

2026 College Free Speech Rankings

Fordham University

191
OVERALL
RANK

F

SPEECH
CLIMATE

YELLOW

SPOTLIGHT
RATING

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 252 Fordham University undergraduates. Key findings include:

- Fordham University ranks 191 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earned a score of 54.7, an F speech climate grade.
- Though Fordham performs worse on “Political Tolerance” and “Administrative Support,” its scores on all the survey components were lower than last year.
- Fordham ranks 233 on “Political Tolerance,” meaning its students do not believe controversial speakers should be speaking on campus.
- Fordham students did not trust their administration to defend free speech, leaving Fordham with a rank of 227 on “Administrative Support.”
- 7 in 10 Fordham students believed it’s at least rarely acceptable to shout down a speaker.
- 6 in 10 Fordham students self-censored during classroom discussions at least once or twice a month.
- 6 in 10 Fordham students were uncomfortable disagreeing publicly with a professor.
- Many Fordham students had a difficult time talking about current events.
- Fordham improved to earn a “yellow light” Spotlight rating. If Fordham kept working to improve seven speech-restrictive policies and earned a “green light” rating, it would have ranked 45.

Executive Summary	1
Student perceptions dipped across all the survey components	3
Students don't want controversial speakers on campus	3
Students don't trust their administration to protect free speech	4
7 in 10 students are okay with shouting down a speaker	4
6 in 10 students self-censor during classroom discussions	5
6 in 10 students are uncomfortable disagreeing publicly with a professor	6
Students have difficulty talking about current events	6
A 'yellow light' school	7
How can Fordham improve?	7
Topline Results	9

Fordham University ranks 191 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings. The university earns a score of 54.7, an F speech climate grade.¹ Over the last year, the university upgraded its Spotlight rating from “red light” to “yellow light.” Fordham had no speech controversies that impacted its ranking this year.

The following report highlights Fordham’s poor performance across the student survey. In addition, it discusses Fordham’s speech policies and statements and what Fordham can do to improve its free speech climate.

STUDENT PERCEPTIONS DIPPED ACROSS ALL THE SURVEY COMPONENTS

Students don’t want controversial speakers on campus

Fordham University ranks 233 on “Political Tolerance.” Students were asked whether six speakers (three liberal and three conservative) who had previously expressed controversial opinions should be allowed to give a campus speech. Majorities of students believed that each speaker asked about should not be allowed on campus (51%-86%).

FIGURE 1: Students Who Said Their School Should Not Allow Each Speaker on Campus (%)

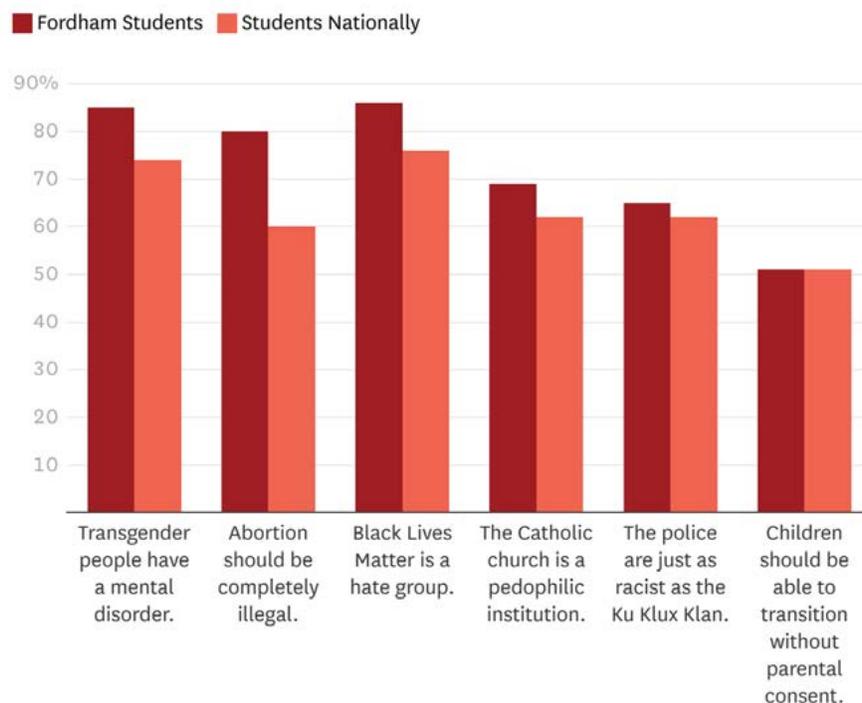


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/ College Pulse

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

Students don't trust their administration to protect free speech

Fordham University ranks 227 on “Administrative Support.” Only 26% of Fordham students said it was either “very” or “extremely” clear that the administration protects free speech on campus, compared to 36% of students nationally. Only 15% said it was either “very” or “extremely” likely that the administration would defend a speaker’s rights during a controversy, compared to 24% of students nationally.

