

# Students Under Fire Database Methodology

Since our founding in 1999, FIRE has fought the culture of censorship on campus. Perhaps no one is more vulnerable to this than students themselves.

The Students Under Fire Database tracks attempts to investigate, censor, or otherwise punish students and student groups for expression that is — or would at a public college or university be — protected by the First Amendment. So, the database treats all institutions as if they were public. For each incident, we provide the following information:

- The *year* of the speech controversy.
- The *school* at which the speech controversy occurred and whether that school is public, secular, religious, a community college, or a federal service academy.
- The *controversial topic(s)* that generated the attempt. (Did the expression concern something about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, race, and/or religion?)
- The *context* the student or student group's expression occurred in. (Did it occur in the classroom? On social media? During a planned event?)
- The *source* of the attempt. (Did the attempt come from an on-campus source such as an administrator, faculty member, or student? Did it come from an off-campus source such as members of the general public or a politician?)
- The *demands*, if any, of those initiating the attempt. (Do they want the student or student group investigated? Suspended? To undergo training?) Note: when administrators are the source, no demands are coded.
- Whether a *petition supporting and/or opposing* the student or student group, or their expression was circulated.
- The *political direction*, if any, of the attempt. (Did the attempt come from the left or from the right of the targeted student or student group?)
- The *outcome* of the attempt. (Was the student or student group investigated? Censored? Suspended? Compelled to undergo training?)
- The *public response*, if any, to the attempt from the college or university. (Did the college or university condemn the student or student group's expression? Did it defend their expressive rights? Did they appease the protesters?)

It is important to note that this research is not exhaustive. It would be nearly impossible to compile information on every attempt to suppress student speech that occurs on hundreds of college and university campuses across the country. However, FIRE is confident that this data accurately documents a culture of censorship.

Furthermore, the Students Under Fire database relies on publicly available information from local and national media outlets, campus newspapers, social media, and the websites/profiles belonging to

colleges and universities. As a general rule, this database requires credible evidence of an attempt to investigate, censor, or otherwise punish a student or student group for expression/activity that is — or would at a public college or university be — protected by the First Amendment. Evidence can come in the form of direct quotations, video/audio recordings, and/or screenshots. Incidents are evaluated on a case by case basis and reviewed by multiple members of FIRE’s research team. Not every entry involves FIRE’s advocacy work.

## Key Definitions

### What Is A Speech Controversy?

A speech controversy is a publicly known effort to have a student or student group investigated, censored, or otherwise disciplined by the administration or student government for expression that is — or at a public college or university would be — protected by the First Amendment. These efforts may include demands made of the administration or student government, or punishments made in the absence of any demands.

A speech controversy does not include instances in which a student or student group is harassed or otherwise intimidated but does not face threat of institutional punishment. Nor does it include incidents in which a student or student group faces counterspeech devoid of demands for institutional action.

### Who Is a Student?

A student is any individual (foreign or domestic) who has applied to, been admitted to, or is enrolled at a U.S. college or university as an undergraduate or non-PhD graduate student. PhD students/candidates would qualify for inclusion in FIRE’s Scholars Under Fire database.

When a student is not identifiable by name, they are entered as an “unnamed” student. If there is evidence that the student expression was intentionally anonymous, they are entered as an “anonymous” or “pseudonymous” student.

### What Is a Student Group?

A student group is any organized cohort or club of students at a college or university that is not engaged in graduate-level pedagogical or research activities. A student group does not need to be a local chapter of a national organization, nor does it need to be receiving funding from the administration and/or student government.

Occasionally, multiple student groups join to form a coalition. Whether organized in such a way or targeted by others for reasons related to a shared activity/feature (e.g., Greek life), a coalition is also considered a student group.

Some student groups include non-students as members (e.g., the Chinese Students and Scholars Association). As long as students are strongly represented in a group's membership and/or significantly involved in its mission, leadership, or operations, this database treats it as a student group.

## What Is the Administration?

The administration includes any professional agent of the college or university whose job involves establishing or enforcing campus policies, investigating conduct or moderating content, or contributing to the general operations of the institution. For the purposes of this database, campus police fall under this definition, whereas local and state police do not. Coaches and other athletics staff also fall under this definition.

