



TO: Lauren Noble, Executive Director – The Buckley Institute
FROM: Rob Schmidt, Inquire
Re: National Undergraduate Study – Executive Summary
Date: September 18, 2024

Below are the key findings from our tenth annual national study of undergraduates on behalf of the Buckley Institute.

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

Two-thirds believe the U.S. Constitution is important and the vast majority still see the First Amendment as important – both at record highs. Students have become more divided on speech codes.

- By a 65% to 28% margin, students say the U.S. Constitution is a very important document for our country that still needs to be followed compared to an outdated document. This 37-point margin in favor of the Constitution being important is the highest recorded to date.
 - A slight majority of liberal students (54%) says the Constitution is important, compared to 74% of moderates and 78% of conservatives.
 - Men (72%) are more likely than women (59%) to say "important."
- By an 85% to 12% margin, students say the First Amendment is an important amendment that still needs to be followed and respected compared to an outdated amendment that can no longer be applied. This 85% "Important" response is the highest recorded to date.
- Students divide on having speech codes to regulate speech for students and faculty - 46% favor to 44% oppose.
 - Underclassmen favor speech codes 52% to 39%, while upperclassmen oppose them 49% to 39%.
 - By race, black students are most likely to favor them, 63% to 34%. Asian students are most likely to oppose them, 50% to 39%.
 - Men favor speech codes 54% to 40%, while women are more divided - 46% oppose to 41% favor.
- By a 68% to 28% margin, students believe that their school encouraging free speech and intellectual diversity is more important than preventing offensive or insensitive dialogue.



- Greater than eight in ten (83%) agree that "hearing and discussing opinions I disagree with gives me a better education and better prepares me to be a leader in the future." Only 14% disagree. This is very similar to last year.

Part II – Expression in the Classroom

While majorities continue to say they have often felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs in class because they were different than their professors or classmates, the “intimidation” scores have declined from last year. Nearly two thirds support their schools taking stances on political issues.

- A slight majority (51%) says they have often felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs in class because they were different than their professors. Forty-six percent (46%) report not often feeling intimidated. Last year, six in ten students (61%) said they often felt intimidated.
 - Students in private schools are slightly more likely than students in state schools to often feel intimidated in sharing views different than their professors, 55% to 49%, respectively.
 - Women are more likely than men to often feel intimidated in sharing views different than their professors, 56% to 47%, respectively.
- When it comes to differing opinions with their classmates or peers, a higher 56% say they have often felt intimidated in sharing their ideas, opinions or beliefs. Forty-one percent (41%) report not often feeling intimidated. This is also a tighter margin than last year when 59% said they often felt intimidated and 38% did not.
 - Once again, students in private schools are slightly more likely than students in state schools to often feel intimidated in sharing views different than their classmates, 60% to 54%, respectively.
- Four in ten (40%) agree that they cannot be close friends with someone who affiliated with a different political party than them, while 54% disagree. This is a notable change from last year when 48% agreed and 44% disagreed.
 - Private school students are more likely than state school students to agree with this statement, 45% to 37%, respectively.
 - Exactly half of liberal students (50%) agree, compared to 62% of both moderate and conservative students who disagree.



- Nearly two in three (64%) agree with their school taking stances on political issues - even if they disagree with the position taken. One in four (26%) disagree.
 - Liberal students are most supportive at 73%, followed by 62% of moderate students and 50% of conservative students.

Part III – Insensitive and Hate Speech

For the first time since 2018, a majority says hate speech is still technically protected under the First Amendment as free speech. Roughly four in ten believe it is sometimes appropriate to shout down or disrupt a speaker and that physical violence can be justified to prevent someone from espousing hateful views. In addition to agreement on shouting down and physical violence being lower, the ideological differences – while still evident – are less stark.

