

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

90 ▲

/261

▲ 30 FROM 2025

GRADE

D

▲ D- FROM 2025

CONTROVERSIES

1

0 FROM 2026

Overview

Northwestern University ranks 90 out of 261 schools in the 2027 College Free Speech Rankings with a score of 63 and a D speech climate grade, rising 30 places from last year.

It ranks in the top 50 for “Self-Censorship,” meaning students report less hesitancy to speak. However, Northwestern lands in the bottom 25 for “Comfort Expressing Ideas,” indicating students feel constrained sharing views on controversial topics, and in the bottom 50 for “Administrative Support,” showing poor student trust that officials will defend speech.

The university has adopted the pro-free speech Chicago Statement and institutional neutrality, but retains a “yellow light” Spotlight rating. It should revise student policies to earn a “green light” Spotlight rating. Given its weak showing on “Administrative Support,” administrators should respond clearly and forcefully to defend free speech whenever censorship occurs or is demanded.

[View the Full Spotlight Rating](#)

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

Visit our website, rankings.fire.org, for more information.

Spotlight Rating

Yellow

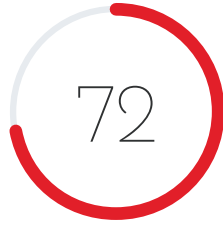


FIRE’s Spotlight database annually rates regulations on student expression based on the extent to which they restrict free speech.

HIGHLIGHTS



46% 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.



28% of students say using violence to stop someone from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.

9.46 : 1

There are roughly 9.46 liberal students for every one conservative student.

Institutional Neutrality

ADOPTED



Chicago Statement for Free Speech

ADOPTED



SCORE DEEP DIVE

COMFORT EXPRESSING IDEAS

D -

— NO CHANGE

DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT

B -

▲ INCREASE

OPENNESS

C +

— NO CHANGE

SELF-CENSORSHIP

D

— NO CHANGE

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT

F

▲ INCREASE

POLITICAL TOLERANCE

F

— NO CHANGE

SCHOLARS UNDER FIRE

0

STUDENTS UNDER FIRE

0

DEPLATFORMINGS

1