CAMPUS EXPERIENCE SURVEY

An Assessment of Pennsylvania State University Students

OCTOBER 2024

AN ACTA/COLLEGE PULSE REPORT







About Us

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AMERICAN COUNCIL OF TRUSTEES AND ALUMNI (ACTA)

The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (ACTA) is an independent, nonprofit organization committed to academic freedom, academic excellence, and accountability at America's colleges and universities. Founded in 1995, ACTA works with alumni, donors, trustees, and education leaders across the country to support the study of the liberal arts, uphold high academic standards, safeguard the free exchange of ideas on campus, and ensure that the next generation receives an intellectually rich, high-quality education at an affordable price.

Our network consists of alumni and trustees from over 1,300 colleges and universities, including over 23,000 current board members. Our quarterly newsletter, *Inside Academe*, reaches over 15,000 readers.

For more information, visit <u>GoACTA.org</u>.

COLLEGE PULSE

College Pulse is a survey research and analytics company dedicated to understanding the attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of today's college students. College Pulse offers custom data-driven marketing and research solutions, utilizing its unique American College Student Panel[™] that includes over 850,000 college students and recent alumni from more than 1,500 two- and four-year colleges and universities in all 50 states.

For more information, visit <u>collegepulse.com</u> or College Pulse's official X account @<u>CollegeInsights</u>.

Methodology

This survey was designed and conducted by College Pulse between May 15, 2024, and August 15, 2024. Surveys were completed by a sample of 2,032 Penn State undergraduate students.

The sample was drawn from College Pulse's American College Student Panel[™] that includes over 850,000 verified students representing more than 1,500 different colleges and universities in all 50 states. Panel members are recruited by a number of methods to help ensure diversity in the panel population, including web advertising, permission-based email campaigns, and partnerships with university organizations. To reduce the effects of any non-response bias, a post-stratification adjustment was applied based on demographic distributions of the undergraduate, derived from the 2017 Current Population Survey (CPS), the 2016 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS), and the 2019–20 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The post-stratification weight rebalanced the sample based on the following benchmarks: gender, race and ethnicity, voter registration, financial aid status, and class year. The sample weighting was accomplished using an iterative proportional fitting (IFP) process that simultaneously balances the distributions of all variables. The frequencies presented in this report, including the gender and political breakdown, are weighted counts to accurately represent the demographic and political composition of the undergraduate population.

The margin of error for this survey ranges from +/- 2–3 percentage points. Margins of error are typically calculated on probability-based samples and are not technically correct for non-probability online samples. We supply them here to provide a general assessment of error ranges that may be associated with the data.

For more information about our methodology, <u>click here</u> or contact methodology@collegepulse.com.

Highlights

A majority of students are uncomfortable publicly disagreeing with professors on controversial topics.

• More than half (56%) of students would feel uncomfortable publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial topic.

• Liberals (55%), moderates (55%) and conservatives (58%) are equally likely to feel uncomfortable in this instance. (See breakdown)

Overall	Political Ideology	Year
60%		

40%







Q4.1_1 On the following scale, how comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? Publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial topic.

Nearly half of students would be uncomfortable sharing views on controversial political topics during an in-class discussion.

• Almost half (47%) of students would feel uncomfortable expressing their views on a controversial topic during an in-class discussion.

• Conservative students (56%) are more likely than liberal students (37%) to feel uncomfortable in this instance. (See breakdown)

• The class of 2027 is the least likely class to feel very uncomfortable expressing their views on a controversial topic during a discussion.









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Q4.1_3 On the following scale, how comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? Expressing your views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion.



Thirty-nine percent of students feel uncomfortable sharing views on controversial political topics in common campus spaces.

- Nearly four in ten (39%) students would feel uncomfortable expressing their views on a controversial political topic to other students during a discussion in a common space such as a quad, dining hall, or lounge.
- Conservative students (47%) are more likely than liberal students (29%) to feel uncomfortable in this instance.



All Students (n=2,023)

Q4.1_4 On the following scale, how comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? Expressing your views on a controversial political topic to other students 7 during a discussion in a common campus space such as a quad, dining hall, or lounge.



A majority of students are hesitant to express unpopular opinions online.

- More than half (56%) of students would feel uncomfortable expressing an unpopular opinion on social media.
- Liberal students (52%) are less likely than conservative students (61%) to feel uncomfortable in this instance.
- The class of 2027 is the least likely class to feel very uncomfortable expressing an unpopular opinion on a personal social media account.



40%





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Q4.1_5 On the following scale, how comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? Expressing an unpopular opinion to your fellow students on a social media account tied to your name.



