

Student Affairs Book Club Discussion Free Speech on Campus

FIRST AMENDMENT

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

COLLEGE STUDENTS VIEWS ON THE FIRST AMENDMENT: *Results from a new survey by John Villasenor- Non-resident senior fellow in Governance Studies and the Center for Technology Innovations at Brookings*

About the Survey: Web-based survey of 1,500 undergraduate students at U.S. four-year colleges and universities who indicated they are U.S. Citizens. Respondents were enrolled in either public or private institutions and were asked to indicate whether they identified as Democrat, Republican, or Independents.

- Does the First Amendment protect “hate speech”?

	Political Affiliation			Type of College		Gender		
	All	Dem	Rep	Ind	Pub.	Priv.	Female	Male
Yes	39	39	44	40	38	43	31	51
No	44	41	39	44	44	44	49	38
Don't Know	16	15	17	17	17	13	21	11

Survey results indicate that many college students believe that hate speech is unprotected.

- Consider an event, hosted at a public U.S. university by an on-campus organization, featuring a speaker known for making statements that many students consider to be offensive and hurtful. A student group opposed to the speaker issues a statement saying that, under the First Amendment, the on-campus organization hosting the event is legally required to ensure that the event includes not only the offensive speaker but also a speaker who presents an opposing view. What is your view on the student group’s statement?

	Political Affiliation			Type of College		Gender		
	All	Dem	Rep	Ind	Pub.	Priv.	Female	Male
Yes	62	65	62	58	63	60	60	66
No	38	35	38	42	37	40	40	34

Survey results shows students’ critical misunderstanding of the First Amendment, since the First Amendment does not require offering a counterpoint to speech.

- If you had to choose one of the options below, which do you think it is more important for colleges to do?
 - Option 1: create a positive learning environment for all students by prohibiting certain speech or expression of viewpoints that are offensive or biased against certain groups of people
 - Option 2: create an open learning environment where students are exposed to all types of speech and viewpoints, even if it means allowing speech that is offensive or biased against certain groups of people?

	Political Affiliation			Type of College		Gender		
	All	Dem	Rep	Ind	Pub.	Priv.	Female	Male
Option 1	53	61	47	45	53	54	52	55
Option 2	47	39	53	55	47	46	48	45

Across most categories, and in the aggregate, the majority of students appear to prefer an environment in which their institution creates an environment that shelters them from offensive view (with the exception of Republicans and Independents)

Author Key Take-Aways

- Many students have a narrow view of freedom of speech and appear to want an environment that shields them from offensive views
- College faculty and administrators have a heightened responsibility to do a better job at fostering freedom of expression on campus