- Three in ten (31%) believe that offensive speech should be subject to criminal prosecution, while 55% disagree.
 - Almost four in ten liberal students (39%) agree, compared to 27% of conservative students and 23% of moderate students.
- A similar 31% agree that political comments they disagree with can be harmful to their mental health, while 62% disagree. Agreement has dropped by eight-points from last year.
- By a 54% to 41% margin, students agree that hate speech is still technically protected under the First Amendment as free speech. This amounts to a net change of 10 points from last year, when 46% agreed and 43% disagreed.
 - Conservative students are most likely to agree at 65%, followed by moderate students at 57% and liberal students dividing 50% to 45%.
 - Men (62% to 34%) are more likely to agree than women (47% to 46%).
- Four in ten (40%) agree that it is sometimes appropriate to shout down or disrupt a speaker on campus, while 51% disagree. Last year, slightly more students agreed than disagreed - 46% to 45%, respectively.
 - Almost half of liberal students (49%) agree. Conservative students are next highest at 39%, followed by only 30% of moderate students who agree.
- Thirty-eight percent (38%) agree that physical violence can be justified to prevent someone from espousing hate speech or making racially charged comments, while 53% disagree. This is the first time since 2021 that the majority of students disagreed with this statement.

Part IV – Diversity and Race Issues

Most continue to say professors should be required to make statements of diversity, equity and inclusion as a condition of employment. For the first time, a plurality says America is moving forward and the promise of equality continues to be extended to more people.

- By a two to one margin of 61% to 29%, students agree that their school should require all professors and administrators make statements in favor of diversity, equity and inclusion as a condition of employment. This has tightened slightly from last year when 63% agreed and 24% disagreed.
 - Seven in ten liberal students (70%) agree, as do 57% of moderate students and 52% of conservative students.

- When given a choice, nearly half (49%) say America is moving forward and the promise of equality continues to be extended to more people. Forty-two percent (42%) believe America is inextricably linked to white supremacy and in general most minorities remain excluded from the American promise of equality. This question has been asked since 2020 and this is the first time that the "moving forward" response is higher than the "linked to white supremacy" response.
 - Conservative students are most likely to say America is moving forward, 70% to 22%. Moderate students say America is moving forward by a 50% to 39% margin. The majority of liberal students (55%) say America is inextricably linked to white supremacy.
 - Men say America is moving forward 58% to 34%, while women say America is inextricably linked to white supremacy 47% to 43%.

Part V – Gender Issues

A slight majority agree with mandating the use of preferred gender pronouns. A clear majority continues to believe allowing transgender college athletes to participate in a sports league that is different from their assigned gender at birth is an issue of fairness and disadvantages other athletes over believing transgender athletes should be able to participate in whichever gender class they feel more comfortable in.

- A majority (53%) agrees that their school should require students, professors and faculty state their preferred gender pronouns when introducing themselves. Four in ten (40%) disagree. Opinions have tightened since last year when 58% agreed and 35% disagreed.
 - Sixty-two percent of liberal students (62%) agree, while pluralities of moderate students and conservative students disagree, 47% and 50%, respectively.

- On the issue of allowing transgender college athletes participating in a sports league designated for a gender different from their assigned gender at birth, 63% believe this disadvantages other athletes because there are biological differences between men and women. Nearly one in three (29%) say transgender athletes should be able to participate in whichever gender class they feel more comfortable in. Last year, 59% said other athletes are disadvantaged compared to 32% who said they should be able to participate in whichever gender class they prefer.
 - Nearly eight in ten conservative students (78%) say this disadvantages other athletes, as do 74% of moderate students. The majority of liberal students (52%) also say this disadvantages other athletes.
 - Men (70%) are more likely than women (58%) to say this disadvantages other athletes.

Part VI – Personal Finances and Economics

Seven in ten believe they will be able to earn enough money to sustain the life they want to live after graduating and obtaining employment. Students remain divided on wanting to live under capitalism or socialism. Most believe federal government price controls on groceries are effective in addressing inflation and increasing costs.

- Thirty-eight percent (38%) believe they will be financially able to pay off their student loan debt after they graduate. One in three (33%) believe they won't be able to and 18% say it does not apply because their college is already paid for. This is consistent with last year's findings.
 - Men (48%) are significantly more likely than women (31%) to believe they will be financially able to pay off their student loan debt.
- Greater than seven in ten (72%) believe they will be able to earn enough money to sustain the life they want to live after they graduate and obtain employment. Twenty-two percent (22%) disagree.
 - Men are also more likely than women to believe they will earn enough money to sustain the life they want to live, 79% to 69%, respectively.
- Students are split on preferring to live under a capitalist economic system (36%) or a socialist economic system (34%). A notable 30% were unsure. Students were similarly divided in 2022 and 2023, but this is the first time more students said "capitalism."
 - The plurality of liberal students (43%) prefers socialism, while the majority of conservative students (51%) prefers capitalism. Moderate students are split - 36% capitalism to 33% socialism.
 - Men (46%) are more likely than women (29%) to prefer a capitalist system.
- Greater than seven in ten (72%) agree that federal government price controls on groceries are an effective way to address the inflation and increasing costs that are making it harder for Americans to buy food. Only 17% disagree.
 - Three in four liberal and moderate students (75%) agree, as do 67% of conservative students.



