

TO: Lauren Noble, Executive Director – William F. Buckley, Jr. Program at Yale
FROM: Jim McLaughlin and Rob Schmidt, McLaughlin & Associates
Re: National Undergraduate Study – Executive Summary
Date: September 28, 2021

Below are the key findings from our seventh annual national study of undergraduates on behalf of the William F. Buckley, Jr. Program at Yale.

Part I – The Constitution, First Amendment, Free Speech and Intellectual Diversity

Strong majorities of students continue to believe the Constitution and the First Amendment are important and still need to be followed and respected. More students now oppose speech codes on campus, which is a reversal from last year. When given a choice, students prefer their school encouraging free speech and intellectual diversity rather than preventing offensive or insensitive dialogue.

- Fifty-five percent (55%) say the Constitution is a very important document that needs to be followed and respected, compared to 31% who say it is outdated. The “important” response is up slightly from 52% last year, but lower than the high of 63% from 2019.
 - Moderate (59% to 29%) and conservative students (80% to 13%) say the Constitution is very important, while a plurality of liberal students say it is outdated, 45% to 41%.
 - Males (65% to 22%) are more likely than females (48% to 37%) to say it is very important.
 - By major, Social and Behavioral Sciences students and Humanities students are most likely to say the Constitution is outdated, at 40% each.

- By an overwhelming margin of 80% to 13%, students say the First Amendment is an important amendment that still needs to be followed and respected rather than it being outdated and can no longer be applied in today’s society. This “important” response is also higher than the 72% last year, but lower than the high of 84% reported in 2019 and 2016.

- A slight plurality, 45%, oppose speech codes on campus, while 42% favor them. This is a net change of 10-points from last year when 48% favored speech codes and 41% opposed them. Current opinions are similar to those from 2017 to 2019 when majorities opposed speech codes.
 - There are significant differences by race, with white students opposing speech codes by a 47% to 39% margin and black students favoring them by a 56% to 32% margin. Hispanic students divide – 44% favor to 45% oppose.

- By a 79% to 15% margin, students say their college or university generally does a good job encouraging free speech and intellectual diversity among students. Similarly, by a 70% to 20% margin, students say their college or university does a good job preventing offensive or insensitive dialogue among students. When given a choice about which is more important, by a two to one margin, students say it is more important for their school to encourage free speech and intellectual diversity (62%) than to prevent offensive or insensitive dialogue (31%).
 - By ideology, preference towards free speech and intellectual diversity is lowest among liberals at 57%, compared to 67% among both moderate and conservative students.
 - White students prefer free speech and intellectual diversity by a 68% to 26% margin, while black students divide – 50% to 46%. Hispanic students prefer free speech by a 54% to 34% margin, as do Asian students by a 59% to 33% margin.

Part II – Expression in the Classroom

Students are very divided on whether they have felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs in class because they were different than their professors or classmates. Despite this, most students say they are more comfortable expressing themselves in the classroom compared to high school. Politics and race are the hot-button issues students feel most uncomfortable speaking about.

- Fifty percent (50%) say they have often felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs in class because they were different than those of their professors, while 45% have not often felt intimidated. While this gap has tightened from last year when 53% often felt intimidated and 43% did not, responses to this question are relatively stable as the average “intimidated” response over the last seven years has been 50%.
 - Sixty-two percent (62%) of conservative students say they have often felt intimidated, compared to 47% of moderate students and 46% of liberal students.
 - Sixty-one percent (61%) of black students say they have often felt intimidated, as well as 54% of Hispanic students. Lower shares of white (47%) and Asian students (48%) say they have often felt intimidated.

- An identical 50% have often felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs because they were different than their classmates or peers, while 47% have not often felt intimidated. This is again a slightly tighter margin than last year (51% to 46%) and close to the average “intimated” response of 52% historically.
 - Similar demographic differences exist here with 61% of conservative students saying they have often felt intimidated, compared to 45% of moderate students and 48% of liberal students.
 - Sixty-three percent (63%) of black students and 52% of Hispanic students say they have often felt intimidated, while white (49%) and Asian students (32%) are less likely to say so.

