

2026 College Free Speech Rankings

Dartmouth College

35
OVERALL
RANK

D+

SPEECH
CLIMATE

GREEN

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 162 Dartmouth College undergraduates. Key findings include:

- Dartmouth ranks 35 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The college earned a score of 67.6, a D+ speech climate grade.
- Dartmouth students have stronger support for letting controversial speakers on campus and less appetite for conduct that disrupts speakers compared to their peers nationally.
- 2 in 3 Dartmouth students are uncomfortable expressing controversial ideas to their professors.
- Since the last rankings, Dartmouth improved to earn a “green light” Spotlight rating and formally adopted institutional neutrality.
- Dartmouth was penalized for two speech controversies in 2024.

Dartmouth College ranks 35 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The college earned a score of 67.6, a D+ speech climate grade.¹ The college jumped 189 places and gained 18 points since last year, thanks in part to upgrading its Spotlight rating from “yellow light” to “green light” and adopting institutional neutrality.

The following report highlights two survey areas where Dartmouth does well and one area where it does poorly. In addition, it discusses Dartmouth’s speech policies and statements, its speech controversies, and what Dartmouth can do to improve its free speech climate.

DARTMOUTH STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF FREE SPEECH

Students are more accepting of speakers and less accepting of disruption

Student perceptions give Dartmouth College a rank of 10 on “Political Tolerance” and 43 on “Disruptive Conduct,” showing that Dartmouth students have stronger support for letting controversial speakers on campus and less appetite for using violence to stop a speech or blocking students from attending a speech than their peers at other schools.

Impressively, Dartmouth ranks 6 on “Tolerance for Liberal Speakers,” 2 on “Tolerance for Conservative Speakers,” and 2 on “Mean Tolerance.” However, despite high marks on these subcomponents, students demonstrated a bias toward liberal speakers compared to conservative ones, as evidenced by a 129 ranking on the “Tolerance Difference” subcomponent.

When it came to controversial conservative speakers, the percentage of Dartmouth students saying they “probably” or “definitely should” be allowed ranged from 41% to 68%. Controversial liberal speakers, meanwhile, were more supported, with percentages ranging from 54% to 76%.

FIGURE 1: Students Who Said Their School “Probably” or “Definitely” Should Allow Controversial Speakers (%)

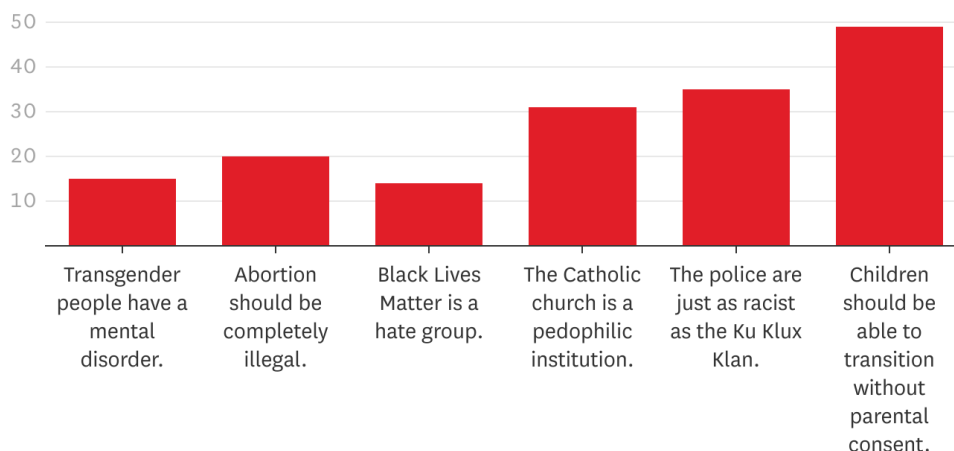


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

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

7 in 10 Dartmouth students believed it is at least rarely acceptable to shout down a speaker matching the national average. But Dartmouth students were less accepting of the other forms of conduct compared to their peers nationally. 5 in 10 Dartmouth students believed there are instances when it is acceptable to block other students from attending a speech, similar to students nationally. And 2 in 10 Dartmouth students believed there are times when violence is acceptable to prevent a speaker from speaking, compared to 3 out of 10 students nationally.

