



“OMG, that Person is Offending Me!” Student Activism and Campus Unrest

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State University of New York

*Shall Make No Law: An Exploration of Current First Amendment Issues on
College Campuses*

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Roadmap

1. Overview of Current Climate
2. Student Activism Interactive Scenarios
3. Closing Thoughts



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But first...

A Case Study: **Evergreen State College**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2cMYfxOFBBM>

“Laws alone cannot secure freedom of expression; in order that every man present his views without penalty there must be a spirit of tolerance in the entire population. Such an ideal of external liberty can never be fully attained but must be sought unremittingly if scientific thought, and philosophical and creative thinking in general, are to be advanced as far as possible.”

--Albert Einstein



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Current Climate

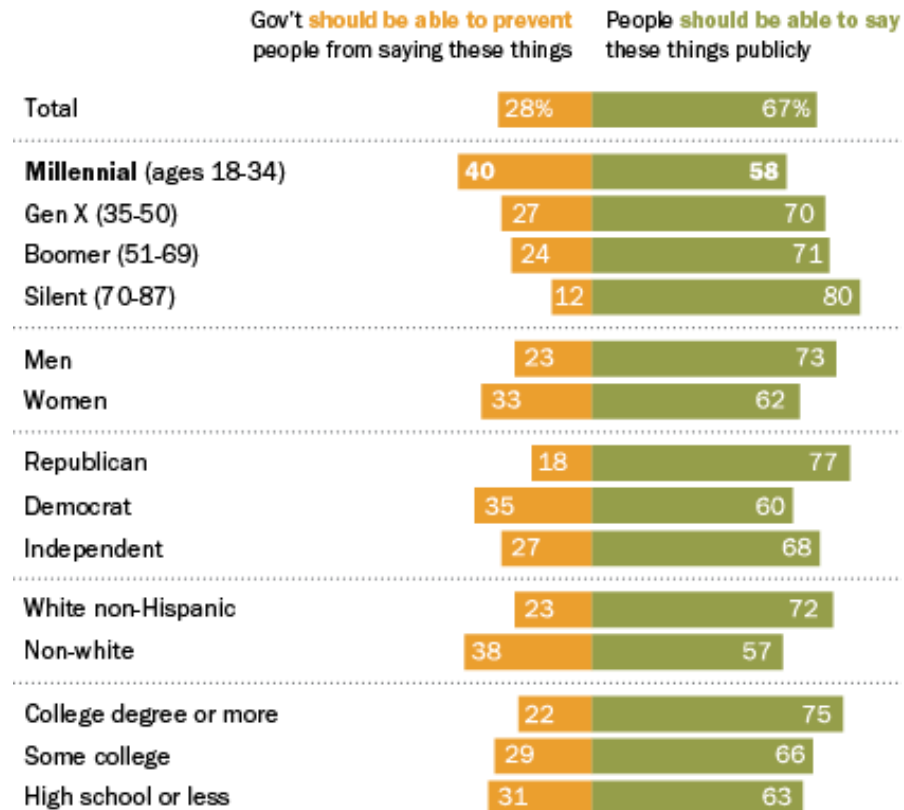
- 2015 Pew Research Center survey finds that **40%** of Millennials believe that government should be able to prevent people publicly making statements that are offensive to minority groups



Current Climate

U.S. Millennials More Likely to Support Censoring Offensive Statements About Minorities

Statements that are offensive to minority groups



Source: Spring 2015 Global Attitudes survey.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



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Current Climate

- 2018 Gallup & the Knight Foundation survey finds that **53%** of students valued a diverse and inclusive environment more than free speech rights

