



2019 Survey of Campus Speech Experts

Best and Worst Schools With Respect to Speech Climate

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Controversies over free speech on college campuses are in the news seemingly every week, whether it's an unpopular guest speaker being shouted down, a voluntary student group being banned from campus, or a professor losing his job over something he said in the classroom. While most Americans consider open inquiry and academic freedom essential to the mission of a university, the debate over what can or cannot be said on campus is far from settled at most schools today.

How serious is the speech problem in higher education? Is the problem widespread or just relegated to a small group of campuses? Which colleges and universities are doing a good job of protecting speech? RealClearEducation conducted a survey of experts on the campus speech climate in order to explore these questions.



ABOUT THIS SURVEY

This survey is designed to show how schools stack up in the opinions of experts who are concerned about free speech on campus. It's a small sample of opinions and is not, to be clear, a scientific poll. If you look closely at our survey respondents, it's evident that conservatives outnumber liberals. We originally invited 70 academics, pundits, and policy experts to participate. About half were recognizably on the left end of the political spectrum. Some of them accepted. Panelists such as Jonathan Haidt, Gregory Lukianoff, and Jeffrey A. Sachs, for instance, are certainly not political conservatives.

Nevertheless, a majority of the 22 invitees who ultimately completed our survey are recognizably on the right side of the political spectrum. This imbalance is itself instructive. A recent Pew Research Center study showed that Republicans are far more likely than Democrats to be worried about professors bringing their political and social views into the classroom (79% to 17%). Republicans are also far more likely than Democrats to believe that colleges are too concerned with protecting students from views they might find offensive (75% to 31%). The greater number of conservatives who agreed to participate in our panel reflects the greater concern conservatives have about campus speech. There are several identifiable libertarians on our panel as well.

There is an obvious reason for the special concern about the campus speech climate among conservatives. They are often outnumbered and underrepresented among the faculty and administration, particularly at elite schools. However, political liberals are increasingly raising concerns about censure on campus as well. On the other hand, there are those who say the entire notion of a campus speech crisis is overblown.

To gain more insight into this issue, we asked our panelists for their opinions on which U.S. colleges and universities have the best climate for free speech, viewpoint diversity, and open inquiry. We also asked them to tell us which schools they think have the most room for improvement in these areas. Finally, we asked panelists to share their thoughts on how free speech, viewpoint diversity, and open inquiry relate to the proper mission of a university.



WHAT WE ASKED OUR PANELISTS

- 1 Which U.S. colleges or universities serve as positive role models in the areas of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and open inquiry?
- 2 Which U.S. colleges or universities have the most need for improvement in the areas of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and open inquiry?
- 3 How do you believe free speech and open inquiry relate to the proper mission of a university? Or, how has viewpoint diversity (or lack thereof) impacted your own education or career?