Students employed by a college or university might also qualify as the administration when they are operating as an agent of the institution (e.g., a resident assistant).

Many colleges and universities delegate their power to fund and recognize student groups to their student government. However, because the administration is composed of professional staff while the student government is composed of students democratically elected by their peers to represent them, this database treats the student government as separate from the administration. However, given that student governments' function and influence on campus culture are distinct from other student cohorts, speech controversies involving student government are also included in this database.

## Key Principles

### Student Government

Due to both its democratic nature and student composition, student government is treated as separate from the administration. However, because this body enforces policies and makes certain funding decisions, we consider them an authoritative body and thus, demands made of and/or punitive actions taken by student government qualify an incident for inclusion in this database. Proposals, resolutions, or deliberations which would target or restrict specific student groups or coalitions are not themselves considered punishments, whereas their enforcement or passing would be considered a punishment.

It is not irregular or unexpected that a democratically elected member of student government might displease a portion of their constituency during their time in office, or face demands for their removal or other forms of punishment from the body itself. This database does not treat such demands as speech controversies. However, if demands are made of the administration to punish an elected member, or if the administration were to take such action, it would qualify as a speech controversy.

## Multiple Parties or Outcomes

Speech controversies sometimes involve more than one student or student group. Attempts might also result in more than one punishment. The following table summarizes how the Students Under Fire database treats these circumstances.

Situation	Treatment
Speech controversies involving student groups composed of numerous individuals	Only one entry is created for the group.
Speech controversies involving both a student group and specific group members	An entry is created for each party that is uniquely targeted and/or punished. For example, a petition demands an investigation into a student group after private text messages between specific members are leaked showing offensive language. Only one entry is created for the group unless those specific students are also targeted and/or experience punishments beyond that of the group.
Speech controversies involving multiple students or student groups engaging in the same expressive activity	Each is considered its own entry unless they are explicitly unified as a group or coalition, in which case only one entry is created. For example, if the administration cancels a speaking event being co-hosted by two student groups, each group is considered its own entry.
Speech controversies involving multiple students or student groups from different campuses	Occasionally students or student groups from different institutions will co-organize or participate in an event on one of their respective campuses. Should such an event be the subject of a speech controversy, the same rules as above apply. Each entry is assigned to the host institution, while their home institution is mentioned either in entry name and/or controversy explanation.

## Criteria for Inclusion

Students often inhabit numerous roles on campus and engage in a wide range of activities as members of student groups. Thus, speech controversies can come in various forms. The criteria for inclusion in this database are found below.

Type	Database's approach	What would be included (example)	What would not be included (example)
Student athletes	Student athletes are students first, and institutions have a responsibility to honor the expressive rights of students to the fullest extent possible, though institutions may punish students for substantially disrupting an athletic program.	A student athlete has their athletic scholarship revoked for an extramural social media post made years earlier.	A student is kicked off their athletics team for repeatedly and openly mocking the coach during practices.
Platforms and forums	Institutions have the authority to control platforms they own. They may place restrictions on how these platforms are used as long as the restrictions meet time, place, and manner rules and do not discriminate based on content/viewpoint.	A student is told to remove a BLM flag from the window of their dorm room while their neighbor is permitted to hang an American flag.	A student group is told by administrators to remove their large, inflatable “free speech ball” that is blocking a building’s entryway.
Students as employees or agents	Student employees are sometimes empowered with authority to act on the institution’s behalf. Universities can limit student employees’ speech as far as it is necessary for their job, but cannot limit their speech when it is not.	A student employed as a Resident Assistant (RA) is prohibited by the administration from speaking to the student newspaper about their campus experience.	A student employed as a RA is prohibited by the administration from advocating for a political candidate during official orientation meetings with students under their care.