FIGURE 2: Students Who Found Disruptive Conduct at Least Rarely Acceptable, 2025 (%)

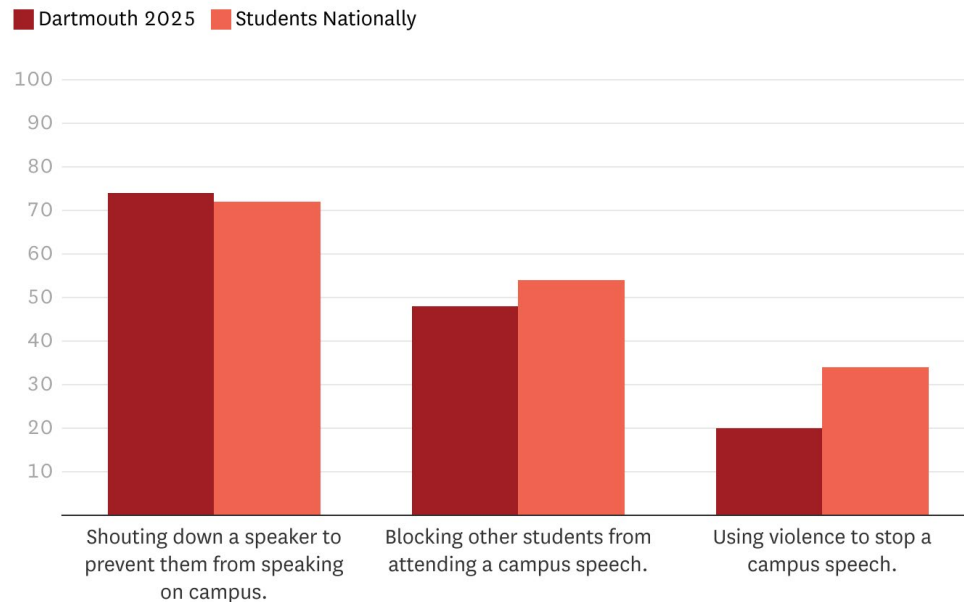


Chart: Emily Nayyer • Source: FIRE/College Pulse

Students are uncomfortable expressing controversial ideas

“In my government classes, I often feel like the liberal view is the only acceptable take. I am conservative-leaning and therefore tend to feel differently about some issues that are discussed in class, especially when they are presented as obviously having a right and a wrong view. I don’t tell my classmates my beliefs because I don’t want to lose friends over it, and I go to a very liberal school (although fairly conservative as far as Ivies go). I also would never tell my professor my conservative thoughts if I thought it would affect my grade on an assignment or in class participation.”

“Office hours is partly for receiving academic help, and partly for getting to know your professor outside of class. I felt like I had to agree with my professor’s political views in office hours to form a closer relationship with him (which would reflect positively in grades and letters of recommendation).”

Dartmouth College ranks 221 on “Comfort Expressing Ideas.” And the issue is primarily in the classroom. At Dartmouth, 2 inf 3 students are uncomfortable disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic both publicly and in a written assignment. Only two of the 257 schools have a higher rate of students who are uncomfortable doing so in a written assignment (Barnard University and the University of Pennsylvania).

FIGURE 3: Students Who Felt Uncomfortable by Context, 2025 (%)