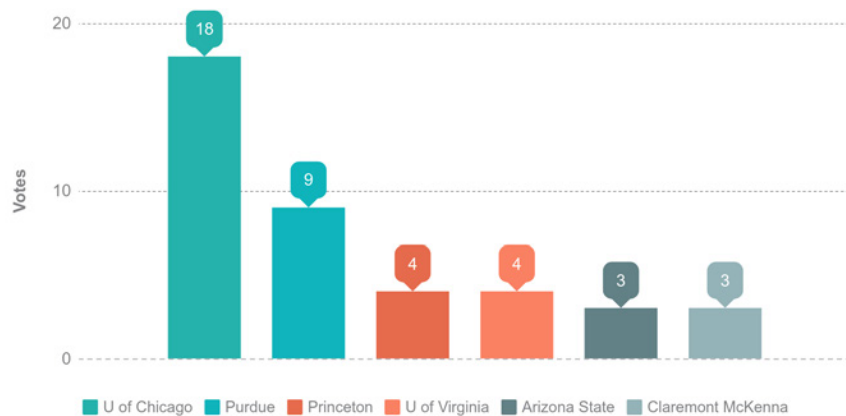
OVERVIEW OF RESULTS



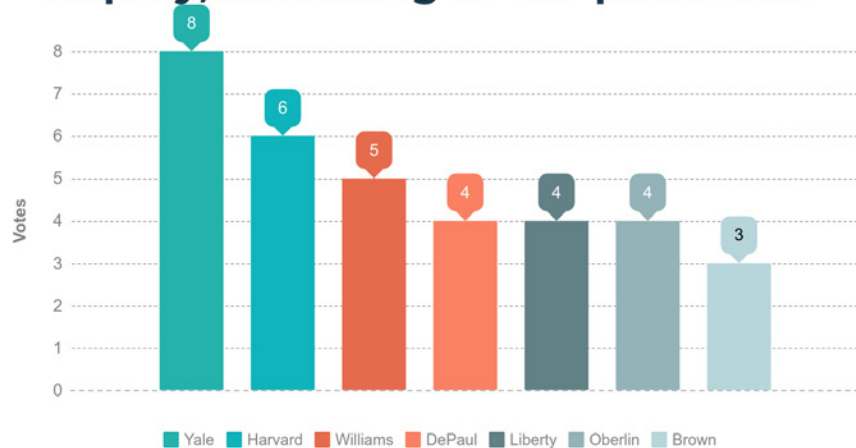
The University of Chicago

Our survey produced an indisputable victor. By proactively encouraging a climate of open inquiry, leaders at the University of Chicago have established their institution as a leader in the area of academic freedom, according to our panelists.

According to our panelists, these are the top six schools in the U.S. in the areas of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and open inquiry.



On the other hand, these seven schools have the most need for improvement in the areas of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and open inquiry, according to our panelists.



BEST SCHOOLS FOR CAMPUS SPEECH

We conducted the survey in September 2019. Panelists were asked to name up to five schools that serve as positive role models in the areas of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and open inquiry.

- **The University of Chicago** was the clear winner for best speech climate, according to our survey. With its famous “Chicago Statement” guaranteeing students and faculty broad latitude for speech and strong protection of academic freedom, the vast majority of our panelists chose the University of Chicago as one of their top five picks.
- Next were **Purdue University**, **Princeton University**, the **University of Virginia**, **Arizona State University**, and **Claremont McKenna College**. These schools stood out to our panelists as positive role models with respect to campus speech climate.

Which U.S. colleges or universities serve as positive role models in the areas of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and open inquiry?

● RealClear surveyed twenty-two experts. Each panelist could select up to five schools.



