



**TO:** Lauren Noble, Executive Director – William F. Buckley, Jr. Program at Yale  
**FROM:** Rob Schmidt, McLaughlin & Associates  
**Re:** National Undergraduate Study – Executive Summary  
**Date:** September 7, 2022

Below are the key findings from our eighth 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

*For the first time, less than half of students believe the Constitution is a very important document for our country. However, an overwhelming majority still sees the First Amendment as important. Students continue to be divided over speech codes and while almost seven in ten say their college or university does a good job encouraging free speech and intellectual diversity, there has been an 11-point decline. Most students believe that the student body and faculty need to be better educated on the value of free speech and the diversity of opinion.*

- Slightly less than half (49%) say the U.S. Constitution is a very important document for our country compared to 36% who say it is an outdated document. This is the lowest “Important” response over four years and the first time it has dropped below 50%.
  - A majority of liberal students now says the U.S. Constitution is outdated, 54% to 36%. Three-quarters of Republican students (74%) say the Constitution is important, as do 56% of moderate students.
- Despite a decline in the perceived importance of the Constitution, students continue to believe by a significant margin of 80% to 12% that the First Amendment is an important amendment that still needs to be followed and respected rather than it being outdated and can no longer be applied in today’s society.
- A plurality, 45%, continues to oppose speech code regulating speech for students and faculty, while 41% favors them. This is nearly identical to last year when 45% opposed them and 42% favored them.
  - There are notable differences by race as Asian students are most inclined to oppose speech codes (55% to 36%) followed by white students (48% to 39%). Black students favor speech codes (53% to 32%) while Hispanic students are divided (44% to 44%).

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- By a 68% to 25% margin, students say their college or university generally does a good job encouraging free speech and intellectual diversity among students. This has tightened from last year when 79% said they were doing a good job.
  - While broad agreement exists, liberal students are most likely to say their school is doing a bad job (31%).
- Greater than eight in ten (84%) agree that incoming students and current college students need to be better educated on the value of free speech and the diversity of opinion on campuses.
- A similar 83% agree that professors and administrators also need to be better educated on the value of free speech and the diversity of opinion on campuses.

### Part II – Expression in the Classroom

*For the first time, decisive majorities of students now say they have often felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs in class because they were different than their professors or classmates. Politics remains the issue students feel most uncomfortable speaking about – and increasingly so.*

- Nearly six in ten (58%) 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 38% have not often felt intimidated. This is a noteworthy shift from past years and the highest ever recorded response of perceived intimidation.
  - While conservative students have always been most likely to often feel intimidated (67%), a majority of liberal students (57%) now says the same. Moderate students feel often intimidated 59% to 38%.
- A higher 63% have often felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs because they were different than their classmates or peers, while 34% have not often felt intimidated. Again, this is this highest ever recorded response of perceived intimidation.
  - There are no significant difference in intimidation levels among liberal (64%), moderate (64%) and conservative students (66%).
  - There are notable ethnicity differences as white (65% to 32%) and Hispanic (67% to 31%) students are more likely to have often felt intimidated compared to black (53% to 44%) and Asian students (54% to 46%).

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- When given a list of hot-button issues, students are again most likely to cite politics (48%) as a topic they are uncomfortable speaking about or are off limits for discussion. This response is 10-points higher than last year. Only one in five (19%) say no topic is off limits for discussion in the classroom, down nine-points from last year.

### 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, the majority believes that there are certain issues school administrators or professors should prohibit from being debated on campus.*

- Almost half (48%) disagree that offensive political opinions – whether in the classroom or on social media – should be reported to school administrators, while 43% agree. The “disagree” response is identical to last year.
  - There are noteworthy differences by school type, as students in private schools agree 50% to 42% while students in public school disagree 51% to 39%.
  - While 56% of conservative students and 50% of moderate students disagree, 50% of liberal students agree they should be reported. students and 58% conservative students disagree, the plurality of liberal students, 47%, agree and 41% disagree.
- A bare majority (51%) agree that there are certain issues that school administrators or professors should prohibit from being debated on campus, while 41% disagree.
  - There are no significant differences in level of agreement by liberal (51%), moderate (53%) and conservative students (52%).
  - Male students (55% to 40%) are more likely than female students (49% to 42%) to agree.
- The majority (54%) disagrees that political comments they disagree with can be harmful to their mental health, while 38% agree.
  - Liberal students are most likely to agree (47%), compared to just 29% of moderate and conservative students.