FIGURE 2: Student Perceptions of the Administration (%)

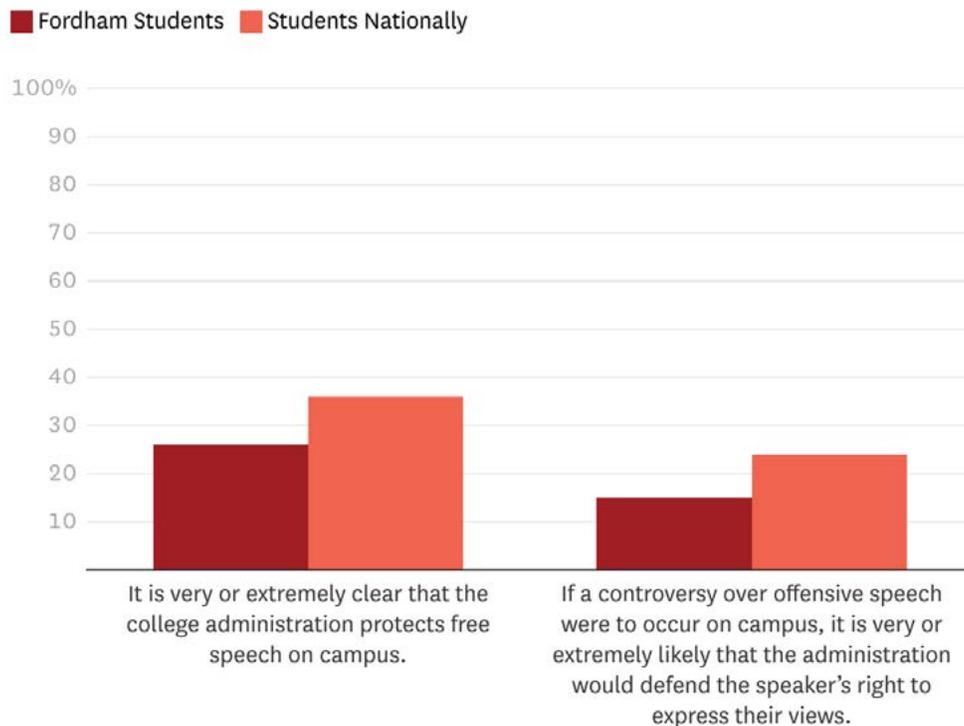


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

7 in 10 students are okay with shouting down a speaker

Fordham University ranks 184 on “Disruptive Conduct,” compared to 78 last year. When compared to students nationally (72%), more Fordham students (74%) said that it is at least “rarely” acceptable to shout down a speaker, 58% deemed blocking other students from attending a campus speech to be acceptable (54% nationally), and 36% viewed violence to stop a speech as acceptable (34% nationally).

FIGURE 3: Students Who Find Disruptive Conduct at Least Rarely Acceptable, by Year (%)

