heterodox academy

Understanding Campus Expression Across Higher Ed

Heterodox Academy's Annual Campus Expression Survey

campus expression survey

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Executive Summary

Heterodox Academy (HxA) is on a mission to improve education and research in universities by increasing open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement. Ideas are the currency of the academy, and advocates for change need the best ideas and evidence available in order to be effective.

HxA has been conducting its annual Campus Expression Survey (CES) to provide benchmarking data and insights on student viewpoint expression and to identify variables associated with expression on campus. Over the past four years we have demonstrated the urgency of the problem with, on average, nearly two-thirds of students reporting that they censor their views in the classroom on culturally controversial topics.

The 2022 HxA CES **surveyed 1,564 full-time college students** (ages 18 to 24) across the United States in November 2022. The sample was stratified by region, race, and gender. Our fourth year of data collection has yielded continued insights into the problem of campus expression by students. It also offers small signs of hope that viewpoint diversity and open inquiry may be improving from the student perspective.

Students' Reluctance to Discuss Controversial Topics Remains High But Shows Signs of Improvement

58.8%
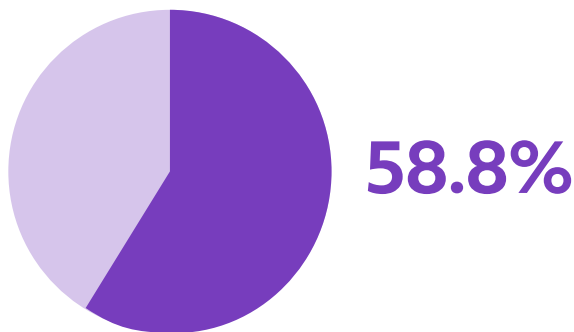
58.8% of students in 2022 reported being reluctant to discuss at least one of the five controversial topics asked about — a slight decrease from 60% in 2021.

40.7% of students were reluctant to discuss politics, 28.6% of students were reluctant to discuss religion, and slightly more than one in five students were reluctant to discuss sexual orientation, race, and gender.

Year-over-year data shows that fewer students reported being reluctant to discuss controversial topics in 2022 compared with 2020 — an encouraging trend.

Self-identified Democrats were the least reluctant to discuss controversial topics; self-identified Republican students were the most reluctant to discuss controversial topics.

Black or African American students were the least reluctant to discuss such topics in class.

Students' Reluctance Is Associated Primarily with Fear of Negative Social Consequences from Peers

The primary reported reason for why students self-censor on controversial topics in the classroom was fear of negative reactions or retribution from fellow students.

62.3%
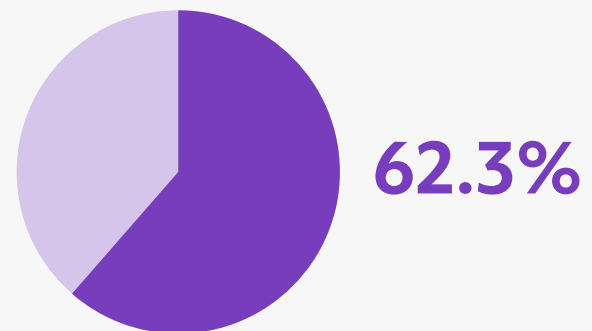
62.3% of students chose "other students would make critical comments with each other after class" as the top reason why they were reluctant to share their views in class.

Students' reports suggest that they overestimate their peers' negative reactions to their expressed views in class by about 3x.

High Peer Interaction Is Associated with Greater Expression Among Students

Students who reported high levels of interaction with fellow students were less likely to self-censor in class.

3X

Students were 3x more likely to report they have a "high amount" of interaction with their peers in 2022 compared with respondents in 2020.