- Nearly six in ten (58%) say they are now more comfortable expressing their ideas, opinions and beliefs in the classroom compared to their time in high school. Only 19% say they are less comfortable and 20% say no different.
 - Sixty-one percent (61%) of upperclassmen (juniors and seniors) are now more comfortable compared to 55% of underclassmen (freshmen and sophomores).
 - Two-thirds (67%) of liberals and 60% of moderates are now more comfortable compared to only 43% of conservative students. **Notably, 33% of conservative students say they are now less comfortable.**
 - There is a correlation between comfort level and the preceding “intimidation” questions. Among the nearly six in ten who are now more comfortable expressing their views compared to high school, majorities say they are *not often intimidated* in sharing their opinions in class because they were different than their professors (52%) and *not often intimidated* in sharing their opinions because they were different than their classmates (53%). Conversely, the 19% who are less comfortable are significantly more likely to often feel intimidated in sharing differing opinions in the classroom (74%) and with their classmates (70%).

- When given a list of hot-button issues, students are most likely to cite politics (38%) and race (30%) as the ones they feel most uncomfortable speaking about and are off limits for discussion. Abortion (26%), religion (26%) and sexual preference (25%) were next highest, with gender being the lowest at 19%. Notably, nearly three in ten (28%) say no topic is off limits for discussion in the classroom.
 - Almost half (49%) of conservative students are uncomfortable talking about politics. A lower share of conservatives (23%) says nothing is off limits while a higher share of liberals (34%) say the same.
 - Women are more likely than men to cite being uncomfortable talking about politics, 42% to 35%, respectively.

Part III – Insensitive and Offensive Speech

While most students do not believe offensive opinions should be reported to school administrators and that people can be forgiven for insensitive or offensive comments, most also believe that society should reevaluate certain types of humor and joking because it risks offending people. A large majority says that insensitive or offensive comments can be harmful to their mental health. Students, however, are making a distinction between insensitive or offensive comments and hate speech.

- Almost half (48%) disagree that offensive political opinions – whether in the classroom or on social media – should be reported to school administrators, while 39% agree.
 - While 56% of moderate students and 58% conservative students disagree, the plurality of liberal students, 47%, agree and 41% disagree.
 - The majority of white students (52%) disagree, while most Hispanic (50%), black (47%) and Asian (46%) agree that these offensive opinions should be reported.
 - Women (51% disagree to 35% agree) are more likely to oppose reporting offensive posts than men (46% to 44%).

- By a greater than two to one margin, students say people can be forgiven for insensitive or offensive comments that are made in the past if they apologize and commit to being more understanding (64%) rather than believing there is never an excuse for insensitive or offensive comments, no matter how long ago they were made and people who are caught making them should face consequences (29%).
 - Sizeable segments of black and Hispanic students are more likely to say there is never an excuse, 43% and 36%, respectively.

- However, students are more divided when it comes to humor. By a 50% to 41% margin, students say society should reevaluate certain types of humor and joking because it risks offending people rather than believing jokes are a part of everyday human interaction and we should not abandon humor even if people sometimes get offended.
 - Two-thirds of liberal students (66%) say we should reevaluate certain types of humor, while 61% of conservative students say we should not abandon humor. Moderate students are divided, 45% not abandon to 47% reevaluate.
 - There is a very distinct gender divide as 52% of men do not want to abandon humor and 59% of women want to reevaluate certain types of humor.

- Seven in ten (71%) agree that “insensitive or offensive comments can be harmful to my mental health,” while 22% disagree.
 - Ideologically, liberal students are most likely to agree at 87%, followed by 65% of moderate students and 56% of conservative students.
 - By race, black students are most likely to agree at 80%.
 - Women (78%) are more likely to agree than men (63%).

- A majority (56%) says most of the time there is a difference between insensitive or offensive comments and hate speech while 37% say comments that are insensitive or offensive can also be considered as hate speech because anything that is derogatory towards a certain person or group is hate speech.
 - While 62% of white students believe there is a difference, the majority (56%) of black students believe insensitive or offensive comments can also be considered as hate speech. Hispanic students are divided, 46% to 43%, while most Asian students (64%) say there is a difference.

Part IV – Hate Speech

Opinions on hate speech are consistent with last year where a plurality says hate speech is still technically protected under the First Amendment as free speech. Furthermore, sizeable portions of students still believe it is appropriate to shout down or disrupt a speaker and physical violence can be justified to prevent a person from using hate speech.

- Forty-seven percent (47%) agree that “hate speech, no matter how racist or bigoted it is, is still technically protected under the First Amendment as free speech,” which is identical to last year. Forty-one percent (41%) disagree which is four-points lower than last year.
 - The plurality (49%) of liberal students disagrees while 49% of moderate students and 53% of conservative students agree.
 - By race, pluralities in all cases agree – 49% of black and Hispanic students and 48% of white and Asian students.
 - Fifty-six percent (56%) of male students agree while the plurality (47%) of female students disagree.