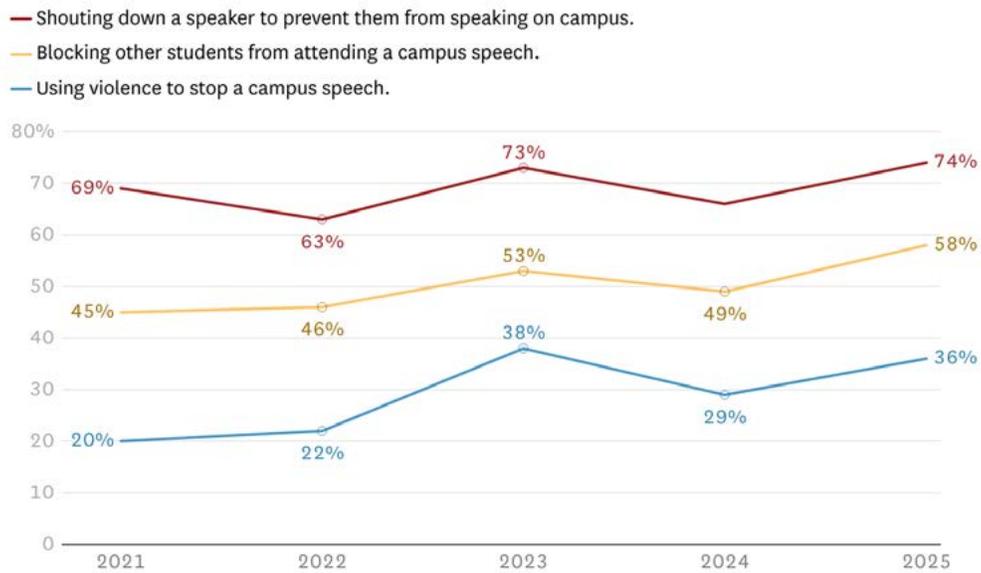


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

6 in 10 students self-censor during classroom discussions

Fordham University ranks 108 on the “Self-Censorship” component. Students were asked about the frequency with which they self-censor in three campus contexts — in the classroom, with a professor, and with other students on campus. Majorities of students self-censored at least once or twice a month in these contexts.

FIGURE 4: Fordham Students Who Self-Censor at Least Once a Month by Context (%)

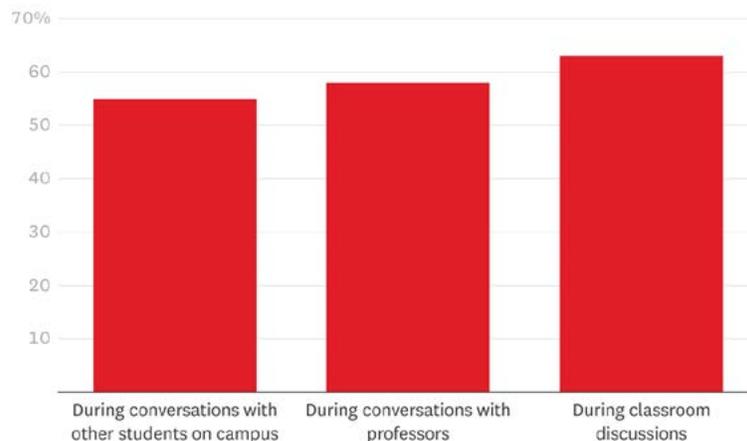


Chart: Emily Nayyer · Source: FIRE/College Pulse

6 in 10 students are uncomfortable disagreeing publicly with a professor

“During the height of the conflict in the middle-east, I felt unsafe as a Jewish student when my professor was significantly pushing for students to support Palestine. I ended up writing an anonymous email, but was too scared to confront this professor in person.”

This year Fordham University ranks 99 on “Comfort Expressing Ideas” compared to 54 last year. Majorities of Fordham students said they were either “somewhat” or “very” uncomfortable in three of the five contexts.

- 67% said they were uncomfortable expressing an unpopular political opinion to fellow students on a social media account tied to their name (in line with students nationally).
- 58% said they were uncomfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic (in line with students nationally).
- 56% said they were uncomfortable disagreeing with a professor about a controversial political topic in a written assignment (compared to 49% nationally).
- 49% said they were uncomfortable expressing views on a controversial political topic to other students in a common campus space such as a quad, dining hall, or lounge (in line with students nationally).
- 48% said they were uncomfortable expressing views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion (compared to 52% of students nationally).

Students have difficulty talking about current events

“Abortion is a sensitive topic, especially around the presidential election months and while everyone seemed to be discussing about pro abortion or pro choice, I felt that society only allowed one answer to be publicly talked about.”

Increasing rates of Fordham University students found it hard to have an open and honest conversation about current events.

- 58% found the Israeli-Palestinian conflict difficult to talk about.
- 46% found abortion difficult to talk about.
- 35% found the presidential election difficult to talk about.
- 35% found transgender rights difficult to talk about.
- 32% found immigration difficult to talk about.