Two-thirds of students censor themselves due to the political climate.

- Just over two-thirds (67%) of students believe the political climate prevents them from saying what they believe because others may find it offensive.
- Conservative students (78%) are more likely than liberal students (58%) to agree that the political climate prevents them from speaking freely. (See breakdown)



Ten percent of students feel they cannot express their opinions because of how others may respond.

- One in ten (10%) students say they very often feel they cannot express their opinion on a subject because of how others may respond.
- Conservative students (17%) are much more likely than liberal students (6%) to say they very often feel they cannot express their views because of how others may respond. (See breakdown)



40%

would respond?







Seventy-one percent of students feel their opinions are not welcome.

- Almost three-quarters (71%) of students have not spoken up on campus before because they thought their opinion would be unwelcome.
- Almost four in ten (39%) students report not speaking up once a month or more.
- Conservative students are more likely than liberal students not to speak up on campus.

Overall	Political Ideology	Year
60%		

40%





Q4.5 How often have you not spoken up on campus because you thought your opinion would be unwelcome?

Fear of classmates' reactions deters 60% of students from speaking up.

- When students do not speak up, they are primarily concerned about the response of classmates (60%), professors (56%), and the student community (53%). Students are less concerned about residence life staff (13%), close friends (33%), and university administration (38%).
- Conservative students are more likely than liberal students to be concerned about professors, classmates, the student community, and university administration. Liberal students are more likely than conservative students to be concerned about close friends. (See breakdown)



Almost all students report a lack of campus training on free expression policies.

- Most students (86%) have not received training from staff or faculty on free expression policies.
- Liberal students (19%) are almost twice as likely as conservative students (11%) to have received training on free expression policies. (See breakdown)



Q4.8 Have you received training from staff or faculty at your college on free , expression policies?

TRUSTEES AND ALUMN

Conservative students are significantly more likely than liberal students to support viewpoint diversity.

• Conservative students (82%) are significantly more likely than liberal students (53%) to say it is more important for colleges to expose students to all types of viewpoints, even if they are offensive or biased against certain groups, than to prohibit offensive speech that is biased against certain groups. (See breakdown)



Liberal students are significantly more likely than conservative students to favor reporting offensive professors.

- Liberal students (72%) are more likely than conservative students (42%) to say professors should be reported to the university if they say something that students find offensive. (See breakdown)
- Upperclassmen are more likely than underclassmen to believe professors should be reported if they say something that students find offensive.



Only 28% of students believe silencing speakers is never acceptable.

- Less than one-third (28%) of students believe it is never acceptable to shout down speakers or try to prevent them from speaking.
- Conservative students (38%) are more than twice as likely as liberal students (17%) to say it is never acceptable to shout down speakers or try to prevent them from speaking. (See breakdown)





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Q4.15_1 How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker: Shouting down a speaker or trying to prevent them from speaking on campus.



Only 71% of students reject violence as a means to silence campus speakers.

- Less than three-quarters (71%) of students say using violence to stop a campus speech is never acceptable.
- Almost one-third (29%) of students think violence is acceptable on at least rare occasions.



Two-thirds of students support consequences for interrupting speakers.

- Almost two-thirds (61%) of students agree that other students should face disciplinary consequences for disrupting speakers with whom they disagree.
- Conservative students (70%) are more likely than liberal students (53%) to agree that other students should face disciplinary consequences for disrupting speakers with whom they disagree. (See breakdown)



All Students (n=2,023)

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Q4.17 Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Students should face disciplinary consequences for disrupting speakers with whom they disagree

Eighty-nine percent of students worry about damaging their reputations.

• Only one in ten (11%) students are not at all worried about their reputation being damaged if others misunderstand something they have said or done.



TRUSTEES AND ALUMN

Q4.22 How worried are you about damaging your reputation because someone 19 misunderstands something you have said or done?

One in ten students frequently witness uncivil treatment of those who express progressive beliefs.

- Less than half (40%) of students report never witnessing uncivil treatment of those who express liberal or progressive beliefs on campus.
- Conservative students (43%) are more likely than liberal students (31%) to have never witnessed a student receive uncivil treatment for expressing liberal or progressive beliefs on campus.



Twenty percent of students frequently witness uncivil treatment of those who express conservative beliefs.

- Only one-third (32%) of students report never witnessing Incivility toward those who express conservative beliefs on campus.
- Liberal students (34%) are more likely than conservative students (21%) to have never witnessed a student receive uncivil treatment for expressing conservative beliefs on campus.