### Part IV – Hate Speech

*Students are showing to be less forgiving of hate speech and more inclined to believe violent actions can be taken. The plurality now disagrees that hate speech is still technically protected under the First Amendment as free speech. Although still minority positions, record high numbers of students 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. Remarkably, almost half say violence in response to offensive speech is not a new phenomenon and in some cultures some types of offensive speech even merit the death penalty.*

- For the first time, a plurality now disagrees that hate speech, no matter how racist or bigoted it is, is still technically protected under the First Amendment as free speech. Forty-four percent (44%) agree, which is the lowest response to date.
  - The majority (53%) of liberal students disagrees, while conservative students agree 54% to 41%. Moderate students divide – 47% agree to 48% disagree.
  - Male students agree 55% to 41% while female students disagree 53% to 38%.
- Forty-four percent (44%) agree that it is sometimes appropriate to shout down or disrupt a speaker on campus, while 47% disagree. This is the highest “agree” response to date.
  - The majority (54%) of liberal students continues to agree with this statement while 55% of moderate students and 59% of conservative students disagree.
- Greater than four in ten (41%) now agree that if someone is using hate speech or making racially charged comments, physical violence can be justified to prevent this person from espousing their hateful views. This is another record high response.
  - Ideologically, agreement is highest among liberals at 47% and it is now the slight plurality response as 46% disagree. Among moderates, 41% agree and 50% disagree and among conservatives, 38% agree and 58% disagree.
  - By race, agreement is highest among black students at 57%, compared to 43% among Hispanic and Asian students and 37% among white students.
  - By major, Mathematics/Engineers and Humanities students were most likely to agree, 54% and 52%, respectively.
- Almost half (48%) agree that violence in response to offensive speech is not a new phenomenon and some speech can be so offensive in certain cases that it merits such harsh punishment like the death penalty.
  - The majority of liberal students agree, 55% to 33%.

## Part V – Diversity and Race Issues

*Most say professors should be required to make statements of diversity, equity and inclusion as a condition of employment. This sentiment also extends to new employees for any organization. Seven in ten support the creation of an office similar to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion that is dedicated to protecting free speech on campus. Barely half say America is inextricably linked to white supremacy and most continue to say systemic racism is a big problem in society today that white people still contribute to.*

- Two-thirds (67%) agree that their college or university should require that all professors and administrators make statements in favor of diversity, equity and inclusion as a condition of employment.
  - Ideologically, decisive majorities of all groups agree with it being highest among liberals (72%) compared to 64% among moderates and 63% among conservatives.
- A similar 65% agrees that new employees at any company, business or organization should be required to sign statements from their employers in favor of diversity, equity and inclusion as a condition of employment.
  - The ideological differences are more pronounced here as liberal students agree 73% to 19%, while conservative students agree by a tighter margin of 55% to 42%. Moderate students agree 64% to 26%.
  - There are also varying levels of agreement by school type as private school students agree 70% to 23% compared to students in state schools who agree 63% to 25%.
- Almost seven in ten support the creation of an office dedicated to protecting free speech on campus, while 19% oppose it.
  - There is broad ideological agreement as 68% of liberals, 74% of moderates and 70% of conservatives agree.
- By a 50% 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 49% to 42%.
  - Seven in ten (68%) liberal students believe America is linked to white supremacy while 72% of conservative students say America is moving forward. The plurality of moderate students says America is moving forward, 48% to 43%.
- Almost eight in ten (78%) 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 16% disagree. This is seven-points higher than last year.