- Four in ten (40%) agree that “it is sometimes appropriate to shout down or disrupt a speaker on my campus,” while 47% disagree. This is very similar to last year, when 40% agreed and 51% disagreed.
 - The majority (53%) of liberal students agrees while 57% of moderate students and 56% of conservative students disagree.
 - Fifty-one percent (51%) of Asian students and 49% of white students disagree while the plurality (48%) of black students agree.

- Thirty-six percent (36%) agree that violence can be justified to prevent a person from using hate speech or making racially charged comments, which is statistically insignificant from the 39% who agreed with this statement last year. The majority (54%) disagrees.
 - Ideologically, agreement is highest among liberals at 41%, followed by 37% of moderate students and 23% of conservative students.
 - By race, agreement is highest among black students at 51%, compared to 43% among Hispanic and Asian students and 30% among white students.
 - By major, Humanities students were most likely to agree at 44%.

Part V – Race Issues

A plurality says America is inextricably linked to white supremacy. Large majorities say systemic racism is a big problem in society today that white people still contribute to and most white Americans need to be re-educated about the true history of America and what it means to be actively anti-racist. Nearly six in ten favor the teaching of critical race theory and a similar share say that have learned about CRT in college or high school. Compared to last year, students are now more divided on the issue of defunding the police.

- By a 49% to 42% margin, students believe America is inextricably linked to white supremacy and most minorities remain excluded from the American promise of equality rather than believing America is moving forward and the promise of equality continues to be extended to more people. This is statistically similar to last year when the margin was 51% to 40%.
 - Seven in ten (72%) liberal students believe America is linked to white supremacy while majorities of moderate (53%) and conservative students (68%) say America is moving forward.
 - Men say America is moving forward 53% to 40% while women say America is linked to white supremacy 56% to 35%.
 - By major, Social and Behavioral Sciences students are most likely to believe America is linked to white supremacy at 65%.
- When given a choice, the majority (52%) says America should strive to become a more equal nation by instituting policies to ensure every citizen is treated fairly and given the same opportunities to succeed. Thirty-nine percent (39%) believe America should strive to be a more equitable nation by instituting policies that seek to correct past racial injustices, like providing reparation to descendants of former slaves and redistributing income and property from wealthy white Americans to struggling black and brown Americans.
 - The majority (54%) of liberal students say “equitable” while 58% of moderate and 69% of conservative students say “equal.”
 - The majority (57%) of white students and pluralities of Hispanic (48%) and Asian students (47%) say “equal” while 50% of black students say “equitable.”

- Seven in ten (71%) agree that “systemic racism is a big problem in society today and white people still contribute to it, whether they realize it or not,” while 21% disagree.
 - Nine in ten (90%) liberal students agree compared to 66% of moderate students and 51% of conservative students.

- Similarly, 66% agree that “most white Americans need to be re-educated about the true history of America and what it means to be actively anti-racist,” while 26% disagree.
 - Eighty-six percent (86%) of liberal students agree compared to 62% of moderate students and only 37% of conservative students.
 - By race, agreement is highest among black (83%) and Asian students (75%).
 - Three in four women (74%) agree compared to 55% of men.

- Six in ten (59%) favor allowing the teaching of critical race theory in all high school and colleges, which says America is founded on white supremacy and most laws and institutions in America today are inherently racist, while 28% oppose it.
 - Eight in ten (82%) liberal students favor this as do 50% of moderate students (37% oppose). Conservative students oppose, 55% to 35%.
 - Majorities of all racial groups favor this, with it highest among Asian (73%) and black (70%) students. Nearly 59% of Hispanic students favor CRT as do 55% of white students.
 - Nearly seven in ten (68%) of Social and Behavioral Sciences majors and 65% of Humanities majors favor the teaching of CRT.

- Fifty-six percent (56%) of students say they have learned about critical race theory before, including 16% who say they learned about it in high school, 28% who say they learned about it in college and 19% who learned about it in both high school and college.
 - Students in private schools are more likely to say they have learned about CRT compared to students in public or state schools, 60% to 54%, respectively.
 - Underclassmen are slightly more likely to say they have learned about CRT compared to upperclassmen, 57% to 55%, respectively.