Part VII – Crime and Public Safety

While most agree rising crime is a serious issue, opinions are divided on securing the Southern border.

- Nearly eight in ten (79%) agree that rising crime in America's cities is a serious issue.
- Students are more divided on securing the Southern border, as 52% agree that it should be a priority for American politicians and 40% disagree.
 - Unlike rising crime, ideological and gender differences persist on securing the Southern border. The majority of liberal students (53%) do not believe it should be a priority, compared to 62% of moderate students and 70% of conservative students who say it should be a priority.
 - Majorities of black (55%), Hispanic (53%), white (51%) and Asian students (51%) agree.
 - Men (60%) are more likely than women (47%) to agree.

Part VIII – Miscellaneous Issues

Almost half continue to believe the Supreme Court is a partisan institution and outdated. Nearly seven in ten students believe in some form of foreign divestment and Israel was the highest scoring country when given a list. Vice President Kamala Harris leads former President Donald Trump by 26-points. Harris voters are more likely to believe that Trump cannot be elected in a way that is fair and trustworthy.

- By a 49% to 38% margin, students believe that the Supreme Court has become nothing more than a partisan institution where the outcomes are predictable compared to believing the Court tries to decide cases based on their understanding of the law regardless of political implications. This is very similar to last year.
 - Liberal students are most likely to say the Court is outdated, 58% to 32%. However, a slight plurality of conservative students also say the Court is outdated, 46% to 41%. Moderate students say the Court tries to decide cases based on their understanding of the law, 47% to 40%.

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- Nearly seven in ten students (68%) believe in some form of foreign divestment, with the most popular position being divestment from all foreign countries and entities (25%). When it comes to specific countries, Israel was highest at 18%, followed by Russia (17%), China (11%) and the United Kingdom (10%).
 - Nearly one in four liberal students (24%) support divestment from Israel compared to 13% of moderate students and 14% of conservative students.
 - Similar shares of liberal students (22%) and conservative students (20%) support divestment from Russia.
- The majority of students (53%) have attended a rally or protest in the last year. Students were most likely to attend an LGBTQ+ rights rally (23%) or pro-abortion rights rally (23%). Seventeen percent (17%) attended a pro-Palestine rally compared to 7% who attended a pro-Israel rally.
 - Ideologically, liberal students are most likely to have attended a rally (62%) with the top three causes being pro-abortion rights (31%), LGBTQ+ rights (30%) and social justice (24%).
 - By race, black students are most likely to have attended a rally (67%) with the top three causes being pro-abortion rights (33%), social justice (30%) and LGBTQ+ rights (29%).
- Nearly six in ten support restricting abortion in some form. Twenty-nine percent (29%) believe there should not be any restrictions on abortion. One in four (25%) believe abortions should be permitted up until the third trimester with exceptions and another 30% believe abortions should be permitted up until the second trimester with exceptions. About one in ten (12%) believe abortion should be outlawed in all or almost all cases.
- In the election for President, Vice President Harris leads former President Trump 55% to 29%, with 10% of students still yet to make up their mind.
 - Liberal students are voting for Harris 79% to 13%, while conservative students are voting for Trump 66% to 18%. Harris has the edge with moderate students, 43% to 35%.
 - Harris is winning female students 60% to 24%, while Harris' lead shrinks to 10-points with male students, 46% to 36%.
- Sixty-three percent of Harris voters disagree - including 46% who strongly disagree - that Donald Trump could be elected president in a way that is fair and trustworthy. This is higher than the 60% of Trump voters who disagree - and the 34% who strongly disagree - that Kamala Harris could be elected president in a way that is fair and trustworthy.



Methodology: Inquire conducted a national survey of 823 undergraduate students from September 5th to 12th, 2024. 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 (2021) 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 7,856,529 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 +/- 3.4% for the 823 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 tenth iteration of our undergraduate research on behalf of the Buckley Institute.

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