There were 7x more students learning primarily in person in 2022 compared with 2020.
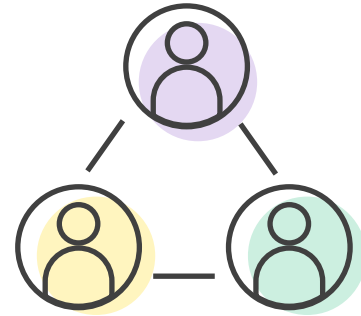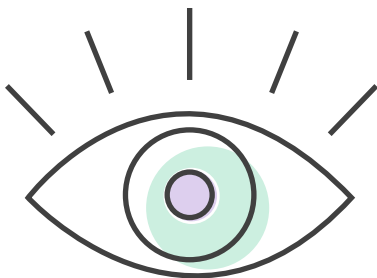
Campus Culture Needs Continued Improvement to Foster Viewpoint Diversity

63.2%
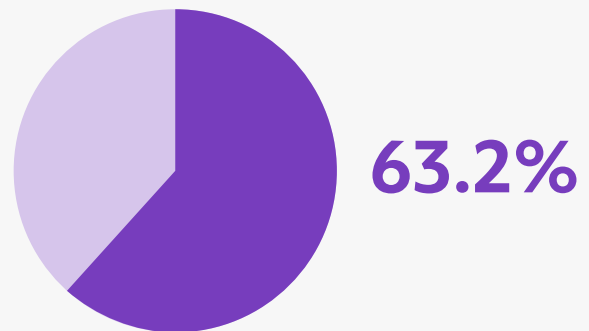
63.2% of students agreed that the climate on their campus prevents people from saying things they believe because others might find those views offensive.

61% of students reported that their university "frequently" or "very frequently" encourages students to consider a wider variety of viewpoints.
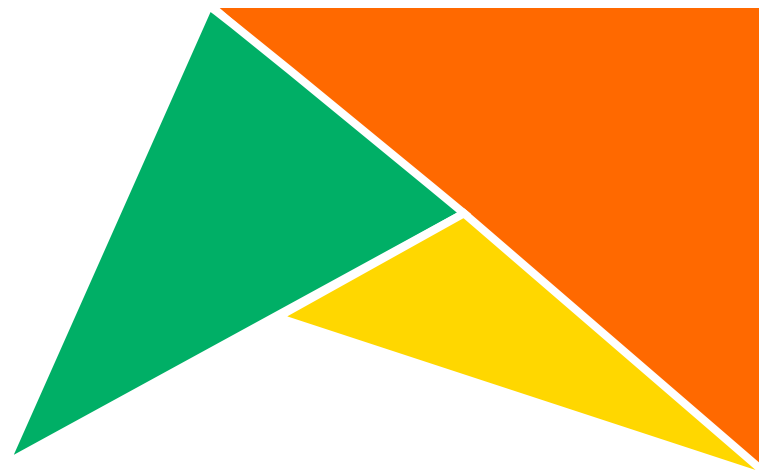
Continued Self-Censure by Students on Campus

The student experience in higher education is one of great possibilities. In addition to helping students gain skills and knowledge necessary to contribute fruitfully in their chosen careers, the university is a place where students should be able to question freely, inquire widely, and converse openly. The university culture must be one in which viewpoint diversity, open inquiry, and constructive disagreement are explicitly valued and practiced.

When academic environments lack sufficient viewpoint diversity, assumptions go unchallenged, promising ideas go underexplored, and it can be difficult to understand or engage with those of different backgrounds. When academic environments are insufficiently open to inquiry, knowledge can be suppressed for the benefit of special interests, innovation can be stifled, progress on important problems can be impeded, and intellectual growth can be stunted.

When a community is marked by intellectual humility, empathy, trust, and curiosity, viewpoint diversity gives rise to engaged and respectful debate, constructive

disagreement, and shared progress toward truth. In an intellectually open environment, members of the community can explore facts, opinions, and beliefs; discover and create important innovations; solve problems; and flourish intellectually. And finally, learning from our differences, and modeling how to engage despite them, is the foundation of healthy academic practice, and of democratic society itself.