40%



Q4.27_2 How often, if ever, have you witnessed a student receive uncivil treatment for expressing the following beliefs on campus? Conservative beliefs

TRUSTEES AND ALUMN

Half of students approve of university taking stances on political and moral issues.

- Half of students approve of the university taking stances on political and moral issues, whether controversial or not.
- Liberal students (61%) are more likely than conservative students (41%) to approve of the university taking stances on political and moral issues. (See breakdown)







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Q4.28 Generally speaking, do you approve of your university taking stances on political and moral issues, whether controversial or not?

A majority of students call for increased political diversity among university faculty.

- Sixty percent of students believe the university should take action to promote political diversity among the faculty.
- Liberal students (57%) are less likely than conservative students (67%) to support the university taking action to promote political diversity among faculty. (See breakdown)



Democrat, 16% are Independent, and 27% are Republican. National polling in recent years has Democrats and Republicans roughly even. Do you agree or disagree with the following 23 statement? My university should take action to promote political diversity among its faculty.



Survey Topline

Q4.1_1 On the following scale, how comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? *Publicly disagreeing with a professor about a controversial topic.*

15% Very comfortable 29% Somewhat comfortable 32% Somewhat uncomfortable 24% Very uncomfortable

Q4.1_2 On the following scale, how comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? *Expressing disagreement with one of your professors about a controversial topic in a written assignment.*

22% Very comfortable 36% Somewhat comfortable 29% Somewhat uncomfortable 13% Very uncomfortable

Q4.1_3 On the following scale, how comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? *Expressing your views on a controversial political topic during an in-class discussion.*

18% Very comfortable35% Somewhat comfortable30% Somewhat uncomfortable17% Very uncomfortable

Q4.1_4 On the following scale, how comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? *Expressing your views on a controversial political topic to other students during a discussion in a common campus space such as a quad, dining hall, or lounge.*

23% Very comfortable 38% Somewhat comfortable 27% Somewhat uncomfortable 12% Very uncomfortable

Q4.1_5 On the following scale, how comfortable would you feel doing the following on your campus? *Expressing an unpopular opinion to your fellow students on a social media account tied to your name.*

17% Very comfortable27% Somewhat comfortable32% Somewhat uncomfortable24% Very uncomfortable

Q4.2 How welcoming is your campus for students who hold unpopular political opinions?

25% Very welcoming49% Somewhat welcoming20% Somewhat unwelcoming6% Very unwelcoming

Q4.3 Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: In general, the political climate these days prevents me from saying things I believe because others might find them offensive.

23% Strongly agree

44% Somewhat agree

15% Somewhat disagree

9% Strongly disagree

9% Don't know

Q4.4 On your campus, how often have you felt that you could not express your opinion on a subject because of how students, a professor, or the administration would respond?

10% Very often21% Fairly often31% Occasionally29% Rarely9% Never

Q4.5 How often have you not spoken up on campus because you thought your opinion would be unwelcome?

4% Weekly15% Several times a month20% Once a month32% Less than once a month29% Never

Q4.6 When you do not speak up, whose response are you worried about? Select up to 7 options.

56% Professors
60% Classmates
33% Close friends
53% Student community at large
13% Residence life staff
38% University administration
1% Other

Q4.7 If a controversy over offensive speech were to occur on your campus, how likely is it that the administration would defend the speaker's right to express their views?

10% Extremely likely
22% Very likely
34% Somewhat likely
14% Not very likely
4% Not at all likely
15% Not sure

Q4.8 Have you received training from staff or faculty at your college on free expression policies?

14% Yes 86% No

Q4.9 In which of the following scenarios did you receive training? Select up to 6 options.

43% Orientation

25% Online module from Dean of Students/Student Services Office 23% Mandatory in-person event 30% Required class 27% Residential Life 13% Other

Q4.10 If you had to choose, it is more important for colleges:

- 34% To prohibit offensive speech on campus that is biased against certain groups
- 66% To expose students to all types of viewpoints; even if they are offensive or biased against certain groups

Q4.11 How often do your professors promote their own political views in the classroom?

4% Very frequently
11% Frequently
28% Occasionally
27% Rarely
16% Very rarely
13% Never

Q4.12 If a professor says something that students find offensive, should that professor (or class instructor) be reported to the university?

59% Yes 41% No Q4.13_1 Please review the following statements and indicate whether you believe a professor (or class instructor) should be reported for making each statement. "It is clear that Affirmative Action is doing more harm than good, and should be eliminated."

18% Should be reported40% Should not be reported42% Other

Q4.13_2 Please review the following statements and indicate whether you believe a professor (or class instructor) should be reported for making each statement. "If you look at the data, there is no evidence of anti-black bias in police shootings."

