

Northwestern University

Evanston, IL • Private School



The most comprehensive guide to free speech on campus — anywhere

Because a true university education requires freedom of expression.

The College Free Speech Rankings are based on student surveys, campus policies, and recent speech-related controversies.

OVERALL RANK

120 ▲

/257

▲ 118 FROM 2024

GRADE

F

— F FROM 2024

SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

2

— 2 FROM 2025

Overview

Northwestern University ranks 120 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings with a score of 58, climbing 118 places and 9 points from last year. The rise largely reflects productive policy reforms: the school improved from a “red light” to a “yellow light” Spotlight rating and formally adopted both the Chicago Statement and a statement on institutional neutrality. These gains came despite a 4-point penalty tied to canceling the student musical “Assassins” and pressuring the group Jewish Voice for Peace to alter its constitution.

Student perceptions place Northwestern in the top 25 for avoiding “Self-Censorship” and in the top 50 for “Openness” to controversial conversations. Yet the university ranks in the bottom 50 for “Comfort Expressing Ideas” and for perceived “Administrative Support,” indicating lingering doubts about how officials handle contentious speech.

Northwestern could further strengthen its climate by revising its remaining restrictive speech policies to earn a “green light” Spotlight rating.

If you are a school administrator and would like to discuss your rating, reach out to speechcodes@thefire.org.

Visit our website: <https://rankings.thefire.org/> for more information.

Spotlight Rating

Yellow



FIRE’s Spotlight database annually rates regulations on student expression based on the extent to which they restrict free speech.

HIGHLIGHTS



41% of students say they have self-censored on campus at least once or twice a month.



72% of students say shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.



31% of students say using violence to stop someone from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.

4.51:1

There are roughly 4.51 liberal students for every one conservative student.

Institutional Neutrality

ADOPTED



Chicago Statement for Free Speech

ADOPTED



SCORE DEEP DIVE

COMFORT EXPRESSING IDEAS

D-

▲ INCREASE

DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT

C+

▲ INCREASE

OPENNESS

C

▼ DECREASE

SELF-CENSORSHIP

D

▲ INCREASE

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

F

▼ DECREASE

POLITICAL TOLERANCE

F

▲ INCREASE

SCHOLARS UNDER FIRE

0

STUDENTS UNDER FIRE

1

DEPLATFORMINGS

1