

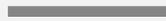
2026 College Free Speech Rankings

Colgate University

138

OVERALL
RANK

F



SPEECH
CLIMATE

RED



SPOTLIGHT
RATING



FIRE
Foundation for Individual
Rights and Expression

Executive Summary

THE COLLEGE FREE SPEECH RANKINGS are the most comprehensive comparison of free speech climates at U.S. colleges and universities. Developed by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, the rankings combine student survey data, written speech policies, and school responses to recent speech-related controversies to evaluate how well institutions uphold free expression. Schools earn higher scores when they protect open debate and viewpoint diversity and lose points when they restrict it.

To understand the student experience of free speech on campus, our survey partner, College Pulse, surveyed 68,510 student respondents from 257 colleges and universities from Jan. 3 through June 5, 2025. The College Free Speech Rankings are available online (rankings.thefire.org) for easy comparison between institutions.

We surveyed 310 Colgate University undergraduates. Key findings include:

- Colgate ranks 138 with an overall score of 57.05, an F speech climate.
- The university improved on each component in this year's College Free Speech Rankings, placing among the top 50 for four: "Comfort Expressing Ideas" (26), "Self-Censorship" (29), "Openness" (29), and Administrative Support" (50). This means that more Colgate students perceive the administration to be supportive of free speech and students are self-censoring less and are more comfortable and open on campus.
- Colgate's lowest ranking comes on "Political Tolerance" (178). Still, it improved on three of the four subcomponents.
- Colgate continues to maintain speech policies that earn it a "red light" rating from FIRE, including two red light policies and four "yellow light" policies. If the university revised these policies and earned a "green light" rating, it would have ranked 13 overall.

Colgate University ranks 138 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 57.05, an F speech climate grade.¹ The university jumped 73 spots and gained 3.4 points since last year.

The following report highlights four survey areas where Colgate ranks among the top 50 and one area where it stands to improve. In addition, it discusses the university's speech policies and what the school can do to improve its free speech climate.

COLGATE STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF FREE SPEECH

More students perceive the administration to be supportive of free speech

Colgate University ranks 50 on "Administrative Support" after finishing 145 last year.

Compared to only 36% among students nationally, 44% of Colgate students said it was either "very" or "extremely" clear that the administration protects free speech on campus. Last year, only 29% of Colgate students said this.

Further, compared to 24% of students nationally, 27% of Colgate students said that it is either "very" or "extremely" likely that the administration would defend a speaker's expressive rights in the face of controversy. Last year, 24% of Colgate students said this.

STUDENTS ARE SELF-CENSORING LESS AND ARE MORE COMFORTABLE AND OPEN ON CAMPUS

Colgate ranks 29 on the "Self-Censorship" component after placing 153 last year.

Students were presented the following definition of self-censorship:

"Refraining from sharing certain views because you fear social (e.g., exclusion from social events), professional (e.g., losing job or promotion), legal (e.g., prosecution or fine), or violent (e.g., assault) consequences, whether in person or remotely (e.g., by phone or online), and whether the consequences come from state or non-state sources."

They were then asked about the frequency with which they self-censor in three campus contexts. Since last year, the percentage of Colgate students who said they self-censored at least "a couple of times a week" fell for each context, particularly when talking to other students.

- Falling from 33% to 18% – during conversations with other students on campus.
- Falling from 24% to 19% – during conversations with their professors.
- Falling from 25% to 19% – during classroom discussions.

¹ The detailed methodology can be found at rankings.thefire.org/methodology.

Coinciding with this decline in self-censorship was a rise on “Comfort Expressing Ideas,” ranking 26 this year compared to 109 last year.

Students were asked how comfortable they would be expressing views on a controversial political topic in five different campus settings. Since last year, the percentage of students who said they were either “somewhat” or “very” comfortable rose for three settings and decreased slightly in the other two. Still, compared to students nationally, Colgate students reported feeling more comfortable in all five.