Right to listen	When an invited speaker's right to speak is violated, so too is the right of those in attendance to listen. These attendees would not be included in the database. However, in the event that no speaker's rights had their rights violated, but an identifiable student listener's did, the incident would qualify for inclusion.	A student bystander who is observing, but not participating in, a campus protest is stopped and interrogated by campus police.	Students who would have attended a speaking event that was shut down by administrators.
Religious freedom	This database does not include entries involving the free exercise of religion unless the incident includes a speech element. Additionally, it includes students or groups facing punishment attempts for their expression about religious freedom.	A religious student group is denied recognition for beliefs others deem hateful and offensive.	A student is suspended for seeking a religious freedom exception to a COVID-19 vaccine mandate.
Association	This database does include speech controversies concerning association when the punishment restricts expressive activity and/or the incident includes a speech element.	Based on the speech/activity of a single fraternity or sorority, the administration prevents all Greek life organizations from recruiting new members.	A student group chooses to remove one of its members for an offensive social media post.
Title VI, VII, or IX	Title VI, VII, and IX investigations of students/groups are not considered speech controversies unless the investigation is in response to protected expression.	Administrators issue a no-contact order to a student on the grounds that they violated the school's Title IX policy when expressing their views about same-sex marriage to another student.	A student is investigated for harassment after continuing to send sexually suggestive text messages to another student despite repeatedly being asked to stop.

## Time, Place, and Manner Restrictions

Colleges and universities may impose reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions on expression as long as these restrictions are [“justified without reference to the content of the regulated speech,”](#) [“narrowly tailored to serve a significant government interest,”](#) and [“leave open ample alternative channels for communication of the information.”](#) Students frequently engage in expressive activity falling within the purview of these restrictions such as tabling, hosting an invited speaker, posting promotional materials, and protesting. Students and student groups in violation of reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions are not included.

## Reversal of Punishments

Occasionally a student or student group may see their punishment reduced or reversed in light of new information or as a result of legal proceedings. These changes will be noted in the controversy explanation for the entry, but the original punishment will still be recorded.

## Coding Decisions

### Student Information

The Students Under Fire database tracks the following details about the targeted student or student group.

Field	Designation	Description	Example
Department	Individuals	The department or school for which graduate students are entering or enrolled. Left blank for undergraduate and incoming undergraduate students.	Law
Rank	Individuals	Is the student a current or incoming student? Undergraduate or graduate?	Undergraduate student
Status	Individuals	Are they a domestic or international student? If unclear, assume domestic.	Domestic
Status	Groups	What is the group's recognition/registration status with the school at the time of the incident? If unspecified, assume recognized/registered.	Seeking recognition
Group Composition	Groups	What is the composition of the students who make up the group's membership? If open for all, assume undergraduate. If unspecified, assume undergraduate.	Undergraduate students

## Type of School

Five different kinds of colleges and universities can be found in the Scholars Under Fire database. The table below lists how each type of school is coded and provides a definition and an example for each type of school. Public, private, and religious schools may or may not have graduate programs.

Type of school	Definition	Example
Community college	A two-year community or county college.	Hudson Community College
Federal service academy	One of the five federal service academies.	United States Naval Academy
Public	A four-year state college or university.	University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA)
Private	A four-year private, secular college or university.	Harvard University
Religious	A four-year religious college or university.	University of Notre Dame

## Characteristics of Speech Controversies

### Topic(s) of controversy

The Students Under Fire database documents the topic(s) of the controversial expression which led to the attempt to punish the student or student group.

If an attempt to punish a student or student group is due to their hosting of a controversial speaker (such as Milo Yiannopoulos) or association with a controversial group (such as the Students for Justice in Palestine parent organization), then the topic(s) relate to the controversial expression of those parties. For example, in 2023 students petitioned the Purdue University administration to cancel College Republicans' planned event featuring Michael Knowles, citing a statement he made during the Conservative Political Action Conference about how "transgenderism must be eradicated from public life entirely." The topic selected would be **Gender**.

The table below provides more specific descriptions of each topic.

Topic	Description	Variable Name in Raw Data File
Abortion	Views on abortion, including partial-birth abortion, the morning after pill, Plan B, and abortifacients.	Topic   Abortion
COVID	Views on COVID-19, its origins, and responses to it (including vaccinations, mask mandates, and social distancing initiatives).	Topic   COVID
Civil Liberties	Views on freedom of speech, gun rights, etc.	Topic   Civil_Liberties
Class or Policy Issues	Views on class issues, economic inequality, economic standing, or economic systems (e.g. Capitalism).	Topic   Class_or_Policy_Is_sues
Elections	Views on previous elections, upcoming elections, voting rights laws, or democracy and democratic institutions.	Topic   Elections
Environment	Views on climate change and/or environmentalism.	Topic   Environment
Foreign Affairs	Views on foreign affairs or events in other countries (e.g., Brexit, the Iraq War, human rights violations).	Topic   Foreign_Affairs
Gender	Views on gender, gender roles, feminism, sexual assault/#MeToo, Title IX, or transgender rights; Accusations of misogyny, sexism or transphobia.	Topic   Gender
Health	Views on mental and physical health, disorders, or disabilities.	Topic   Health
Immigration	Views on immigration, immigration policy, or immigrants.	Topic   Immigration
Institutional Policy	Views on institutional policies, funding, grants, or conflicts of interest.	Topic   Institutional_policy
Israeli-Palestinian Conflict	Views on Israeli-Palestinian relations, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,	Topic   Israeli-Palestinian_Conflict