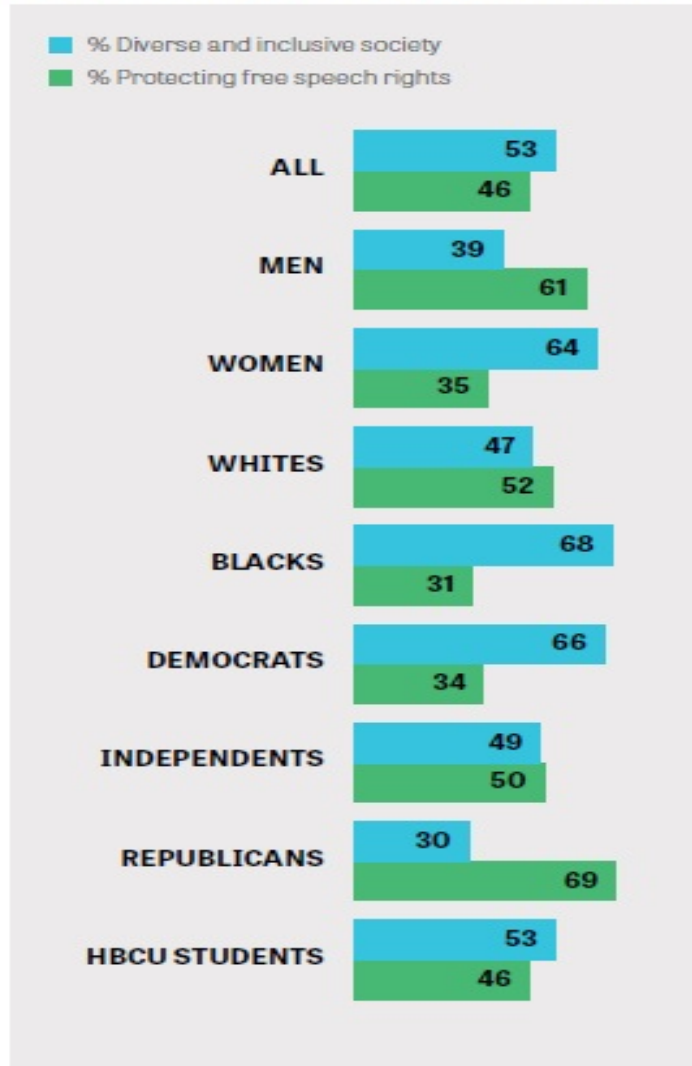


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Current Climate

Diversity and Inclusion vs. Free Speech

If you had to choose, which do you think is more important?





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Current Climate

- 2016 Gallup/Knight Foundation survey finds that **54%** of U.S. college students agree that the climate on their campus prevents some people from expressing their views because others might find them offensive
- The same survey conducted in 2017 jumps to **61%**



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Current Climate

College Students Increasingly Perceive Their Campus Climate Prevents People From Saying Things They Believe

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the following statement: The climate on my campus prevents some people from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive.

	2016	2017	Change
	%	%	pct. pts.
Strongly/Somewhat agree	54	61	+7
Strongly/Somewhat disagree	46	38	-8

GALLUP/KNIGHT FOUNDATION 2017 COLLEGE STUDENT SURVEY



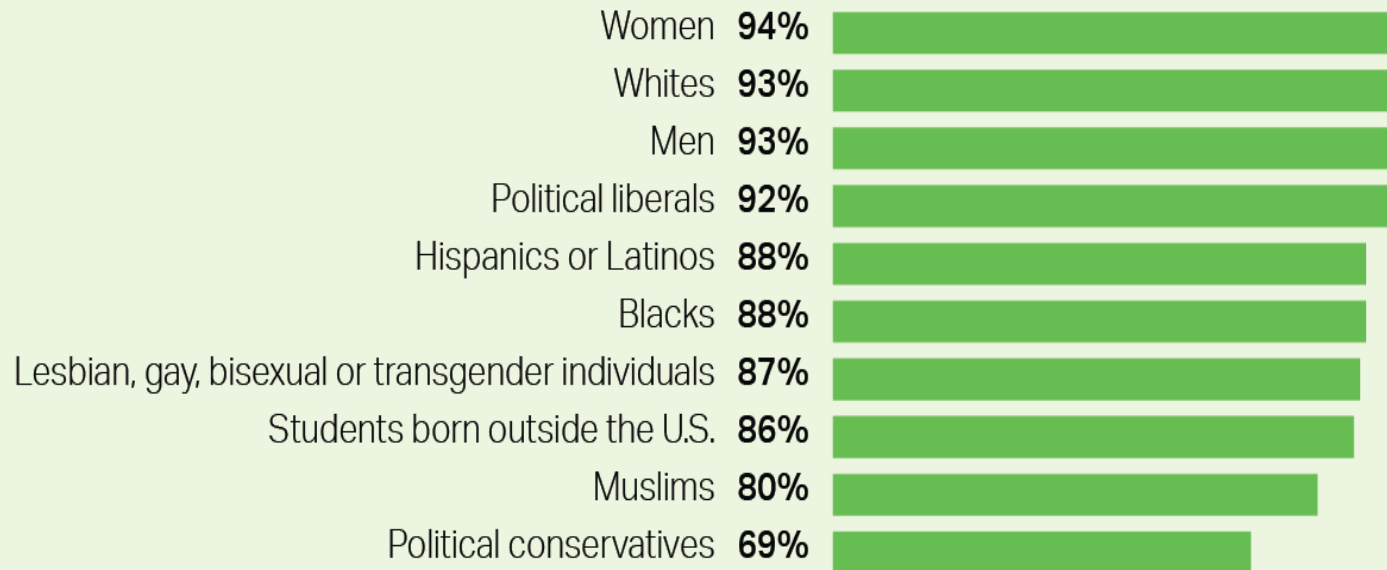
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Current Climate

Students' Perceptions of Whether Groups on Campus Can Freely Express Their Views

On your college's campus, do you think members of each of the following groups are, or are not, able to freely and openly express their views?