FIGURE 1: Students Who Felt at Least Somewhat Comfortable by Context (%)

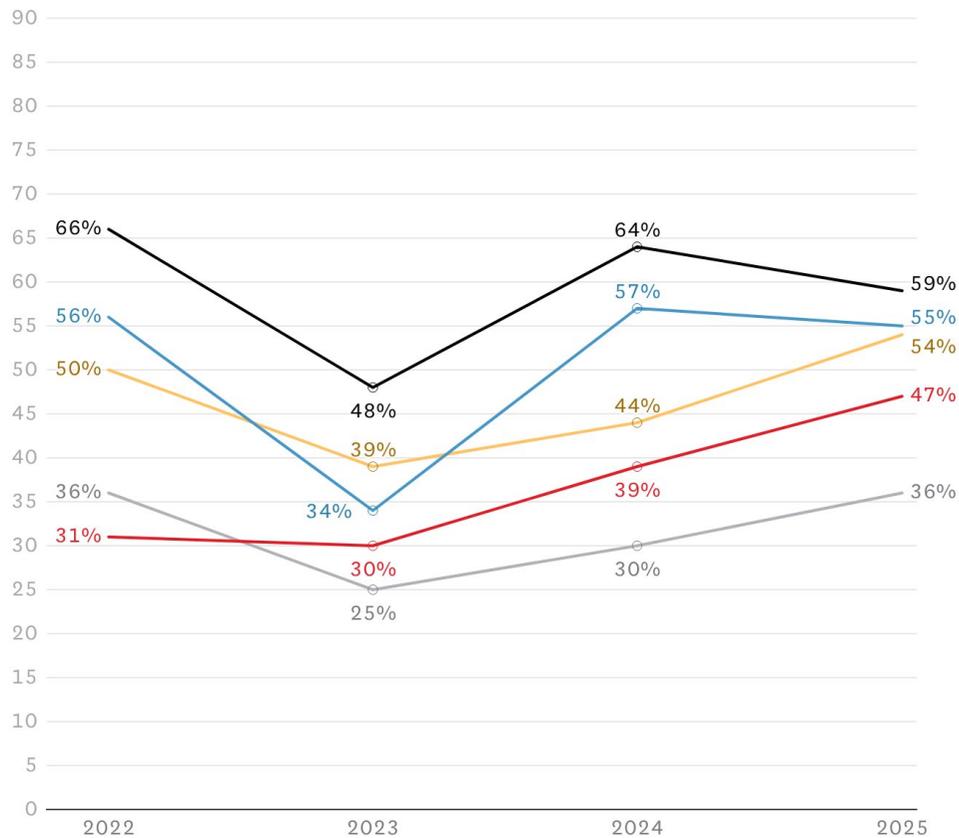


Chart: Emily Nayer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Colgate ranks 29 on the “Openness” after finishing 76 last year. Students were presented a list of 20 topics and asked which, if any, were difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on campus. Impressively, 15 of 20 topics were identified by fewer students this year, and 19% selected “none of the above” whereas only 5% said this last year.

Perhaps more impressively, Colgate students identified 17 topics less frequently than students nationally.

FIGURE 2: Topics Identified as Difficult to Have an Open and Honest Conversation About (%)