	anti-Zionism, the BDS movement, or Zionism.	
Judiciary System	Views on a current or past court trial, verdict, etc.	Topic   Judiciary_System
Other	Views unrelated to any other selection option.	Topic   Other
Police	Views on policing, police misconduct, police killings, and/or movements either supporting or opposing police (e.g., ACAB, Defund the Police, Blue Lives Matter).	Topic   Police
Political Views	General views on political issues, candidates, parties, and/or those who subscribe to or are given a political label (e.g., liberal, conservative, “radical leftist,” or “far-right extremist.”	Topic   Political_VIEWS
Race	Views on racial issues, racial differences, racial inequality, racial identity, historical racism, remedies to address racism (e.g., affirmative action, DEI efforts), or accusations of racism.	Topic   Race
Religion	Views on religion or religious differences; Accusations of religious prejudice (e.g., “Islamophobia”).	Topic   Religion
Sexuality	Views on sexual orientation or gay rights; Accusations of homophobia.	Topic   Sexuality
Terrorism	Views on terrorism, individual terrorist attacks, or the War on Terror.	Topic   Terrorism

### Context of Students' Expression

The context refers to the environment (for individual students) or activity (student groups) in which the targeted expression occurred. The table below describes these contexts, specifying whether the context applies only to individual students or student groups. Multiple contexts may be selected, for instance, if the controversial expression occurred in a back-and-forth conversation via text message, the context would be **Direct Interaction** and **Email**.

Context	Designation	Description	Variable Name in Raw Data File
Advertisement	Groups	A physical promotional advertisement for the group or its activities, such as a flier or poster.	Context Advertisement
Classroom	Individuals	The classroom or a virtual classroom.	Context Classroom
Direct Interaction	Individuals	An in-person or otherwise direct exchange/interaction between the student and another party. Can include face-to-face encounters, and private messages.	Context Direct_interaction
Display	Groups	A visibly physical display such as a flag, piece of art, chalking, memorial, etc.	Context Display
Individual Member	Groups	The activity or expression of an individual member of a group made outside the context of the group.	Context Individual_member
Internal Communication	Groups	Any expression or exchange made between members of the student group (e.g., a group chat).	Context Internal_communication
Email	Individuals	An email or other electronic communication, such as a text message.	Context Email
Event	Groups	Party, protest, presentation, speech, tabling, or similar organized event.	Context Event
Legitimacy	Groups	The group's presence, identity, or recognized status on campus (e.g., a pro-abortion group at a Catholic university).	Context Legitimacy
Op-Ed/Blog	Individuals	An op-ed, newspaper article,	Context Op-Ed_Blog

		or blog post.	
Protest	Individuals	An on-or off-campus rally or protest. (Note: for student groups, this could be coded under “Event”, as they are likely to host/organize protests).	Context   Protest
Publication	Group	A statement intentionally released by the group in an op-ed, on social media, or any other platform.	Context   Publication
Public Comments	Individuals	A public interview, speech, statement, display (e.g. a flag), television appearance, or podcast appearance.	Context   Public_comments
Scholarship	Individuals	Research activity (e.g., distributing a survey) or the presentation of findings (e.g., panel discussion).	Context   Scholarship
Social Media	Individuals	A social media platform such as Facebook (Meta), Instagram, Twitter (X), or Snapchat.	Context   Social_media
Student Group	Individuals	A meeting, resolution, training, event, forum, or other activity as a member of a student group.	Context   Student_Group

## Sources of Attempts

The source(s) refers to those making demands of the institution to punish students or student groups. Such efforts can be initiated by on-campus sources, off-campus sources, or a combination of both. Attempts can also be made by anonymous or unknown sources. The sources can overlap, meaning that an attempt can have more than one source.