 Yes, they are able to



Key Findings of 2017 Gallup/Knight Foundation Survey:

- Majorities of college students believe protecting free speech rights (56%) and promoting an inclusive society welcoming of diverse groups (52%) are extremely important in a democracy. When asked to choose which is more important, they tilt toward inclusion over free speech, 53% to 46%.
- Although they say they prefer open campus environments, students also favor certain policies that may restrict expression, including campus policies prohibiting the use of slurs or other language that is intentionally offensive (73%), banning costumes that stereotype racial or ethnic groups (60%) and establishing designated "free speech zones" on campus (83%). They are divided on instituting speech codes -- codes of conduct that restrict biased speech -- with 49% in favor and 51% opposed.
- One in four college students say they have personally felt uncomfortable on campus because of comments they heard about their race, ethnicity or religion. Black (43%) and Jewish students (38%) are among the subgroups most likely to say they have felt uncomfortable. Republicans (17%) are the least likely major subgroup to say they have felt uncomfortable.

Key Findings of Gallup/Knight Foundation 2017 Survey:

- Just 28% of students favor colleges canceling invitations to campus speakers because some students oppose the invitation. However, 69% favor colleges canceling planned speeches because of concerns about violent protests.
- Although the majority of students oppose college students using violence or shouting down speakers to prevent controversial speakers' messages from being heard, 10% say violence and 37% say shouting down speakers are "acceptable" at least sometimes.
- By 57% to 43%, students say most discussion of political or social issues at their college takes place online through social media rather than in classrooms and other public areas of campus.
- Students increasingly believe that social media stifles free speech because people are afraid of being attacked (59%) or "blocked" (60%) by those who disagree with their views.



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Current Climate

Takeaways:

- Student attitudes towards free speech have shifted drastically since the “free speech movement” of the 1960’s
- Current students know little about the history of free speech in the U.S.
- *“This generation has a strong and persistent urge to protect others against hateful, discriminatory, or intolerant speech, especially in educational settings” (Chemerinsky & Gillman)*



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Student Activism

GAME PLAN:

Is your campus ready to respond to various situations that implicate First Amendment rights?

For each scenario, panelists will discuss:

1. Rights of each of the parties
2. What the university may do (legally)
3. What the university should do (practically)
4. Lessons learned



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Scenario #1

Professional Provocateur, Shilo Hippopotamus, has been invited by the College Independents to speak at SUNY Saratoga. Shilo has been touring college campuses across the country promoting his new book, “Dangerous Dudes” and spouting commentary that many find to be hateful and offensive. The college community becomes aware through the campus bulletin that Shilo will be coming to campus, and they are outraged. A large group of students storm the office of the Dean of Students demanding that the event be cancelled.

Scenario #2

In the midst of all the chaos, a SUNY Saratoga student searches Shilo on the internet and finds out that he practices Judaism. The student tweets out: “If Hitler had taken them all, the college would have a lot less problems right now—death to all Jews.” The tweet goes viral across campus. Members of the college Hillel and other students are now calling for the expulsion and arrest of the student who posted the tweet. They also want to organize a rally against the hateful words and in strong support of love for people of all backgrounds and religions.



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Student Activism

Scenario #3

Back at the Dean's office, the situation is starting to deteriorate. For hours, students have been demanding for the Dean to shut down Shilo's event, but they have been told that the event will move forward as scheduled. The Dean overhears a group of students discussing that if the college will not prevent the speech from taking place, they will need to take the situation into their own hands.



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Scenario #4

A local community group known as “The Church that Hates Absolutely Everybody” catches wind about Shilo’s event through the local news channel. They are eager to stir things up on campus even more and contact the Campus Event Coordinator to arrange a date to come on campus. The group is known for its use of inflammatory hate speech against many groups, which includes holding large signs that depict graphic images and state “Same-Sex Marriage is a Sin” and “You’re Going to Hell.”



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Student Activism

Scenario #5

It has been a tough week at SUNY Saratoga. Hateful tweets and offensive speakers (invited and uninvited)—the students are fed up. A large group of students have descended upon the President's Office. They have a large list of demands, including calling for the President's resignation, and refuse to leave the office until their demands have been met.



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Student Activism

QUESTIONS?
&
CLOSING THOUGHTS