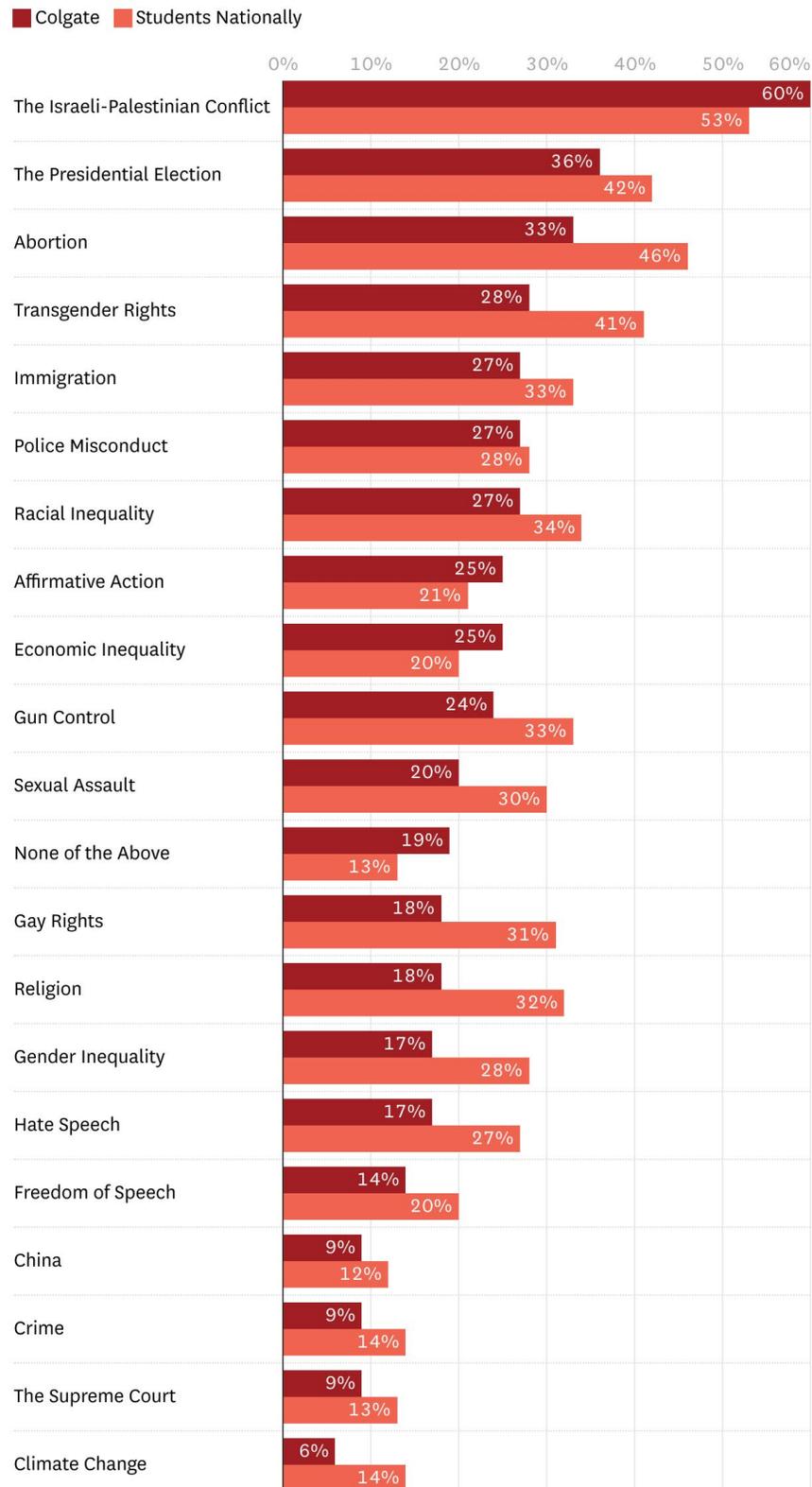


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Students are more tolerant of liberal speakers than conservative speakers

Colgate ranks 178 on “Political Tolerance.”

Students were asked whether six speakers (three liberal, three conservative) who had previously expressed controversial opinions should be allowed to give a campus speech. The “Political Tolerance” component was influenced by four subcomponents, for which Colgate earned mixed rankings: “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers” (60), “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers” (152), “Mean Tolerance” (92), and “Tolerance Difference” (202).

Among Colgate students, support declined for only two speakers (one liberal and one conservative) but increased for the other four. Colgate students expressed greater support than students nationally for all three liberal speakers and similar levels of support for all three conservative speakers.

Gains for liberal speakers were greater than for conservative speakers. Additionally, students expressed greater support for liberal speakers overall (ranging from 41% to 65%) than for conservative speakers (ranging from 23% to 28%). Given the liberal supermajority at Colgate, these disparities are unsurprising.