When administrators punish a student or student groups absent any demands, they are considered the source. When the student government punishes a student or student group absent any demands, undergraduate students or graduate students are considered the source (depending on the composition of that student government).

The table below provides more specific descriptions of each source.

Source	Description	Variable Name in Raw Date File
Activist(s)	On- or off-campus activist organizations (e.g., the Cardinal Newman Society, or Climate Justice at Boston College).	Source   Activists
Administrator(s)	Members of the college or university administration.	Source   Administrators
Alumni	Individual alumni of the college or university or alumni organizations.	Source   Alumni
Anonymous	The source cannot be identified more specifically.	Source   Anonymous
Corporation(s)	Businesses or corporations (e.g., Zoom).	Source   Corporations
Faculty	Individual faculty members, academic departments, or faculty organizations at the college or university. PhD students are also considered faculty.	Source   Faculty
Foreign Government	A foreign government, its agents, or its elected officials.	Source   Foreign_Government
General Public	Members of the general public or local community.	Source   General_Public
Graduate Student(s)	One or more graduate students, a student group composed of graduate students, or a graduate student government. PhD students are not considered graduate students.	Source   Graduate_students
Politician(s)	Elected or formerly elected officials, Cabinet officials (e.g., Secretary of Education).	Source   Politicians

Public Figure	A public figure that is not an elected official (e.g., Bishop of the Archdiocese).	Source   Public_figures
Stakeholder(s)/Parent(s)	Donors to, trustees of, or parents of students at the college or university.	Source   Stakeholders
Undergraduate Student(s)	One or more undergraduate students, a student group composed of graduate students, or an undergraduate student government.	Source   Undergraduate_students

## Demands

Those seeking to punish students and student groups may make one or more demands of the college or university administration. Some demands apply only to individual students, while others apply only to student groups. The following table provides more specific descriptions of each.

Demands	Designation	Description	Variable Name in Raw Data File
Apology and Condemnation	Individuals and Groups	A demand for the administration to apologize for or condemn the student/group and/or their expression.	Demands   Apology_and_condemnation
Censorship	Individuals and Groups	A demand to alter or remove an advertisement or display; alter or cancel an event; retract a statement or publication made by the student/group; stop research or journalism in progress; issue a no-contact order; or institute prior restraint.	Demands   Censorship
Expulsion	Individuals	A demand to expel a student from the college or university.	Demands   Expulsion
Policy Change	Individuals and Groups	A demand for a change to the college or university's official policies or practices.	Demands   Policy_Change
Student	Individuals and	A demand for the student	Demands   Student_G

Government	Groups	government to censor, suspend, reject, remove funds, or otherwise punish the targeted student group.	overnment
Suspension	Individuals	A demand for the student/group to be suspended, placed on leave, removed from the classroom, or otherwise restricted access to campus or organized group activities.	Demands   Suspension
Training	Individuals and Groups	A demand for mandatory training for the targeted student/group and/or all students.	Demands   Training
Group sanction	Individuals	A demand for the student to resign from a group, or for the group or administration to apologize for, condemn, censor, demote, suspend, reject, remove, or otherwise punish the targeted student in their capacity as a member of a group.	Demands   Group_sanction
Revocation	Individuals	A demand to revoke the targeted students' admissions offer and/or scholarship.	Demands   Revocation
Remove	Groups	A demand to deny or revoke the targeted group's status or funding, or to dissolve the group or otherwise remove it from campus.	Demands   Remove
Termination	Individuals	A demand to fire a student from their on-campus job, or force their resignation.	Demands   Termination_forced_resignation
Vague Investigation	Individuals and Groups	A demand to investigate, look into, or take some unspecified action against the targeted student/group.	Demands   Vague_investigation

## Political Motivations of Attempts

Most speech in the database is political in some way, whether it belongs to the targeted student/group, or the source(s) initiating attempts against them. Though the political orientation of the targeted student/group or the source(s) is sometimes made explicitly clear (e.g., College Democrats or a Republican Governor), in most cases it is not, and even when it is, they may still be

targeted by those of similar alignment. Based on what we can reasonably infer, the political direction of the attempt or punishment is thus classified in relation to the targeted student, and described as coming either “from their left” or “from their right,” or as unclear/apolitical in nature.