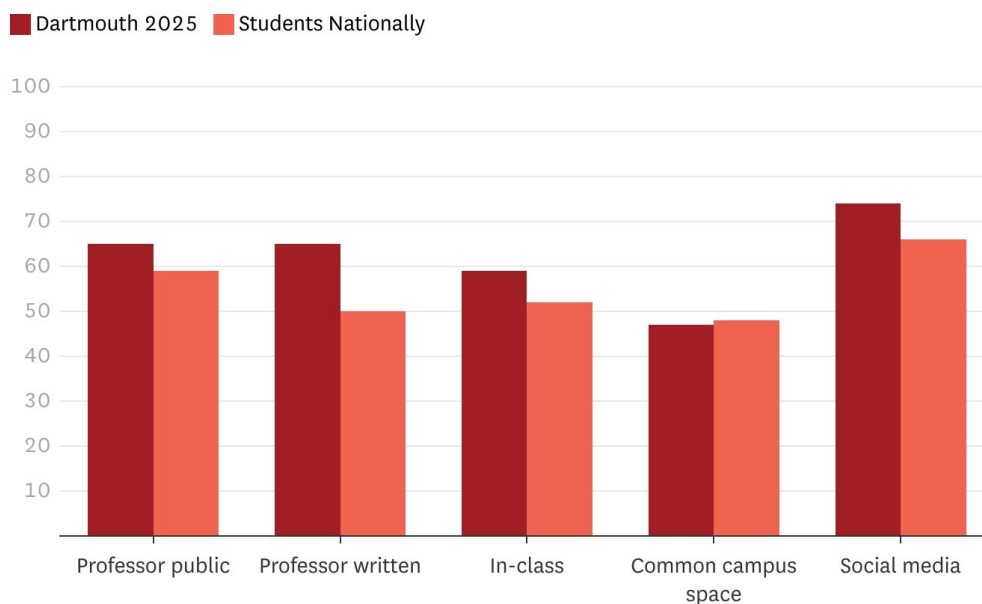


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

A ‘GREEN LIGHT’ SCHOOL WITH INSTITUTIONAL NEUTRALITY

Dartmouth College earns an overall “green light” rating for its written policies governing student expression. The institution maintains policies on internet usage, harassment, and expressive activity that do not imperil free speech of students on campus. While the college is governed by three harassment policies that earn “yellow light” ratings, these policies are not incorporated into the rating and do not impact Dartmouth’s overall green light rating. This limited exception allows a school to earn an overall green light rating if it maintains harassment policies that comply with the 2024 Title IX regulations, but deviates from FIRE’s recommended harassment standard as articulated in *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education*.

Dartmouth became the only green light school in the Ivy League after it revised two policies in September 2024. In addition, in December 2024, Dartmouth formally adopted institutional neutrality through a statement on institutional restraint.

DARTMOUTH'S SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

In 2024, Dartmouth College had two speech controversies, both involving the speech of pro-Palestinian speakers. Dartmouth was penalized for its involvement in each of these speech controversies because it did not respond in a speech-protective manner in either situation.

In one, college administrators and the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center indefinitely postponed retired obstetrician-gynecologist Alice Rothchild's lecture titled "Health and Human Rights Consequences of War on Gaza." Administrators canceled the event for "scheduling changes on [Rothchild's] East Coast tour." However, Rothchild disputed the college's explanation, saying she was available and planned to give the talk. Then, medical school faculty helped Rothchild reschedule the lecture at an off-campus location.

In the other, the college's geography department chose Nicole Nguyen, at that time a professor of criminology, law, and justice at the University of Illinois Chicago, for a tenured position in the department. The college's administration declined the appointment. Supporters worldwide accused the college of discriminating against her due to her progressive research, which includes public support for pro-Palestinian student protesters and criticism of the war on terror.

HOW CAN DARTMOUTH IMPROVE?

Dartmouth College has already done the easiest thing it can do to improve its ranking for next year's College Free Speech Rankings: reform its speech policies to earn a "green light" rating from FIRE. FIRE was pleased to work collaboratively with the Dartmouth administration on these revisions and continues to consult with the college on new and pending regulations on expression.

Since these reforms, Dartmouth has skyrocketed in the rankings and had the most improvement of any school from last year's ranking. Dartmouth has laid the groundwork, but positive cultural change takes time. We saw improvement on Dartmouth's policies and speech controversies, but student perceptions are still lagging.

The college could build on recent gains by adopting the Chicago Statement and continuing to invest in programming that encourages respectful, open debate across contentious issues. When speech controversies arise the school should take speech protective actions. The school's "Administrative Support" score ticked up a little this year, and by reinforcing policies through action students are more likely to believe the administration supports free speech.

Dartmouth's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings Scores by Component

COMPONENT	DARTMOUTH COLLEGE	NATIONAL AVERAGE	MINIMUM VALUE	MAXIMUM VALUE
Comfort Expressing Ideas	9.15	9.53	5	15
Self-Censorship	12.13	12.12	3	20
Disruptive Conduct	16.11	15.50	3	20
Administrative Support	10.88	11.32	2	20
Openness	6.98	7.19	0	10
Political Tolerance	8.35	6.44	3	15
Chicago Statement	0 (no)	-	0 (no)	3 (yes)
Institutional Neutrality	3 (yes)	-	0 (no)	3 (yes)
Spotlight Rating	5 (Green)	-	-10 (Red)	5 (Green)
Campus Deplatformings	-2	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Scholars Under Fire	-2	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Students Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Overall score	67.60	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	7	4
Not very clear	51	32
Somewhat clear	60	37
Very clear	26	16
Extremely clear	17	11

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	7	4
Not very likely	44	27
Somewhat likely	64	40
Very likely	42	26
Extremely likely	5	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	39	24
Somewhat uncomfortable	67	41
Somewhat comfortable	40	24
Very comfortable	17	11

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	31	19
Somewhat uncomfortable	74	45
Somewhat comfortable	41	25
Very comfortable	16	10