FIGURE 3: Colgate Students Who Said the Administration “Probably” or “Definitely” Should Allow Speakers (%)

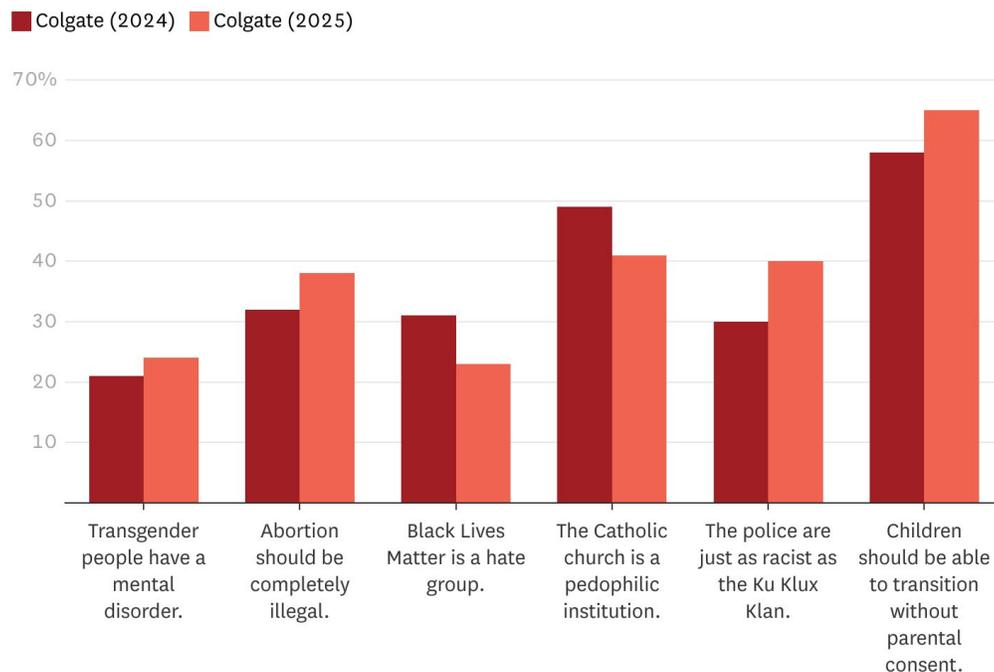


Chart: Emily Nayer • Source: FIRE/College Pulse

A ‘RED LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH A CHICAGO STATEMENT

In October of 2018, Colgate University officially adopted a statement on free speech like the “Chicago Statement,” for which the university earned bonus points in this year’s College Free Speech Rankings. However, these bonuses were not enough to overcome the penalties the university received due to its policies.

Colgate earns an overall “red light” rating for its written policies governing student expression. The institution maintains policies on postings, harassment, civility, and internet usage that imperil the expressive rights of students on campus. Two of the university’s three harassment policies fail to meet the legal standard for peer hostile environment harassment in an educational setting. Both policies reserve broad discretion to punish nearly any conduct on campus, stating the university may punish conduct under this policy “even if the behavior in question does not rise to the level of legally recognized or actionable discrimination or harassment.”

Similarly, the university maintains two policies on civility that implicate students’ expressive rights. Civility may indeed be a laudable goal for students to aspire to, but policies mandating civility can all too easily be applied by administrators to punish disfavored speech. Colgate also restricts expressive activities by requiring campus postings to receive prior approval, heavily regulating where and how materials can be displayed, and forbidding anonymous authorship. Lastly, the institution’s internet usage policy subjects a wide range of protected expression to punishment by placing restrictions on specific types of digital communications.

HOW CAN COLGATE IMPROVE?

Colgate University can improve its ranking by reforming its “red light” and “yellow light” speech policies to earn a “green light” rating. If the university earned a green light rating this year, it would rank 13 instead of 138. The university could further boost its rating by pairing its statement on free speech with a formal commitment to institutional neutrality similar to the “Kalven Report.” Together, these changes would have placed Colgate 5 in this year’s College Free Speech Rankings.

Additionally, these changes should be communicated directly to students. While Colgate placed in the top 50 for “Administrative Support,” “Self-Censorship,” “Openness,” and “Comfort Expressing Ideas,” student perceptions were not consistent across ideological lines. Given the liberal supermajority on campus, Colgate should prioritize communicating these changes. Doing so could lead to more balanced perceptions, which in turn might place Colgate even higher in these components next year.