## Outcomes of Attempts

The Students Under Fire database records 13 different possible outcomes, of which 11 relate to the administration while a single outcome relates to the student government. One further outcome records whether a student’s unenrollment is ambiguous.

Multiple outcomes may be selected, and any and all punitive outcomes involving the administration are assumed to also have first involved an investigation.

Outcome	Designation	Description	Variable Name in Raw Data File
Censorship	Individuals and Groups	Administrators forbid the student/group from conducting research or journalism; altered grades or materials; pressured the student/group to delay or retract publication; pressured the student/group to delay, alter, cancel, or shut down an event; assigned exorbitant security fees; imposed prior restraint or prior review of future expression; handed out a no-contact order; requested or required the student/group not to engage in the expression again.	Outcome Censorship
Expelled	Individuals	Administrators expel the student from the college or university.	Outcome Expelled
Group Sanction	Individuals	A student is censored, demoted, suspended, rejected, removed, or otherwise punished as a member of a student group. The decision to punish the student may be the group’s, or one imposed upon the group by administrators.	Outcome Group_sanction
Individual Sanction	Groups	A student group censors, demotes, suspends, rejects, removes, or otherwise punishes an individual	Outcome Individual_sanctioned

		member. The decision to do so may either be their own, or one imposed upon the group by administrators.	
Investigation	Individuals and Groups	Administrators place a student/group under investigation because of their expression either in response to public backlash or internal administrative concerns. This also includes Title IX investigations deemed retaliatory for expression.	Outcome   Investigation
No sanction	Individuals and Groups	A student/group is neither investigated, censored, or otherwise punished by the administration as a result of the speech controversy.	Outcome   No_sanction
Removed	Groups	Administrators deny or revoke a group's status or funding, or dissolve or ban the group from the college or university.	Outcome   Removed
Revoked	Individuals	Administrators withdraw the student's admissions offer or scholarship.	Outcome   Revoked
Student Government	Individuals and Groups	The student government investigates, censors, suspends, rejects, denies or revokes status or funding, or otherwise punishes a student or student group. It also applies when the student government passes or enforces a resolution or policy which targets and restricts a group's expression.	Outcome   Student_government_sanction
Suspension	Individuals	Administrators place a student/group on leave; suspend them indefinitely or for a certain period of time; remove them from their office or residence; or restrict access to campus or its resources which they would otherwise have access to.	Outcome   Suspension
Termination	Individuals	Administrators fire or terminate a student from an on-campus job, or	Outcome   Termination

		pressures them to resign. This may happen on the spot, when an employment offer is rescinded, or when the students' contract is not renewed.	
Training	Individuals and Groups	Administrators request or require the student/group to undergo training, issue an apology, or write a reflection essay.	Outcome   Training
Unenrolled	Individuals	The student is no longer enrolled at the college or university, and it is unclear whether the decision was made by the student themselves or the administration.	Outcome   Unenrolled

## Public Response

How college and university administrators respond to speech controversies matters. Clear and consistent messages in support of free expression help to foster a campus climate where the open exchange of ideas can thrive. Subjective or inconsistent enforcement that appears to target specific kinds of speech, but not other kinds, confuses students, and possibly emboldens those seeking to punish students/groups for their expression.

The Students Under Fire database identifies 10 kinds of public responses the college or university may issue to a speech controversy. Colleges and universities may issue multiple responses — sometimes conflicting responses — to a speech controversy. When this occurs, the Students Under Fire database records and lists each kind of public response.

The term **Appeased Protesters** describes when a college or university's response to a speech controversy indicates that those demanding action are correct to do so.

For example, after receiving complaints about “anti-semitic remarks” made by a student, administrators at Florida State University said:

Thank you for bringing this to our attention. Please be assured that Florida State University does not tolerate racism or hate speech. We take matters like this very seriously, and will review this information with our Office of Student Conduct and Community Standards.

The term **Condemned Expression or Speaker** describes when the school (or a top administrator) issues a statement condemning the expression and/or the student or student group responsible.