A ‘YELLOW LIGHT’ SCHOOL

Fordham University earns an overall “yellow light” rating after earning a “red light” last year for its written policies governing student expression. The university maintains seven yellow light policies and five green light policies. One of the university’s harassment policies fails to meet the legal standard for peer hostile environment harassment in an educational setting, putting protected speech that does not reach that threshold at risk. In addition, students must provide two days’ notice and meet with the dean before holding a demonstration—an unnecessary administrative burden that undermines expressive rights.

The university also broadly defines bullying, opening up a wide range of protected speech to punishment. Any expression the institution wishes to prohibit under the “bullying” banner would best be categorized as hostile environmental harassment and governed under those policies.

Fordham also heavily regulates the distribution of materials. The institution’s policies on advertisements, distributing materials, and hosting outside speakers entail content and viewpoint discrimination, granting administrators broad discretion over campus speech and suppressing a wide range of protected expression. Finally, 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 FORDHAM IMPROVE?

Fordham University can improve its ranking by reforming its “yellow light” speech policies to earn a “green light” rating. If Fordham earned a green light rating this year, it would rank 45 instead of 191. In addition to improved speech policies, Fordham should adopt the Chicago Statement and make an official commitment to institutional neutrality.

Policy changes alone do not change a campus’ free speech culture. Fordham should communicate these policy changes to students in a way that emphasizes the university’s commitment to free expression and affirms that students and faculty won’t be penalized for protected speech. Such actions could improve Fordham’s poor rank on “Administrative Support” (227).

The university should also take active steps to improve campus culture. For example, Fordham could embed expressive rights training into first-year orientation so students learn what is protected expression and when expression crosses into unprotected conduct. Fordham could improve its middling rank on “Disruptive Conduct” (184) and its poor rank on “Political Tolerance” (233).

Fordham's 2026 College Free Speech Rankings Scores by Component

COMPONENT	FORDHAM UNIVERSITY	NATIONAL AVERAGE	MINIMUM VALUE	MAXIMUM VALUE
Comfort Expressing Ideas	9.62	9.53	5	15
Self-Censorship	12.21	12.12	3	20
Disruptive Conduct	15.18	15.50	3	20
Administrative Support	10.16	11.32	2	20
Openness	7.52	7.19	0	10
Political Tolerance	5.01	6.44	3	15
Chicago Statement	0 (No)	-	0	3
Institutional Neutrality	0 (No)	-	0	3
Spotlight Rating	-5 (Yellow)	-	-10 (Red)	5 (Green)
Campus Deplatformings	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Scholars Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Students Under Fire	0	-	∞ Penalties	∞ Bonuses
Overall score	54.71	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	15	6
Not very clear	64	26
Somewhat clear	107	42
Very clear	51	20
Extremely clear	14	6

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	20	8
Not very likely	79	31
Somewhat likely	116	46
Very likely	33	13
Extremely likely	4	2

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	45	18
Somewhat uncomfortable	101	40
Somewhat comfortable	85	34
Very comfortable	21	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	37	15
Somewhat uncomfortable	105	42
Somewhat comfortable	82	32
Very comfortable	29	11

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	35	14
Somewhat uncomfortable	87	34
Somewhat comfortable	109	43
Very comfortable	21	9

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	25	10
Somewhat uncomfortable	98	39
Somewhat comfortable	88	35
Very comfortable	41	16

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Very uncomfortable	61	24
Somewhat uncomfortable	108	43
Somewhat comfortable	62	25
Very comfortable	21	8

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	23	9
Rarely	91	36
Occasionally, once or twice a month	81	32
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	42	17
Very often, nearly every day	15	6

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	26	10
Rarely	81	32
Occasionally, once or twice a month	78	31
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	42	17
Very often, nearly every day	24	10

How often do you self-censor during classroom discussions?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	17	7
Rarely	76	30
Occasionally, once or twice a month	82	33
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	58	23
Very often, nearly every day	17	7

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	18	7
Sometimes acceptable	77	31
Rarely acceptable	92	36
Never acceptable	65	26

Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	3	1
Sometimes acceptable	53	21
Rarely acceptable	91	36
Never acceptable	105	42

Using violence to stop a campus speech.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Always acceptable	5	2
Sometimes acceptable	34	13
Rarely acceptable	51	20
Never acceptable	162	64

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	135	54
Probably should not allow this speaker	79	31
Probably should allow this speaker	23	9
Definitely should allow this speaker	15	6