27% Should be reported 31% Should not be reported 42% Other

Q4.13_3 Please review the following statements and indicate whether you believe a professor (or class instructor) should be reported for making each statement. "Owning a gun is the right of every U.S. citizen."

9% Should be reported49% Should not be reported42% Other

Q4.13_4 Please review the following statements and indicate whether you believe a professor (or class instructor) should be reported for making each statement. "Biological sex is a scientific fact. There are two sexes, male and female."

18% Should be reported 27 40% Should not be reported 42% Other

Q4.13_5 Please review the following statements and indicate whether you believe a professor (or class instructor) should be reported for making each statement. "Requiring vaccination for COVID is an assault on individual freedom."

22% Should be reported 36% Should not be reported 42% Other

Q4.13_6 Please review the following statements and indicate whether you believe a professor (or class instructor) should be reported for making each statement. "Those who want to eliminate Affirmative Action are perpetuating white privilege."

21% Should be reported 37% Should not be reported 42% Other

Q4.13_7 Please review the following statements and indicate whether you believe a professor (or class instructor) should be reported for making each statement. "It is clear that we have a problem with racist police in the U.S. shooting unarmed black men."

16% Should be reported 43% Should not be reported 42% Other

Q4.13_8 Please review the following statements and indicate whether you believe a professor (or class instructor) should be reported for making each statement. "A civilized society doesn't need guns."

Q4.13_9 Please review the following statements and indicate whether you believe a professor (or class instructor) should be reported for making each statement. "There are a wide variety of sexes. Sex is not binary."

11% Should be reported47% Should not be reported42% Other

Q4.13_10 Please review the following statements and indicate whether you believe a professor (or class instructor) should be reported for making each statement. "Not getting vaccinated for COVID is irresponsible and inconsiderate to others."

16% Should be reported43% Should not be reported42% Other

Q4.14_1 Student groups often invite speakers to campus to express their views on a range of topics. Regardless of your own views on the topic, should your school ALLOW or NOT ALLOW a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea? *Israel is a genocidal, apartheid state which harms non-Jewish residents.*

21% Definitely should allow this speaker35% Probably should allow this this speaker30% Probably should not allow this speaker14% Definitely should not allow this speaker

10% Should be reported 48% Should not be reported 42% Other

Q4.14_2 Should your school ALLOW or NOT ALLOW a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea? *Transgender women are not women in the same way that biological women are.*

23% Definitely should allow this speaker 33% Probably should allow this this speaker 27% Probably should not allow this speaker 17% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Q4.14_3 Should your school ALLOW or NOT ALLOW a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea? *Abortion should be illegal under all circumstances.*

16% Definitely should allow this speaker35% Probably should allow this this speaker27% Probably should not allow this speaker22% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Q4.14_4 Should your school ALLOW or NOT ALLOW a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea? *Policing in America is systematically racist*.

25% Definitely should allow this speaker47% Probably should allow this this speaker20% Probably should not allow this speaker8% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Q4.14_5 Should your school ALLOW or NOT ALLOW a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea? *Capitalism should be replaced with socialism*.

19% Definitely should allow this speaker44% Probably should allow this this speaker26% Probably should not allow this speaker10% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Q4.14_6 Should your school ALLOW or NOT ALLOW a speaker on campus who promotes the following idea? *Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices do more harm than good.*

20% Definitely should allow this speaker 35% Probably should allow this this speaker 29% Probably should not allow this speaker 16% Definitely should not allow this speaker

Q4.15_1 How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker: Shouting down a speaker or trying to prevent them from speaking on campus.

7% Always acceptable31% Sometimes acceptable33% Rarely acceptable28% Never acceptable

Q4.15_2 How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker: Blocking other students from attending a campus speech.

4% Always acceptable15% Sometimes acceptable28% Rarely acceptable53% Never acceptable

Q4.15_3 How acceptable would you say it is for students to engage in the following action to protest a campus speaker: Using violence to stop a campus speech.

3% Always acceptable10% Sometimes acceptable16% Rarely acceptable71% Never acceptable

Q4.16 In November 2023, some students at Arizona State University threw rocks at a campus building window in order to disrupt a Student Government meeting. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *Students should face disciplinary consequences for disrupting speakers with whom they disagree.*

1% Strongly agree

- 2% Somewhat agree
- 0% Somewhat disagree
- 0% Strongly disagree

97% N/a

Q4.17 Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *Students should face disciplinary consequences for disrupting speakers with whom they disagree.*

17% Strongly agree44% Somewhat agree30% Somewhat disagree8% Strongly disagree1% N/a

Q4.18 Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *My university* should discipline students who deliberately disrupt classes or events to prevent the voicing of views with which they disagree.