SCHOOLS THAT NEED IMPROVEMENT

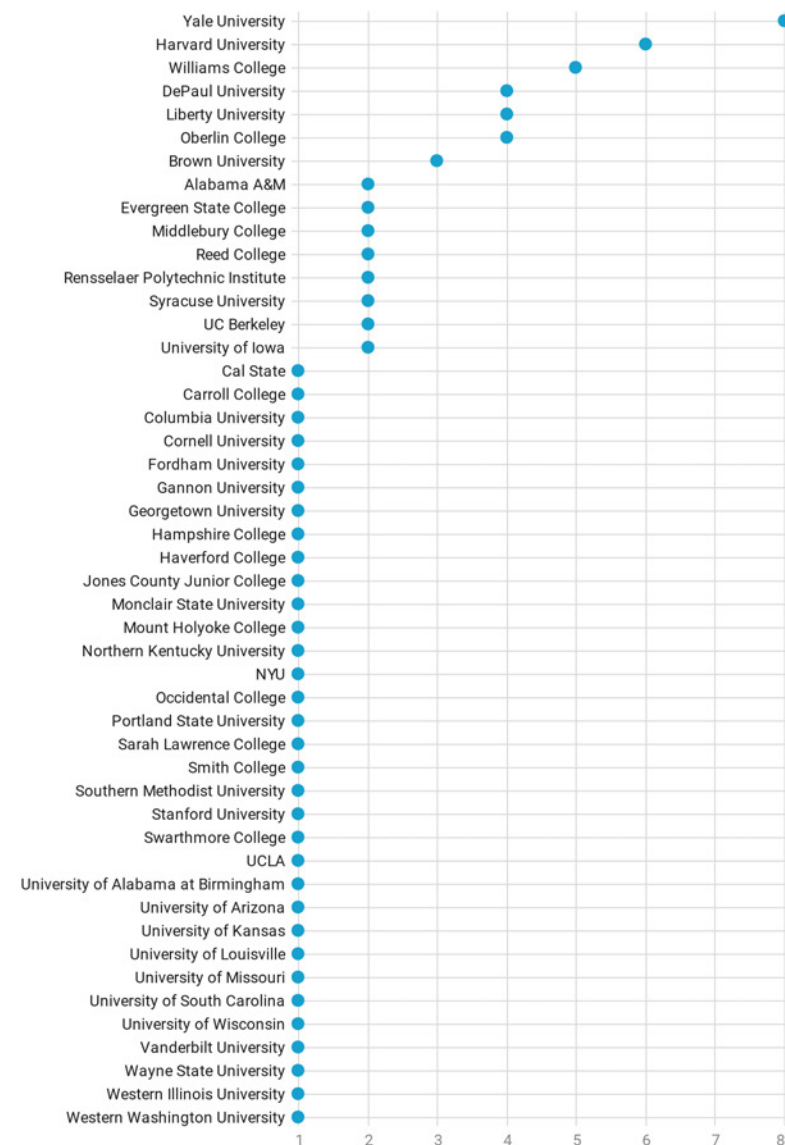
Panelists were also asked to name up to five schools that have the most need for improvement in the areas of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and open inquiry.

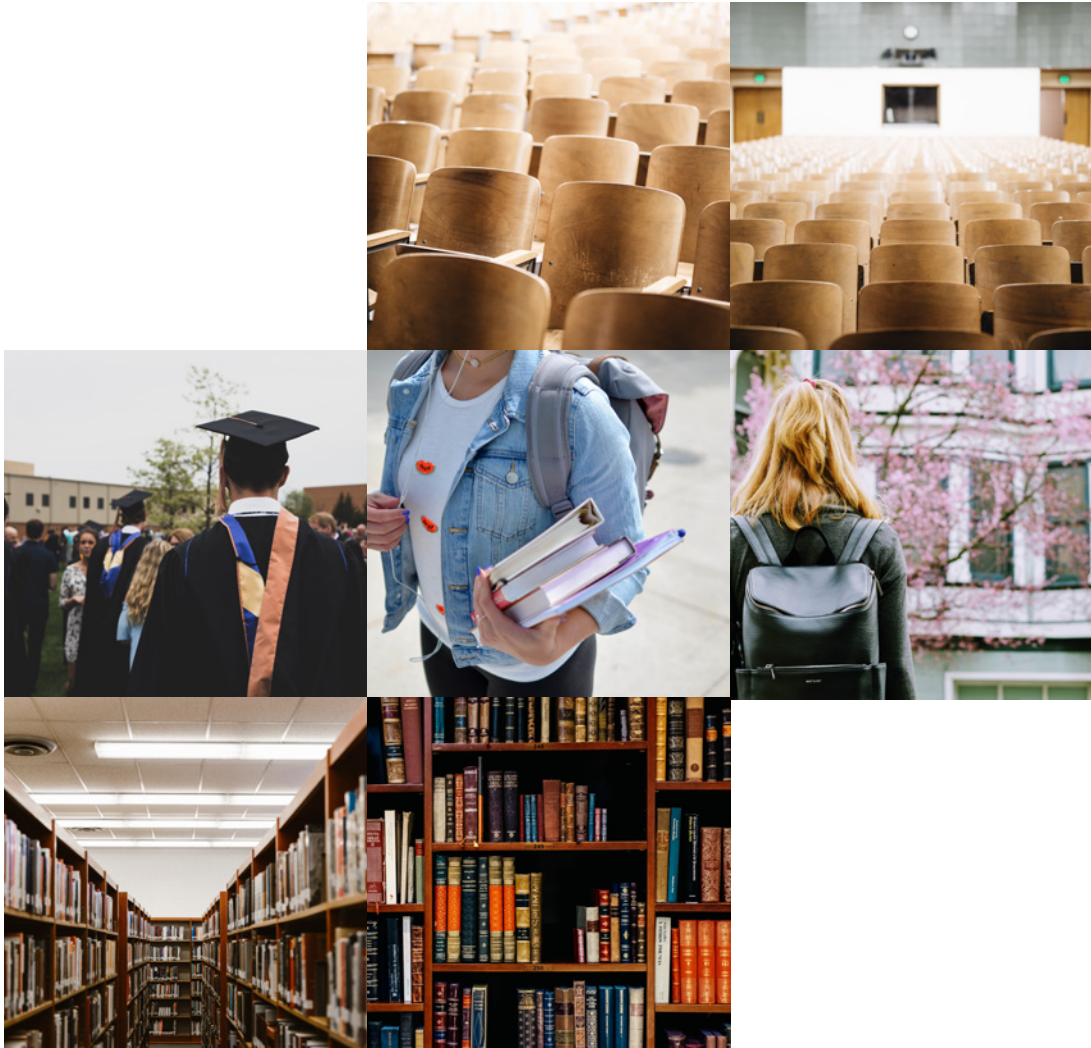
• **Yale University** was the one most frequently identified by our panelists. High-profile controversies related to free speech and academic freedom, including the ouster of a professor from his position as a college master, the contentious renaming of a residential building, and the removal or destruction of controversial artwork on campus likely contributed to Yale's troubled reputation among our respondents.