For example, after forbidding Right for Life from purchasing tickets for or attending an event featuring Ben Shapiro, administrators at University of Notre Dame said:

This event is problematic. This speaker is problematic... For this event, we have determined that university dollars are not going to go to it.

The term **Disingenuous** describes a catch-all category for when the administration says it supports free speech but does or says something that suggests otherwise, such as investigating or disciplining a student or student group. It also includes contradictory statements by different administrators or within the same statement. Common examples of disingenuous statements are ones implying the institution's hands are tied or expressing a legal obligation to uphold the First Amendment without agreeing with the principles behind the law.

For example, after erasing messages chalked by Students for Justice in Palestine, administrators at Rutgers University said:

Rutgers adheres to the principles of free speech and academic freedom. All members of our community — our faculty, students, alumni and staff — are free to express their viewpoints in public forums as private citizens, including viewpoints that the University itself may not share.

The term **Encouraged (or Approved of) Self-Censorship** describes when a college or university responds to a speech controversy by encouraging or approving of others censoring the controversial expression.

For example, after barring *The Berea Torch* from distributing promotional flyers and prohibiting the paper's use of campus print services, the president of Berea College said:

Across the country, unrecognized organizations, because they are not subject to college rules or oversight, pose increased risks to students and the campus community. Students, faculty, and staff are discouraged from giving interviews to Berea Torch representatives or otherwise supporting group operations.

The term **High Honors** applies only when the school (or a top administrator) issues a statement that reacts appropriately to the incident listed by both unambiguously expressing a commitment to free speech and explaining why the school is committed to freedom of expression. There cannot be any contradictory statements by other officials or any form of punishment for the speech in question, i.e. no investigation, censorship, or formal sanction by the administration.

For example, in response to a demand from an off-campus organization calling for the university to punish Students Allied for Freedom and Equality for chants made during their pro-Palestinian protest, administrators at the University of Michigan took no action against the student group and said:

It is clear that many within and outside our university community heard certain chants as antisemitic. We understand that perspective and thank those individuals for sharing their views, especially during this time in our nation's history when there has been a rise of antisemitic speech and violence. At U-M all student protesters are expected to adhere to public safety procedures, but university policy does not – and should not – dictate or control the ability of students to protest or the content of their protest messages. One of our most important values as an institution – one we teach and model in and out of the classroom and one that is embodied in our commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion – is the respect for those who have different opinions, have different life experiences, hold different world views. Also, our university freedom of speech policy says, in part, that the "expression of diverse points of view is of the highest importance, not only for those who espouse a cause or position and then defend it, but also for those who hear and pass judgment on that defense."

The term **Honors** applies when the school (or a top administrator) expresses support for free expression but without an explanation of why free speech is important, i.e. the "because" part necessary for High Honors is missing. An "Honors" designation also applies if a top official admonishes a lower official or school employee for not respecting free speech.

For example, in response to State Representative Austin Smith's demand that Arizona State University cancel an event hosted by Socialist Revolution, administrators took no action and said:

...as a matter of free speech, the university neither endorses nor restricts opinions or views expressed at student group meetings, rallies or other events.

The term **Mistaken on the Law** describes when the school (or a top administrator) makes an appeal to the law to justify suppressing expression, but is incorrect in its interpretation of the law.

For example, a spokesperson for Creighton University justified administrators revoking approval for Turning Point USA to host an event, claiming that by changing the event's name the group had endangered the university's tax-exempt status.

The term **Neutral** describes when the only statement(s) available do not take a stand on either the particular speech in question or the value of free speech. Statements may simply describe what happened without expressing an opinion on the value of the speech or what, if anything, should be

done. Administrators may offer resources to upset parties or make a statement that the school is not taking a position on what was said, without explaining why.

For example, in response to a lawsuit filed by Daria Danley against the university, administrators at Montana State University said:

Montana State University has accepted this settlement as a conciliatory mechanism to best serve the interests of our students. Rather than engaging in protracted litigation and a public debate of this matter, we have taken steps to allow the involved students to return to the privacy of their normal lives and to focus on their education.

The term **None** describes when a college or university does not issue a response to a speech controversy on campus.

**Unknown** applies when FIRE cannot determine if the college or university issued a public response to a speech controversy on campus.