27% Strongly agree48% Somewhat agree20% Somewhat disagree6% Strongly disagree

Q4.19 How many friends on campus do you have who adhere to a different political ideology?

4% All
9% Most
23% Many
22% About half
26% A few
7% Just one or two
9% None

Q4.20 Have you lost friends on campus because of your political beliefs? 13% Yes **30** 87% No

Q4.21 Which of the following two statements comes closer to your own view?

- 66% People should be allowed to express unpopular opinions in public; even those that are deeply offensive to other people.
- 34% Government should prevent people from engaging in hate speech against certain groups in public.

Q4.22 How worried are you about damaging your reputation because someone misunderstands something you have said or done?

14% Worried a lot 45% Worried a little 30% Not very worried 11% Not at all worried

Q4.23 Have you been socially excluded due to any of the following actions? Select all that apply.

- 13% Sharing your political or social views
- 9% Having joined or been a member of a student or community organization
- 11% Posting on social media
- 7% Attending an on-campus speaking event, protest, demonstration, or rally
- 73% None of the above

Q4.24 How often have you been socially excluded?

2% Very frequently
4% Frequently
11% Occasionally
8% Rarely
2% Never
73% Other

Q4.25 Have you experienced threats or harassment from fellow students due to any of the following actions? Select up to 4 options.

- 8% Sharing your political or social views
- 6% Having joined or been a member of a student or community organization
- 6% Posting on social media or on your door
- 6% Attending an on-campus speaking event, protest, demonstration, or rally
- 82% None of the above

Q4.26 How often have you experienced threats or harassment from fellow students?

1% Very frequently

- 3% Frequently
- 7% Occasionally
- 5% Rarely
- 2% Never
- 82% N/a

Q4.27_1 How often, if ever, have you witnessed a student receive uncivil treatment for expressing the following beliefs on campus? Liberal or progressive beliefs

3% Very frequently
7% Frequently
22% Occasionally
28% Rarely
40% Never

Q4.27_2 How often, if ever, have you witnessed a student receive uncivil treatment for expressing the following beliefs on campus? *Conservative beliefs*

7% Very frequently15% Frequently30% Occasionally17% Rarely32% Never

Q4.27_3 How often, if ever, have you witnessed a student receive uncivil treatment for expressing the following beliefs on campus? *Religious beliefs*

6% Very frequently12% Frequently25% Occasionally22% Rarely35% Never

Q4.28 Generally speaking, do you approve of your university taking stances on political and moral issues, whether controversial or not?

8% Strongly approve42% Somewhat approve36% Somewhat disapprove14% Strongly disapprove

Q4.29 A recent national survey of university faculty found that about 56% of professors are Democrat, 16% are Independent, and 27% are Republican. National polling in recent years has Democrats and Republicans roughly even. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? *My university should take action to promote political diversity among its faculty.*

17% Strongly agree43% Somewhat agree31% Somewhat disagree9% Strongly disagree

Q4.30 How often have you been treated unfairly on campus by professors, teaching fellows, or administrators as a result of your political opinions and beliefs?

2% Frequently11% Sometimes24% Rarely63% Never

 $\mathsf{Q5.1}$ Does the First Amendment allow your university to ban hate speech on campus?

15% Yes 36% No 49% Not sure

Q6.1 I would feel freer to discuss controversial topics on campus if... Select up to 6 options.

- 30% There were more student groups dedicated to fostering wideranging debate and discussion
- 24% There was greater viewpoint diversity among faculty members
- 30% First year orientation included more discussion about the importance of free expression on campus
- 26% My university hosted a broader diversity of guest speakers
- 30% Senior administrators (presidents; provosts; deans; and department chairs) did more to encourage a free speech culture
- 14% My university reformed existing policies that discourage free and open discussion
- 27% I already feel free to discuss controversial topics on campus
- 20% None of the above

Q6.2 What do you believe is the most effective change to improve the campus climate?

- 17% There were more student groups dedicated to fostering wideranging debate and discussion
 14% There was greater viewpoint diversity among faculty members
 14% First year orientation included more discussion about the importance of free expression on campus
 14% My university hosted a broader diversity of guest speakers
 16% Senior administrators (presidents; provosts; deans; and department chairs) did more to encourage a free speech culture
 10% My university reformed existing policies that discourage free and
- open discussion

15% Something else

Q6.3 If you could suggest one other reform to senior university leaders to foster freer deliberation on campus, what would it be? *Open text response*



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