• Yale was followed by **Harvard University**, **Williams College**, **Oberlin College**, **Liberty University**, **DePaul University**, and **Brown University** among schools identified most often by our panelists as in need of improvement with respect to campus speech climate.

Which U.S. colleges or universities have the most need for improvement in the areas of free speech, viewpoint diversity, and open inquiry?

● RealClear surveyed twenty-two experts. Each panelist could select up to five schools.





ANALYSIS OF SURVEY RESULTS

Our panelists include professors, journalists, lawyers, and scholars who work in the areas of higher education or First Amendment law and policy. They come from a wide range of educational and ideological backgrounds. Nevertheless, our results show some consensus. For instance, there is no question that the University of Chicago is seen as a leader in the area of free speech on campus. In this survey, we wanted to focus attention on those schools that are getting it right, not just those that are getting it wrong.

However, our survey also reveals some disagreement as to which schools are doing a good job or a poor job of protecting speech. The University of California, Berkeley, for instance, received an equal number of negative and positive votes — perhaps revealing competing conceptions about what actually constitutes a good speech climate. Thus, our survey shows that views of a school's campus speech climate can be subjective, based on one's ideology and background.

It is hard to draw much of a conclusion about any school that received merely one or two votes in either the "role model" or "needs improvement" category. For those schools that received a larger share of votes, it's likely that they have gained something of a reputation — either positive or negative — among those who are concerned about the campus speech climate. Our goal was simply to provide a qualitative look at the reputations of schools in the eyes of our panelists, who spend a lot of time working in or thinking about these institutions.

OUR PANEL OF CAMPUS SPEECH EXPERTS



Jonathan Haidt – professor, New York University
Gregory Lukianoff – president, Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE)
Charles Murray – scholar, American Enterprise Institute
Debra Mashek – executive director, Heterodox Academy
Robert P. George – professor, Princeton University
Heather Mac Donald – fellow, Manhattan Institute
Jeffrey A. Sachs – lecturer, Acadia University
Robert Shibley – executive director, FIRE
Robby Soave – associate editor, Reason
Jennifer Kabbany – editor, The College Fix
Nicholas Quinn Rosenkranz – professor, Georgetown Law
Kim Colby – attorney, Christian Legal Society
Jennifer L. Lambe – associate professor, University of Delaware
Tyson Langhofer – director, Center for Academic Freedom at the Alliance Defending Freedom
Cliff Maloney – president, Young Americans for Liberty
Geoffrey R. Stone – professor, University of Chicago School of Law
John J. Miller – director, Dow Journalism program at Hillsdale College
Wolf von Laer – CEO, Students for Liberty
Matt Lamb – national director, Students for Life
Nicole Neily – president, Speech First
Kassy Dillon – CEO, Modern Media Strategies
Robert Corn-Revere – adjunct scholar, Cato Institute

WHY IS THE CAMPUS SPEECH CLIMATE IMPORTANT?