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	31	19
Somewhat uncomfortable	65	40
Somewhat comfortable	55	34
Very comfortable	12	7

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	21	13
Somewhat uncomfortable	56	34
Somewhat comfortable	59	37
Very comfortable	26	16

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	68	42
Somewhat uncomfortable	51	32
Somewhat comfortable	33	21
Very comfortable	9	6

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	5	3
Rarely	65	40
Occasionally, once or twice a month	57	35
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	30	19
Very often, nearly every day	4	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	13	8
Rarely	55	34
Occasionally, once or twice a month	50	31
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	34	21
Very often, nearly every day	10	6

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	8	5
Rarely	49	30
Occasionally, once or twice a month	65	40
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	24	15
Very often, nearly every day	16	10

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	10	6
Sometimes acceptable	39	24
Rarely acceptable	70	43
Never acceptable	42	26

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	1	1
Sometimes acceptable	25	15
Rarely acceptable	51	32
Never acceptable	85	52

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	0	0
Sometimes acceptable	16	10
Rarely acceptable	16	10
Never acceptable	129	80

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	46	28
Probably should not allow this speaker	44	27
Probably should allow this speaker	48	30
Definitely should allow this speaker	24	15

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	23	14
Probably should not allow this speaker	29	18
Probably should allow this speaker	64	40
Definitely should allow this speaker	45	28

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	42	26
Probably should not allow this speaker	54	33
Probably should allow this speaker	42	26
Definitely should allow this speaker	24	15

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	19	12
Probably should not allow this speaker	47	29
Probably should allow this speaker	57	35
Definitely should allow this speaker	39	24

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	18	11
Probably should not allow this speaker	56	35
Probably should allow this speaker	52	32
Definitely should allow this speaker	37	23

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	18	11
Probably should not allow this speaker	21	13
Probably should allow this speaker	85	52
Definitely should allow this speaker	38	24

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	95	59
Yes	67	41

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	88	54
Yes	74	46

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	147	91
Yes	15	9

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	142	87
Yes	20	13

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	149	92
Yes	13	8

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	124	76
Yes	38	24

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	124	77
Yes	38	23

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	123	76
Yes	39	24

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	122	75
Yes	40	25

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	127	79
Yes	35	21

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	111	69
Yes	51	31

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	97	60
Yes	65	40

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	43	27
Yes	119	73

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	95	59
Yes	67	41

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	112	69
Yes	50	31

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	98	61
Yes	64	39

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	113	69
Yes	49	31

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	129	80
Yes	33	20

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	128	79
Yes	34	21

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	96	59
Yes	66	41

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	140	87
Yes	22	13

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	28	17
Rarely	51	32
Occasionally, once or twice a month	51	31
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	24	15
Very often, nearly every day	9	5

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
No, but I have been threatened with discipline.	14	9
I have not been disciplined nor threatened with discipline.	148	91

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	54	33
Rarely	52	32
Occasionally, once or twice a month	30	18
Fairly often, a couple times a week	17	10
Very often, nearly every day	10	6

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	19	11
Unlikely	56	35
Neither likely or unlikely	34	21
Likely	43	27
Very likely	11	7

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	11	7
Unlikely	35	21
Neither likely or unlikely	55	34
Likely	54	34
Very likely	7	5

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
I have filed a Title IX complaint.	3	2
I both know someone who has and have myself filed a Title IX complaint.	5	3
I have not but I know someone who has filed a Title IX complaint.	64	39
I have neither filed a Title IX complaint, nor know anyone who has.”)	89	55

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
A Title IX complaint was filed against someone I know, but not me.	48	29
A Title IX complaint has never been filed against me or someone I know.”)	114	71

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	48	29
Less than once a year	21	13
Once or twice a year	23	14
Several times a year	13	8
Once a month	5	3
2-3 times a month	11	7
About weekly	6	4
Weekly	13	8
Several times a week	21	13

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	162	100

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	1	1	1
No	161	99	99

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	2	1	5
Less than half the time	18	11	47
About half the time	13	8	33
Most of the time, nearly every day	3	2	8
Always	3	2	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	8	5	26
Less than half the time	14	9	47
About half the time	7	4	23
Most of the time, nearly every day	0	0	2
Always	1	1	3

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	5	3	14
Less than half the time	10	6	30
About half the time	15	9	44
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	2	12

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	13	8	45
Less than half the time	8	5	27
About half the time	6	4	20
Most of the time, nearly every day	3	2	9

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	2	14
Less than half the time	15	10	53
About half the time	5	3	17
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	3	15
Always	0	0	2



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