In the classroom especially, the benefits of viewpoint diversity and open inquiry are inhibited when students self-censure due to fear of retribution from peers. Heterodox Academy (HxA) is on a mission to ensure that education and research at institutions of higher learning provide students and all members of the campus community to have a place to openly express diverse perspectives and engage in open inquiry without fear.

HxA has been conducting its annual Campus Expression Survey (CES) to provide benchmarking data and insights on student viewpoint expression and identify variables associated with expression on campus. Over the past four years we have demonstrated the urgency of the problem with, on average, nearly two-thirds of students reporting that they censor their views in the classroom on culturally controversial topics.

Our fourth year of data collection has again demonstrated the problem of campus expression by students. But it also offers emerging signs of hope that viewpoint diversity and open inquiry may be improving from the student perspective.

This year, the data prompts the following takeaways:
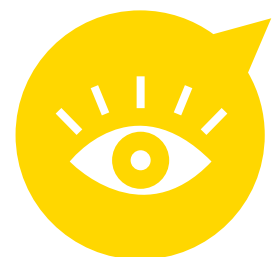
Takeaway 1

Students' Reluctance to Discuss Controversial Topics Remains High But Shows Signs of Improvement

Consistent across the four years of CES data collection, nearly two in three students reported self-censoring on at least one of the controversial topics asked about. Our 2022 data shows that **the percentage of students reporting self-censure remained high at 58.5% in 2022,** although it represented a slight decrease from 60% in 2021.

We observed a consistent **pattern of a slight decrease of self-censure across the past three years.** Slightly fewer students reported self-censoring on the five controversial topics asked about (i.e., gender, politics, race, sexual orientation, and religion), after a spike in reported self-censure between 2019 and 2020.

Demographic variables continued to be associated with differences in self-censure on controversial topics. **Students identifying as Democrat, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino/a, and/or female all reported significantly less self-censorship** on specific topics asked about in the survey.

Takeaway 2

Students' Reluctance Is Associated Primarily with Fear of Negative Social Consequences from Peers

The primary reported reason for **why students self-censor on controversial topics in the classroom was fear of negative reactions or retribution from fellow students.** When students who expressed reluctance to share their views on a controversial topic were then asked to write in their reasons why, the top response category was fear from other students, representing 32.9% of total responses.

Students were then provided with a list of eight prefilled reasons why they might self-censure, and 62.3% of students chose "other students would make critical comments with each other after class" and 57% of students chose "other students would criticize my comments as offensive."

There was a mismatch between what students feared from other students and what they reported they would do if a fellow student expressed a viewpoint they disagreed with. The top response students chose when asked what they would themselves do if another student expressed a different viewpoint, endorsed by 66.3% of students, was "I would ask questions to better understand."

In contrast, 15.6% of students said they would "speak out to criticize them as being offensive" and 21.7% said they would "not say anything during class but would make critical comments outside of class." Overall, **students' reports suggest that they overestimate their peers' negative reactions to their expressed views in class by about 3x** — a puzzle for future research.

Takeaway 3

High Peer Interaction Is Associated with Greater Expression Among Students

The CES data shows a sharp increase in self-censorship between 2019 and 2020. During the 2020 CES data collection, the majority of students were taking classes fully online and had little classroom or campus interaction with peers. In contrast, 2022 CES data shows that 91% of student respondents were taking classes in person, and 3x more students reported a "high" level of interaction with peers in 2022 compared with 2020.

Our data shows that **students who reported high levels of interaction with students were less likely to self-censor** and were more likely to feel confident to share their views in the classroom. In fact, across the controversial topics asked about in

the survey, at least 10% more students reported reluctance to share their views in the classroom if they reported lower amounts of peer interaction compared with students who reported a high amount of peer interaction.