## Part VI – Gender Issues

*While most students do not usually state their gender pronouns when introducing themselves in a formal setting, a slight majority says their school should require that students, professors and faculty state their preferred gender pronouns when introducing themselves. Three in four agree there are natural and inherent differences between men and women and a plurality says that while they may support transgender rights, transgender athletes performing in a sport league designated for a gender that is different from their assigned gender disadvantages other athletes. Students are almost evenly divided on recent state legislation restricting discussion about gender identity and sexual topics for children under 10 years old in public schools.*

- One in four (27%) usually state their preferred gender pronouns when introducing themselves in a formal setting, while most (66%) do not.
  - Students in private schools are more likely than those in state schools to state their gender pronouns, 33% and 24%, respectively.
  - Liberal students are most likely to use pronouns at 38%, followed by 23% for moderates and 12% for conservatives.
  - By major, 44% of Arts majors state their preferred gender pronouns.
- A majority (51%) agrees that their college or university should require that students, professors and faculty state their preferred gender pronouns when introducing themselves, while 40% disagree.
  - Liberal students agree 64% to 29%, while conservative students disagree by a near inverse margin, 64% to 31%. Moderates split at 45%.
- Nearly three in four (74%) agree that there are natural and inherent differences between men and women, while 17% disagree.
  - Eighty-four percent (84%) of conservatives agree as to 80% of moderates. Agreement is lower among liberals at 69%.
- When given a choice, 49% say allowing transgender college athletes to participate in a sports league designated for a gender that is different from their assigned gender at birth is an issue of fairness and disadvantages other athletes. Four in ten (40%) say transgender athletes should be able to participate in whichever gender class they feel more comfortable in.
  - By an 81% to 14% margin, conservative students say this is an issue of fairness as do 59% of moderates. The majority of liberal students (53%) says transgender athletes should be able to participate in whichever gender class they feel more comfortable in.
  - There is a notable gender difference as male students say it is an issue of fairness, 64% to 29% while female students say whichever gender class 47% to 41%.

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- Students are sharply divided on legislation restricting discussion about gender identity and sexual topics for children under 10 years old in public schools, with 45% favoring it and 44% opposing it.
  - Majorities of conservative (57% to 35%) and moderate students (52% to 34%) favor this while liberal students oppose 57% to 38%.
  - By race, support is highest among black students (55% to 29%) and Asian students (51% to 41%). White students divide 47% favor to 44% oppose while the majority of Hispanic students oppose 51% to 37%.

### Part VII – Miscellaneous Issues

*Students divide on whether they want to live under capitalism or socialism with most unsure. Almost half say they would be personally willing to give up a position or job opportunity for another individual who is less privileged than them. Half disapprove of the job President Biden is doing, with most of the disapproval being about his age and not being progressive enough.*

- Students divide on whether they would prefer to live under a capitalism economic system (31%) or socialist economic system (33%). The plurality (35%) was unsure.
  - Nearly half (48%) of liberal students prefer to live under socialism while 55% of conservatives prefer to live under capitalism. Moderate students split, 32% capitalism to 27% socialism.
- Almost half (49%) would personally be willing to give up a position or job opportunity for another individual who is less privileged than them, including 16% who would be “very willing.” Nearly four in ten (39%) would be unwilling to do so.
  - By ideology, liberal students (58%) would be most willing to give up a position, followed by 42% of moderate students and 39% of conservative students.
- The majority (56%) considers themselves privileged, while 31% do not.
  - By ideology, liberal students (64%) are most likely to say they are privileged, followed by 56% of conservatives and 49% of moderates.
  - By race, white students (65%) are most likely to say they are privileged, followed by 55% of Asian students, 49% of Hispanic students and 35% of black students.
- Just 38% of students approve of the job President Biden is doing, including only 9% who “strongly approve” and 29% who “somewhat approve.” Half (50%) disapprove, including 32% who disapprove because he is too old, not progressive enough and would prefer another person to lead the Democratic Party. Another 18% disapprove and support Republicans.

## McLaughlin & Associates

**Methodology:** McLaughlin & Associates conducted a national survey of 803 undergraduate students from August 29<sup>th</sup> to September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2022. 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 803 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 eighth iteration of our undergraduate research on behalf of the William F. Buckley, Jr. Program at Yale.

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