

University of Wisconsin - Madison

Madison, WI • Public 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

101 ▲

/257

▲ 126 FROM 2024

GRADE

F

— F FROM 2024

SPEECH CONTROVERSIES

4

1 FROM 2025

Overview

The University of Wisconsin–Madison ranks 101 out of 257 schools in the 2026 College Free Speech Rankings with a score of 59 and an F speech climate grade. The University of Wisconsin System adopted a statement on institutional neutrality – earning the Madison campus a bonus that helped offset penalties from an attempted disruption of Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield’s talk.

Policy gains aside; students report serious problems. Wisconsin places in the bottom 25 nationally for “Comfort Expressing Ideas,” and no area lands in the top 50, underscoring a campus climate where many students hesitate to share controversial views while a vocal minority remains willing to interrupt speakers.

Wisconsin could make meaningful progress by revising its written policies to move from a “yellow light” Spotlight rating to green and by reinforcing clear consequences for disrupting campus events.

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



40% of students say they have self-censored on campus at least once or twice a month.



76% of students say shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.



35% of students say using violence to stop someone from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.

2.18:1

There are roughly 2.18 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+

▼ DECREASE

OPENNESS

C-

▲ INCREASE

SELF-CENSORSHIP

D-

▲ INCREASE

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

D-

▲ INCREASE

POLITICAL TOLERANCE

F

▼ DECREASE

SCHOLARS UNDER FIRE

0

STUDENTS UNDER FIRE

1

DEPLATFORMINGS

3