Takeaway 4

Campus Culture Needs Continued Improvement to Foster Viewpoint Diversity

When asked about the broader campus climate, **61% of students reported that their university "frequently" or "very frequently" encourages students to consider a wider variety of viewpoints** and perspectives on issues. This is a 17-point increase since 2021, but similar to 2019 levels.

Although this is encouraging news, this means that 39% of students reported that their institutions were not explicitly encouraging viewpoint diversity frequently on campus. Although top-down communications from one's institution is necessary to foster a climate that values diverse perspectives, sustained culture change takes time. The **majority of students — 63.2% — still feared causing offense if they openly expressed their views on campus**, which has increased nearly 10 points since 2019 and 2020.

About the Data and Methods

The 2022 HxA Campus Expression Survey (CES) **surveyed 1,564 full-time college students** (ages 18 to 24) across the United States in November 2022 via CloudResearch. The sample was stratified by region, race, and gender based on proportions reported by the National Center for Educational Statistics and previous Gallup-Knight data collections.

The goal of the CES is to measure the extent to which students feel reluctant discussing various topics on their campuses, what variables may covary with reluctance, and broader questions about campus climate.

The data in this report is presented as descriptive unless otherwise specified.

Students were asked a variety of questions about how comfortable or reluctant they were to speak their views in the classroom on five core controversial topics (i.e., politics, race, religion, sexual orientation, and gender) as well as additional controversial topics relevant to the past year (i.e., the COVID-19 pandemic, free speech, and abortion). Students also reported their reluctance to speak their views about noncontroversial topics for comparison.

If students endorsed any reluctance to discuss one or more of the five controversial topics, they were then asked to share which possible consequences they were concerned about, first by entering feared consequences in an open response box, followed by selecting any of five provided options. Students were also asked what they would do themselves if another student expressed a viewpoint they strongly disagreed with about a controversial topic.

The survey also included questions about their opportunity to discuss with or get to know other students in their classes, in addition to the format in which their classes were held (i.e., online, hybrid, in person). Finally, students were asked questions about the climate of expression on their campus and how often university administration encouraged students to express diverse viewpoints.

Demographic questions included gender, sexual orientation, university type and location, race and ethnicity, political orientation, religion, and socioeconomic status.

Most data is reported as descriptive data across the various demographic indicators collected. Fisher's exact tests were used for comparisons of viewpoint expression questions across various demographic indicators.

For full information regarding the sample and methods, data, and data analysis, please see Supporting Documentation, available at www.heterodoxacademy.org. For the 2019–2021 reports, please see here.
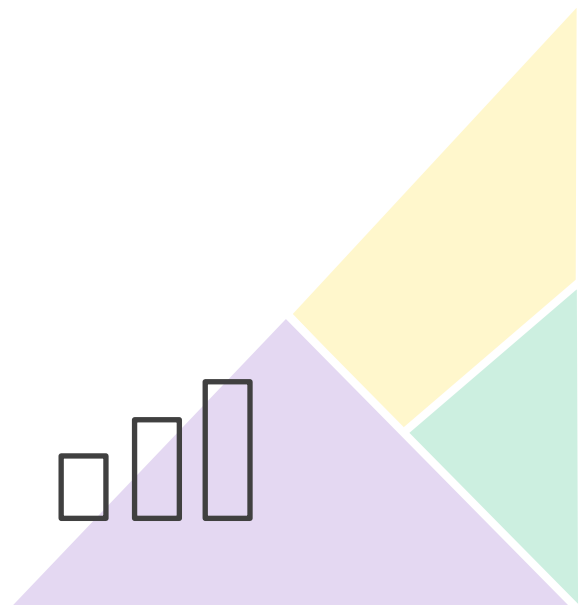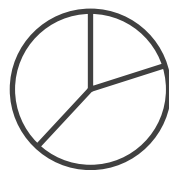
The Student Sample by the Numbers