Colgate 2026 College Free Speech Rankings Scores by Component

COMPONENT	COLGATE UNIVERSITY	NATIONAL AVERAGE	MINIMUM VALUE	MAXIMUM VALUE
Comfort Expressing Ideas	9.95	9.53	5	15
Self-Censorship	12.70	12.12	3	20
Disruptive Conduct	15.58	15.50	3	20
Administrative Support	12.06	11.32	2	20
Openness	7.75	7.19	0	10
Political Tolerance	5.99	6.44	3	15
Chicago Statement	3	-	0	3
Institutional Neutrality	0	-	0	3
Spotlight Rating	-10 (Red)	-	-10 (Red)	5 (Green)
Campus Deplatformings	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Scholars Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Students Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Overall score	57.05	58.67		

Topline Results

How clear is it to you that your college administration protects free speech on campus?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all clear	6	2
Not very clear	23	7
Somewhat clear	144	46
Very clear	115	37
Extremely clear	23	7

If a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on your campus, how likely is it that the administration would defend the speaker's right to express their views?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Not at all likely	5	2
Not very likely	65	21
Somewhat likely	156	50
Very likely	75	24
Extremely likely	10	3

How comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? [Presented in randomized order]
Publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	62	20
Somewhat uncomfortable	102	33
Somewhat comfortable	113	36
Very comfortable	32	10

Expressing disagreement with one of your professors about a controversial political topic in a written assignment.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	27	9
Somewhat uncomfortable	114	37
Somewhat comfortable	129	42
Very comfortable	40	13

Expressing your views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	25	8
Somewhat uncomfortable	114	37
Somewhat comfortable	131	42
Very comfortable	40	13

Expressing your views on a controversial political topic to other students during a discussion in a common campus space such as a quad, dining hall, or lounge.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	31	10
Somewhat uncomfortable	97	31
Somewhat comfortable	117	38
Very comfortable	65	21

Expressing an unpopular political opinion to your fellow students on a social media account tied to your name.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	87	28
Somewhat uncomfortable	112	36
Somewhat comfortable	84	27
Very comfortable	28	9

This next series of questions asks you about self-censorship in different settings. For the purpose of these questions, self-censorship is defined as follows:

Refraining from sharing certain views because you fear social (e.g., exclusion from social events), professional (e.g., losing job or promotion), legal (e.g., prosecution or fine), or violent (e.g., assault) consequences, whether in person or remotely (e.g., by phone or online), and whether the consequences come from state or non-state sources. [Presented in randomized order]

How often do you self-censor during conversations with other students on campus?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	26	8
Rarely	111	36
Occasionally, once or twice a month	117	38
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	46	15
Very often, nearly every day	10	3

How often do you self-censor during conversations with your professors?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	22	7
Rarely	115	37
Occasionally, once or twice a month	114	37
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	37	12
Very often, nearly every day	21	7

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	21	7
Rarely	115	37
Occasionally, once or twice a month	116	38
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	46	15
Very often, nearly every day	12	4

How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker?
[Presented in randomized order]

Shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	13	4
Sometimes acceptable	94	30
Rarely acceptable	113	37
Never acceptable	89	29

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	9	3
Sometimes acceptable	56	18
Rarely acceptable	101	33
Never acceptable	144	46

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	3	1
Sometimes acceptable	45	14
Rarely acceptable	46	15
Never acceptable	217	70

Student groups often invite speakers to campus to express their views on a range of topics. Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school **ALLOW** or **NOT ALLOW** a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea? [Presented in randomized order]

Transgender people have a mental disorder.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	130	42
Probably should not allow this speaker	103	33
Probably should allow this speaker	57	18
Definitely should allow this speaker	20	6

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	85	27
Probably should not allow this speaker	107	34
Probably should allow this speaker	91	29
Definitely should allow this speaker	28	9

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	127	41
Probably should not allow this speaker	112	36
Probably should allow this speaker	56	18
Definitely should allow this speaker	15	5

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	53	17
Probably should not allow this speaker	129	42
Probably should allow this speaker	103	33
Definitely should allow this speaker	24	8

The police are just as racist as the Ku Klux Klan.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	46	15
Probably should not allow this speaker	139	45
Probably should allow this speaker	94	30
Definitely should allow this speaker	31	10

