The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Knoxville, TN • Public School

College Free Speech RANKINGS

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

47 ▼

/261

▼ -11 FROM 2025

GRADE

D+

D+ FROM 2025

CONTROVERSIES

1

0 FROM 2026

Overview

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville, ranks 47 out of 261 schools in the 2027 College Free Speech Rankings with a score of 67 and a D+ speech climate grade. The school maintains a "green light" Spotlight rating.

The campus ranks in the top 50 for "Political Tolerance," jumping 100 places from last year and showing comparatively greater student willingness to host speakers across the ideological spectrum. However, it lands in the bottom 25 for "Openness," meaning many contentious topics feel off-limits to students.

UT Knoxville should adopt the pro-free speech Chicago Statement and an official commitment to institutional neutrality. It should respond clearly and forcefully to defend free speech whenever censorship occurs or is demanded. Doing so will demonstrate the university's commitment to free speech and build community trust that the administration will defend expressive rights.

Spotlight Rating

Green

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

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.

HIGHLIGHTS



49% of students say they have self-censored on campus at least once or twice a month.



71% of students say shouting down a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.



29% of students say using violence to stop someone from speaking on campus is acceptable, at least in rare cases.

1.08 : 1

There are roughly 1.08 liberal students for every one conservative student.

Institutional Neutrality

NOT ADOPTED



Chicago Statement for Free Speech

NOT ADOPTED



SCORE DEEP DIVE

COMFORT EXPRESSING IDEAS
D
▲ INCREASE

DISRUPTIVE CONDUCT
C+
▲ INCREASE

OPENNESS
D
▼ DECREASE

SELF-CENSORSHIP
D–
▲ INCREASE

ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT
D–
▼ DECREASE

POLITICAL TOLERANCE
F
▲ INCREASE

SCHOLARS UNDER FIRE
1

STUDENTS UNDER FIRE
0

DEPLATFORMINGS
0