Percentage of students at public or private universities

Private 24.80%

Public 75.20%
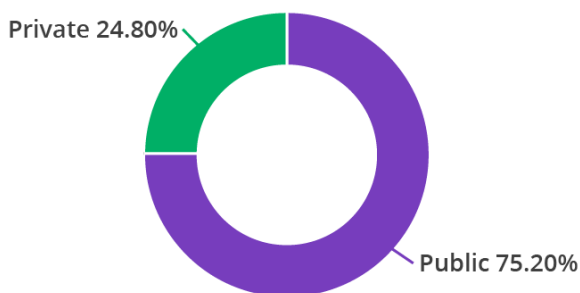
figure 1

Percentage of students attending universities by region

West 20.50%

Midwest 23.90%

South 33.80%

Northeast 21.80%
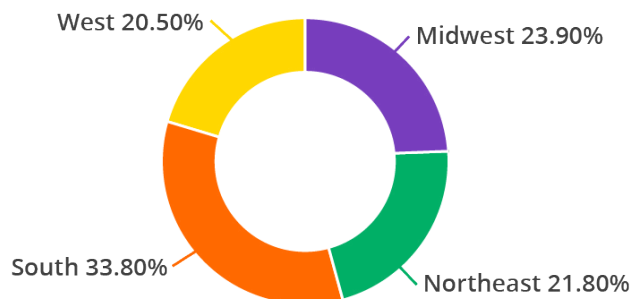
figure 2

Percentage of students taking classes by modality

Other 0.30%

Online 9.10%

Balanced 11.90%

In-Person 78.70%
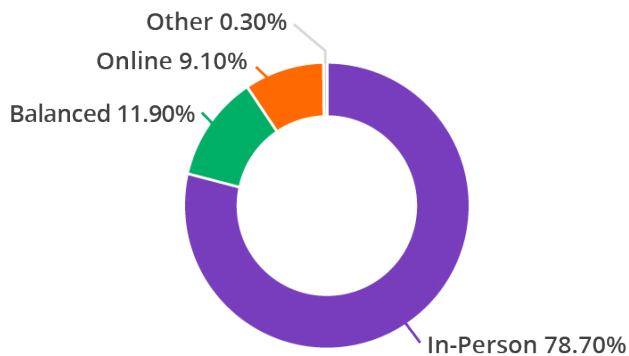
figure 3

Percentage of students by academic class standing

Unknown 1.6%

Senior 23.00%

First-year 21.20%

Junior 28.40%

Sophomore 25.80%
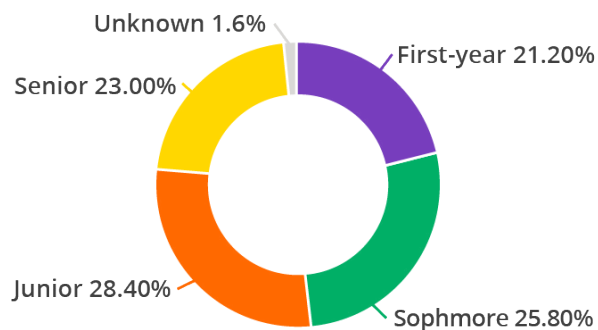
figure 4

Gender

54.6% female

41.8% male

3.6% nonbinary

Sexual Orientation

72.4% straight or heterosexual

17.0% bisexual

4.8% gay or lesbian

3.9% not listed

1.9% asexual

Religion

51.5% Christian

16.6% other

13.1% atheist

11.4% agnostic

<3% each: Muslim, Jewish, Buddist, Hindu

*Correction: Figure 1 labels were switched in the original version of this report. The error was corrected on 4/14.

