

Washington and Lee University

Lexington, VA • 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

55 ▼
/257

▼ -22 FROM 2024

GRADE

D

— D FROM 2024

SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

1

0 FROM 2025

Overview

Washington and Lee University ranks 55 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings with a score of 63 and a D speech climate grade. The school earns a “yellow light” Spotlight rating but has adopted the Chicago Statement, earning a modest policy bonus.

Student perceptions place W&L in the top 25 on “Disruptive Conduct,” indicating broad rejection of shout-downs and similar tactics compared to other schools. The university places in the top 50 for both “Political Tolerance” toward controversial speakers and perceived “Administrative Support” for free expression.

W&L could make meaningful gains by revising its speech codes to secure a “green light” Spotlight rating and by adopting an official commitment to institutional neutrality.

Spotlight Rating

Yellow 

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

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.

HIGHLIGHTS



47% of students say they have self-censored on campus at least once or twice a month.



68% of students say shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.



24% of students say using violence to stop someone from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.

1.28:1

There are roughly 1.28 liberal students for every one conservative student.

Institutional Neutrality

NOT ADOPTED



Chicago Statement for Free Speech

ADOPTED



SCORE DEEP DIVE

COMFORT EXPRESSING IDEAS

D

▼ DECREASE

DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT

B-

▼ DECREASE

OPENNESS

C

▲ INCREASE

SELF-CENSORSHIP

D-

▼ DECREASE

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

D-

▼ DECREASE

POLITICAL TOLERANCE

F

▼ DECREASE

SCHOLARS UNDER FIRE

0

STUDENTS UNDER FIRE

0

DEPLATFORMINGS

1