus.

DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT

3–20 POINTS

How acceptable students think it is for other students to shout down, block access to, or use violence against a campus speaker.

POLITICAL TOLERANCE

3–15 POINTS

How willing students are to allow both liberal and conservative speakers on campus, even when they disagree with them.



We Analyze Policies

We review each school's written rules on student expression and check whether they've endorsed key free speech commitments.

SPOTLIGHT RATING

-10 TO +5 POINTS

Based on FIRE's policy database. "Green light" schools earn five points. "Yellow light" (-5) and "red light" (-10) schools lose points for policies that chill speech.

CHICAGO STATEMENT

0 OR 3 POINTS

Credit for having adopted or endorsed the Chicago Statement or a substantially similar statement.

INSTITUTIONAL NEUTRALITY

0 OR 3 POINTS

Credit for having adopted an official position of institutional neutrality substantially similar to the principles set forth in the University of Chicago's Kalven Report.



We Track Controversies and How Schools Respond

We document real-world campus controversies involving speech and score how schools respond. Schools that protect speech during a controversy can earn up to two bonus points. Those that restrict it can lose up to five points. Penalties and bonuses decay by one point per year.

CAMPUS DEPLATFORMINGS

Attempts to stop speakers, performances, art, or events.

SCHOLARS UNDER FIRE

Efforts to punish faculty for protected expression.

STUDENTS UNDER FIRE

Efforts to punish students or student groups for protected expression.



We Add It Up

Each school receives an overall score based on student responses, written policies, and how the school handled recent speech-related controversies.

Final scores range from six to 111, plus bonuses and penalties. Higher scores reflect a stronger campus climate for free expression.

COMPONENT	MINIMUM VALUE	MAXIMUM VALUE
Comfort Expressing Ideas	5	15
Self-Censorship	3	20
Disruptive Conduct	3	20
Administrative Support	2	20
Openness	0	10
Political Tolerance	3	15
Chicago Statement	0	3
Institutional Neutrality	0	3
Spotlight Rating	-10	5
OVERALL SCORE	6 +/- CONTROVERSIES	111 +/- CONTROVERSIES

Note: To ensure full transparency, the methods were [pre-registered](#) on Open Science Framework (OSF).

Explore the Rankings: rankings.thefire.org

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