Percentage of students by self-reported race and ethnicity

Other	1.0%
Middle Eastern	1.5%
Multi-racial	3.8%
Asian	6.3%
Black or African American	13.6%
Hispanic or Latino	18.6%
White	55.2%
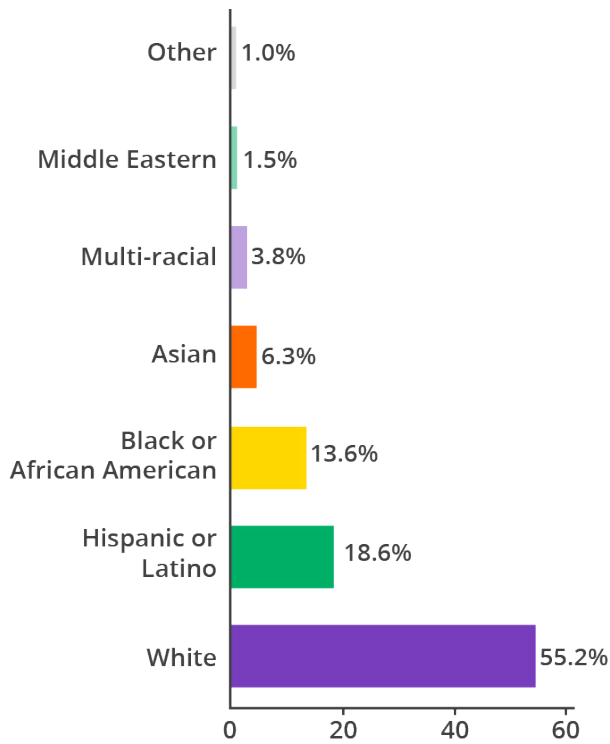
figure 5

Percentage of students by self-reported political orientation

Libertarian	3.4%
Other	5.5%
Don't Know	10.8%
Republican	19.9%
Independent	20.1%
Democrat	40.3%
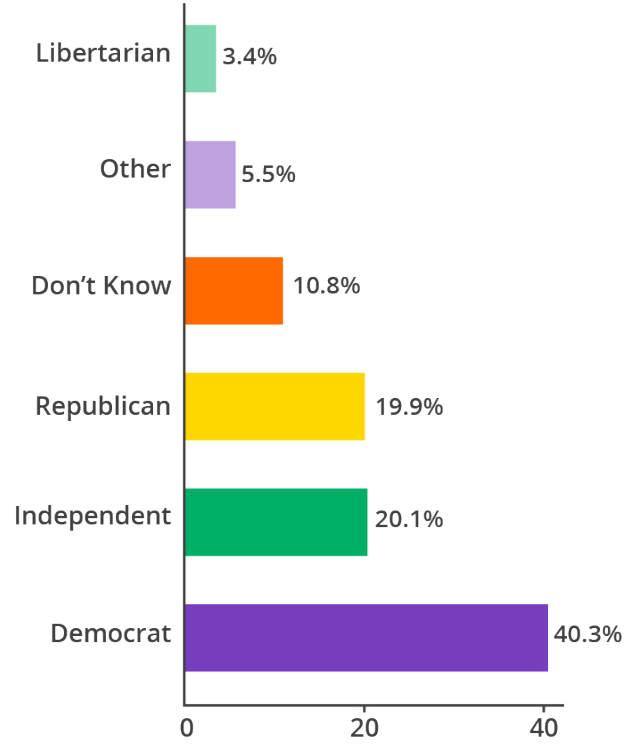
figure 6