Abortion should be completely illegal.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	87	35
Probably should not allow this speaker	113	45
Probably should allow this speaker	41	16
Definitely should allow this speaker	11	4

Black Lives Matter is a hate group.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	133	53
Probably should not allow this speaker	83	33
Probably should allow this speaker	23	9
Definitely should allow this speaker	13	5

The Catholic church is a pedophilic institution.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	86	34
Probably should not allow this speaker	86	34
Probably should allow this speaker	54	21
Definitely should allow this speaker	25	10

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	66	26
Probably should not allow this speaker	98	39
Probably should allow this speaker	69	28
Definitely should allow this speaker	18	7

Children should be able to transition without parental consent.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Definitely should not allow this speaker	43	17
Probably should not allow this speaker	85	34
Probably should allow this speaker	87	34
Definitely should allow this speaker	37	15

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	135	54
Yes	116	46

Affirmative action

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	210	84
Yes	41	16

China

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	224	89
Yes	28	11

Climate change

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	231	92
Yes	21	8

Crime

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	220	87
Yes	32	13

Economic inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	205	82
Yes	47	18

Freedom of speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	206	82
Yes	46	18

Gay rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	197	78
Yes	55	22

Gender inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	203	81
Yes	49	19

Gun control

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	194	77
Yes	57	23

Hate speech

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	199	79
Yes	52	21

Immigration

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	172	68
Yes	79	32

The Israeli/Palestinian conflict

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	107	42
Yes	145	58

The Presidential Election

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	162	65
Yes	89	35

Police misconduct

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	187	74
Yes	65	26

Racial inequality

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	191	76
Yes	61	24

Religion

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	174	69
Yes	78	31

Sexual assault

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	179	71
Yes	72	29

The Supreme Court

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	226	90
Yes	26	10

Transgender rights

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	165	65
Yes	87	35

None of the above

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	221	88
Yes	31	12

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	46	18
Rarely	107	42
Occasionally, once or twice a month	74	29
Fairly often, a couple of times a week	19	8
Very often, nearly every day	6	2

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes, I have been disciplined.	1	0
No, but I have been threatened with discipline.	31	12
I have not been disciplined nor threatened with discipline.	220	87

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	92	37
Rarely	64	25
Occasionally, once or twice a month	54	22
Fairly often, a couple times a week	26	10
Very often, nearly every day	16	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	16	6
Unlikely	63	25
Neither likely or unlikely	88	35
Likely	74	29
Very likely	11	4

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	26	10
Unlikely	53	21
Neither likely or unlikely	89	35
Likely	70	28
Very likely	13	5

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

Response	Frequency	Percent
I have filed a Title IX complaint.	6	2
I both know someone who has and have myself filed a Title IX complaint.	5	2
I have not but I know someone who has filed a Title IX complaint.	43	17
I have neither filed a Title IX complaint, nor know anyone who has.”)	198	79

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.	2	1
A Title IX complaint was filed against me and someone I know.	2	1
A Title IX complaint was filed against someone I know, but not me.	29	11
A Title IX complaint has never been filed against me or someone I know.”)	219	87

How often do you attend church or religious services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Never	83	33
Less than once a year	14	6
Once or twice a year	40	16
Several times a year	31	12
Once a month	28	11
2-3 times a month	14	6
About weekly	10	4
Weekly	25	10
Several times a week	7	3

Are you currently a member of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	6	2
No	246	98

Are you a veteran of the armed services?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Yes	4	2	2
No	248	98	98

How often would you say that you feel anxious?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	1	1	4
Less than half the time	4	2	11
About half the time	12	5	35
Most of the time, nearly every day	11	4	32
Always	6	2	17

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	6	2	10
Less than half the time	21	8	38
About half the time	24	10	44
Most of the time, nearly every day	4	2	8

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	8	3	13
Less than half the time	22	9	35
About half the time	20	8	32
Most of the time, nearly every day	13	5	20

How often would you say that you feel depressed?

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	8	3	22
Less than half the time	21	8	53
About half the time	9	4	24
Most of the time, nearly every day	0	0	1

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

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Never	4	1	6
Less than half the time	19	7	30
About half the time	23	9	38
Most of the time, nearly every day	11	4	18
Always	5	2	8



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