We gave our respondents the opportunity to explain, in more detail and in their own words, why they think the speech climate on campus is important. We asked them to choose between the following two prompts: How do you believe free speech and open inquiry relate to the proper mission of a university? Or, how has viewpoint diversity (or lack thereof) impacted your own education or career? Here are their responses:

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As a professor, I no longer take risks; I must teach to the most easily offended student in the class. I therefore avoid saying or doing anything provocative. My classes are less fun and engaging.

- Jonathan Haidt

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Jonathan Haidt – professor, NYU

“Because of a lack of viewpoint diversity, policies are implemented to promote ends that are sometimes antithetical to free inquiry and the Socratic spirit. For example, at my university we have a ‘bias response line.’ Students are encouraged to anonymously report anyone who says anything that offends them. So, as a professor, I no longer take risks; I must teach to the most easily offended student in the class. I therefore avoid saying or doing anything provocative. My classes are less fun and engaging.”

Gregory Lukianoff – president, FIRE

“Perhaps the most profound way a lack of viewpoint diversity harms campus free speech is that now decades of college students have come to see the First Amendment and/or freedom of speech primarily as that excuse used by people in power to not have to punish the insensitive, wrongheaded, or offensive. Whereas in a democracy the majority gets to make the rules, and protections of free speech exist almost exclusively to protect the rights of minorities, students’ views have been entirely reversed. Campus activists have come to think of power as something that can be counted on to be on their side, so they want campus administrators to be free to stop speech they see as harmful or hurtful. This is how you end up with campus activists believing that free speech is something that exists to protect the powerful. They, somewhat irrationally, still see themselves as the underdog, but power is overwhelmingly on their side and therefore they do not see how a lack of free speech would harm them if they were genuinely a disfavored minority on or off campus.”

Charles Murray – scholar, AEI

“The telos of the university is truth. It cannot have a second telos. There is no such thing as a university that fully supports the search for truth and also pursues a social-justice agenda, for example — or, for that matter, also pursues a limited-government agenda.”

Debra Mashek – executive director, Heterodox Academy

“The university exists to create and disseminate knowledge. Those core functions can’t be realized if people are unable to ask questions, to share ideas, or to interrogate all claims.”

Robert P. George – professor, Princeton University

“Freedom of thought and speech are the oxygen of the life of the mind.”

Robby Soave – associate editor, Reason

“Students and professors must be free to question long-held truths, and to risk provoking and offending the adherents of those truths, for the university to function.”

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The reality is that we can neither teach nor learn in a space where 'anything goes,' making it essential that we strike a balance between free speech and inclusion.

- Jeffrey A. Sachs

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Heather Mac Donald – fellow, The Manhattan Institute

“The core mission of a university is to pass on our cultural inheritance from one generation to the next. There is a vast body of knowledge — of history, literature, art, the foundations of science, and the constitutional traditions that have lessened the threat of arbitrary, tyrannical power — that students lack and that universities should feel an urgent necessity to provide. Free speech and open inquiry can aid in that mission by allowing received errors about the past and present to be corrected. But to put free speech and open inquiry at the heart of a university's mission risks distracting attention away from the fact that students are graduating from college with their ignorance largely intact, and risks portraying the university as a debating society rather than the place where the past is curated and preserved.”