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	24	8
Probably should not allow this speaker	84	27
Probably should allow this speaker	159	51
Definitely should allow this speaker	42	14

Some students say it can be difficult to have conversations about certain issues on campus. Which of the following issues, if any, would you say are difficult to have an open and honest conversation about on your campus? [Presented in randomized order with none of the above always listed last]

Abortion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	209	67
Yes	101	33

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	233	75
Yes	77	25

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	281	91
Yes	28	9

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	292	94
Yes	18	6

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	283	91
Yes	27	9

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	231	75
Yes	79	25

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	265	86
Yes	45	14

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	253	82
Yes	57	18

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	258	83
Yes	52	17

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	235	76
Yes	75	24

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	259	83
Yes	51	17

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	226	73
Yes	84	27

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	124	40
Yes	185	60

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	198	64
Yes	112	36

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	227	73
Yes	83	27

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	225	73
Yes	85	27

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	254	82
Yes	56	18

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	247	80
Yes	62	20

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	281	91
Yes	29	9

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	224	72
Yes	86	28

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	251	81
Yes	58	19

On your campus, how often have you felt that you could not express your opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	61	20
Rarely	133	43
Occasionally, once or twice a month	83	27
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	25	8
Very often, nearly every day	8	3

Have you ever been disciplined by your college's administration for expression on campus?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I have been disciplined.	0	0
No, but I have been threatened with discipline.	32	10
I have not been disciplined nor threatened with discipline.	277	89

How often, if at all, do you hide your political beliefs from your professors in an attempt to get a better grade?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	133	43
Rarely	91	29
Occasionally, once or twice a month	48	15
Fairly often, a couple times a week	25	8
Very often, nearly every day	13	4

How likely or unlikely is it that a student on campus would be reported to the administration by another student for saying something controversial?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very unlikely	43	14
Unlikely	113	36
Neither likely or unlikely	89	29
Likely	60	19
Very likely	5	2

How likely or unlikely is it that a professor on campus would be reported to the administration by a student for saying something controversial?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very unlikely	40	13
Unlikely	97	31
Neither likely or unlikely	96	31
Likely	69	22
Very likely	8	3

Have you or anyone you know filed a Title IX complaint?

Response	Frequency	Percent
I have filed a Title IX complaint.	10	3
I both know someone who has and have myself filed a Title IX complaint.	3	1
I have not but I know someone who has filed a Title IX complaint.	109	35
I have neither filed a Title IX complaint, nor know anyone who has.”)	187	60

Has a Title IX complaint ever been filed against you or someone you know?

Response	Frequency	Percent
A Title IX complaint was filed against me.	0	0
A Title IX complaint was filed against me and someone I know.	3	1
A Title IX complaint was filed against someone I know, but not me.	64	20
A Title IX complaint has never been filed against me or someone I know.”)	243	78

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	109	35
Less than once a year	30	10
Once or twice a year	63	20
Several times a year	48	15
Once a month	19	6
2-3 times a month	16	5
About weekly	10	3
Weekly	13	4
Several times a week	3	1

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	7	2
No	303	98

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	3	1	1
No	307	99	99

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	9	3	14
Less than half the time	16	5	26
About half the time	14	5	23
Most of the time, nearly every day	18	6	30
Always	4	1	7

How often would you say that you feel lonely or isolated?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	26	8	35
Less than half the time	30	10	40
About half the time	14	4	18
Most of the time, nearly every day	2	1	3
Always	2	1	3

How often would you say that you feel like you have no time for yourself?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	1	6
Less than half the time	23	7	35
About half the time	32	10	49
Most of the time, nearly every day	6	2	9
Always	0	0	1

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	10	3	18
Less than half the time	31	10	54
About half the time	11	3	18
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	1	7
Always	2	1	3

How often would you say that you feel stressed, frustrated, or overwhelmed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	5	1	9
Less than half the time	13	4	25
About half the time	26	8	49
Most of the time, nearly every day	6	2	12
Always	3	1	5



510 Walnut Street
Suite 900
Philadelphia, PA 19106
T: 215.717.3473
www.thefire.org

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