- By a close 46% to 44% margin, students believe we should defund police departments because they are failing many communities rather than believing we can reform the criminal justice system, but defunding police departments is a mistake. This is a significant net shift of 10-points from last year when 52% wanted to defund police departments and 40% did not.
 - Two-thirds (65%) of liberal students support defunding the police while 52% of moderate students and 68% of conservative students do not want to defund the police.
 - A majority (51%) of white students do not want to defund the police while 54% of black students, 53% of Asian students and 52% of Hispanic students want to defund the police.
 - Men do not want to defund the police 51% to 39% while women want to defund the police by an inverse margin of 51% to 39%.
 - Greater than six in ten (62%) of Social and Behavior Sciences students want to defund the police while 51% of Mathematics and Engineering students and 50% of Business students do not want to defund the police.

Part VI – Miscellaneous Issues

A plurality still says socialist principles have the potential to be good for America. Students divide on whether men and women are equal or men are more privileged on campus. Nearly half favor instituting programs and scholarships to encourage college enrollment for white men.

- A slight plurality (44%) says socialist principles have the potential to be good for America while 36% say socialism is too radical. This is nearly identical to last year when the margin was 44% to 37%.
 - Six in ten (62%) liberal students say socialist principles have the potential for good, while the plurality (43%) of moderate students and 60% of conservative students say socialism is too radical.
 - By race, Hispanic students were most likely to say socialism is too radical, dividing evenly at 43%.
- Students also remain divided on the national debt. While 82% say the national debt is a problem, there is an identical split where 41% say it is a huge problem that needs to be addressed immediately either through spending reforms or revenue raising measures and 41% say it is a problem but there are other issues that need to be addressed more immediately, such as combatting climate change, reducing income inequality and dealing with racial injustices. Last year 88% said the national debt was a problem with 44% saying it was a huge problem and 44% saying it was a problem but other issues needed to be addressed. Currently, only 6% say the national debt is not a concerning problem.

- Thirty-seven percent (37%) say men are more privileged than women on their campus while a higher 43% say men and women are generally equal. Only 8% say women are more privileged than men.
 - The majority (51%) of liberal students say men are more privileged than women while majorities of moderate (53%) and conservative students (54%) say men and women are generally equal.
 - By race, Asian students are most likely to say men are more privileged than women at 45%.
 - Male students say men and women are generally equal, 47% to 32%, while female students are divided at 41%.

- After hearing about a recent study finding that men are dropping out of college at a much higher rate than women and enrollment rates for poor and working-class white men are lower than enrollment rates for black, Latino and Asian men, 48% favor instituting programs and scholarships to encourage enrollment for white men, similar to programs for minorities. Thirty-one percent (31%) oppose it and a large 21% are unsure.
 - Male students favor this by a 60% to 23% margin, while female students divide 39% to 38% with 23% unsure.

- Three in ten (31%) have attended a rally or protest in the last two years that advocated for a particular political cause. This is down slightly from 37% last year.
 - Ideologically, liberal students are most likely to have attended a rally at 42% compared to 27% of moderate students and 19% of conservative students.
 - Almost half (48%) of black students have recently attended a rally or protest.
 - By major, Arts (46%), Humanities (43%) and Social and Behavioral Science students (40%) are most likely to have attended a rally.

Methodology: McLaughlin & Associates conducted a national survey of 800 undergraduate students from September 19th to 26th, 2021. All student participants were under the age of 25 and attend either a four-year private or public college or university on a full-time basis. This study's universe is the "conventional" four-year undergraduate, therefore excluding undergraduates who either attend a two-year school, technical school, junior college or trade school, are over the age of 24 or attend on a part-time basis. All interviews were conducted online and respondents were carefully selected and screened from a nationwide representative platform of individuals who elect to participate in online surveys. Data for this survey have been stratified by age, race/ethnicity, gender and geography using the most recent National Center for Education Statistics Report (2018) to reflect the actual demographic composition of four-year, full-time undergraduate students in the United States. According to the NCES Statistics, there are approximately 8,156,367 undergraduates who fall within these parameters. Because the sample is based on those who initially self-selected for participation rather than a probability sample, no estimates of sampling error can be calculated. However, a confidence interval of 95% was calculated in order to produce an error estimate of +/- 3.5% for the 800 respondents. This error estimate should be taken into consideration in much the same way that analysis of probability polls takes into account the margin of sampling error. The error estimate increases for cross-tabulations. Totals may not add up to exactly 100% due to rounding, refusals and the ability for respondents to give multiple answers to certain questions. All surveys may be subject to multiple sources of error, including, but not limited to question wording and ordering, sampling error, coverage error and measurement error. This study is the seventh iteration of our undergraduate research on behalf of the William F. Buckley, Jr. Program at Yale.

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