Jeffrey A. Sachs – lecturer, Acadia University

“Free speech is rightly viewed as essential to university life, but free speech alone is not enough. The reality is that we can neither teach nor learn in a space where ‘anything goes,’ making it essential that we strike a balance between free speech and inclusion. Colleges and universities have made enormous strides in just the last few years and we should not be afraid to acknowledge their accomplishments.”

Jennifer Kabbany – editor, The College Fix

“When students, and even many professors, are afraid to voice their unpopular opinions for fear that they will be attacked by a mob of social justice warriors or ostracized by their peers, then it is no longer a place of higher education, or academic inquiry, or stimulating debate — it is an Orwellian dead zone. Far too many scholars have abdicated their professional responsibility to teach the whole subject in favor of providing their narrow and biased narrative.”

Kim Colby – attorney, Christian Legal Society

“For nearly four decades, I have worked to keep religious student groups on college campuses in red, blue, and purple states. I never would have believed how entrenched hostility to religious student groups would be among college administrators. Religious students and their groups are a positive campus presence who should be welcomed by college administrators but instead are often threatened with exclusion from campus precisely because of their specific religious beliefs and speech. Such opposition makes no sense because religious student groups enhance both religious and ideological diversity on campus.”

Jennifer L. Lambe – associate professor, University of Delaware

“It is imperative for Universities to prepare students to interact with a diverse range of ideas and thoughts. Learning to have civil dialogue about contentious subjects with people who have different viewpoints is desperately needed. The human tendency to view the world as ‘us’ and ‘them’ is being heightened in our current media environment. As educators, we must engage students to consider why it is important to protect freedom of expression, perhaps especially for ideas we find deeply offensive. We must also make clear that freedom of speech and press mean that the government cannot easily restrict one's expression, but it does not mean that you are absolved of consequences and criticism of that expression.”

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As educators, we must engage students to consider why it is important to protect freedom of expression, perhaps especially for ideas we find deeply offensive.

- Jennifer L. Lambe

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Tyson Langhofer – director, Center for Academic Freedom at the Alliance Defending Freedom

“Humans are predisposed to be biased towards ideas that they find attractive, rather than relying solely upon hard facts. When an academic environment is intellectually uniform, important ideas or theories remain unexplored and widely held assumptions go unchallenged. In such an environment, research and studies can be corrupted or suppressed for the benefit of certain special interests. This in turn suppresses innovation, solvable problems remain unsolved, and intellectual growth is restricted. Most tragically, important truths remain unknown.”

Cliff Maloney – president, Young Americans for Liberty

“The fundamental purpose of higher education is to maximize the potential of those who will soon take their first steps into the outside world, carrying what they’ve learned in the classroom and applying it to the advancement of society. This growth simply cannot take place, however, if students are routinely barred from hearing ideas to which they have yet to be exposed.”

Geoffrey R. Stone – professor, University of Chicago School of Law

“Free speech and open inquiry are essential to the mission of a university. The goal of a university is to seek the truth. The only way to do that is to encourage a wide diversity of views and to allow them to be tested critically and openly.”

John J. Miller – director, Dow Journalism program at Hillsdale College

“When I think about free speech and open inquiry on campus, I think of a line written by John Milton long ago: ‘Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the making.’”

Wolf von Laer – CEO, Students for Liberty

“One needs to be uncomfortable in order to grow. Universities need to be a place of respectful conversation that sometimes can be provocative. Progress can only come from challenging the status quo. This can only come about when people think and act differently than others. Free speech and peaceful — even if heated — exchanges are the foundation for this.”

Matt Lamb – national director, Students for Life

“There is no point in having a university if you are not going to encourage students to debate issues and learn more about opposing viewpoints. I believe that the issues we see today with polarization and heated rhetoric in politics as well as the issues we have as a broader society discussing important issues is linked to the way students are treated by universities.”

Nicole Neily – president, Speech First

“Universities were created with the goal of pursuing truth, wherever that may lie. Unfortunately, by restricting and discouraging certain viewpoints, opinions, and ideas, they have hobbled themselves in this mission — and in turn, undermined their own legitimacy.”



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