Percentage of students by self-reported total family income

Less than $20,000	12.4%
$20,000 to $29,999	9.3%
$30,000 to $39,999	7.0%
$40,000 to $49,999	9.5%
$50,000 to $74,999	16.4%
$75,000 to $99,999	13.3%
$100,000 to $149,999	11.4%
$150,000 to $199,999	5.0%
$200,000 to $249,999	2.7%
$250,000 to $449,999	1.8%
$500,000 or more	1.3%
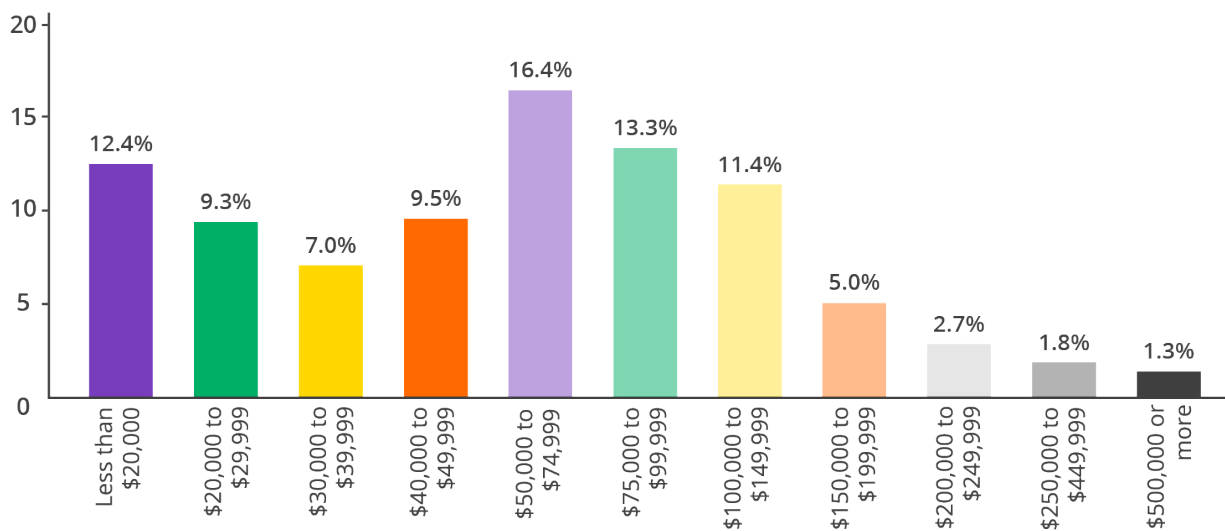
Note: N = 156 (10%) of respondents skipped this question and are not shown in the above graph.

figure 7
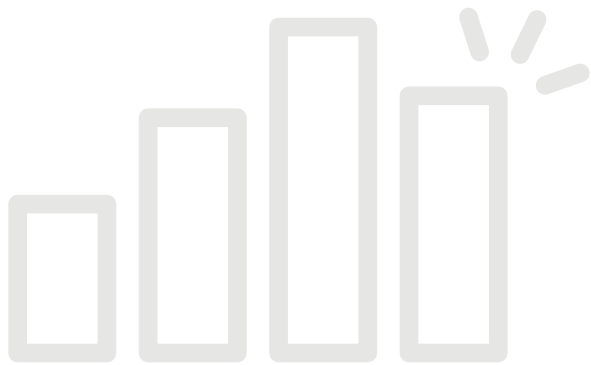
Takeaway 1: Students' Reluctance to Discuss Controversial Topics Remains High But Shows Signs of Improvement

Student self-censure, particularly across controversial topics, remains a core issue on campuses today. Our 2022 data shows that the percentage of students reporting self-censure remained high:

58.5% of students in 2022 report being reluctant to discuss at least one of the five controversial topics asked about, although this represents a slight decrease from 60% in 2021.

Students' Reluctance to Discuss Specific Topics

Similar to prior years, students were asked to report their reluctance to discuss the topics of gender, politics, race, religion, and sexual orientation in their classes during the semester, in addition to a comparison question to generally "noncontroversial" topics.

In 2022, **40.7% of students were reluctant to discuss politics**, 28.6% of students were reluctant to discuss religion, and slightly more than one in five students were reluctant to discuss sexual orientation, race, and gender (Figure 8). The year-over-year data shows that fewer students

report being reluctant to discuss controversial topics in 2022 compared with 2020 — an encouraging trend.

For comparison, just 10.5% of students reported being reluctant to discuss noncontroversial topics. These results suggest that **students are at least twice as likely to report reluctance to discuss controversial topics compared with noncontroversial topics**, with students being nearly 4x as likely to report reluctance to discuss politics specifically.

Students' reported reluctance to discuss specific topics
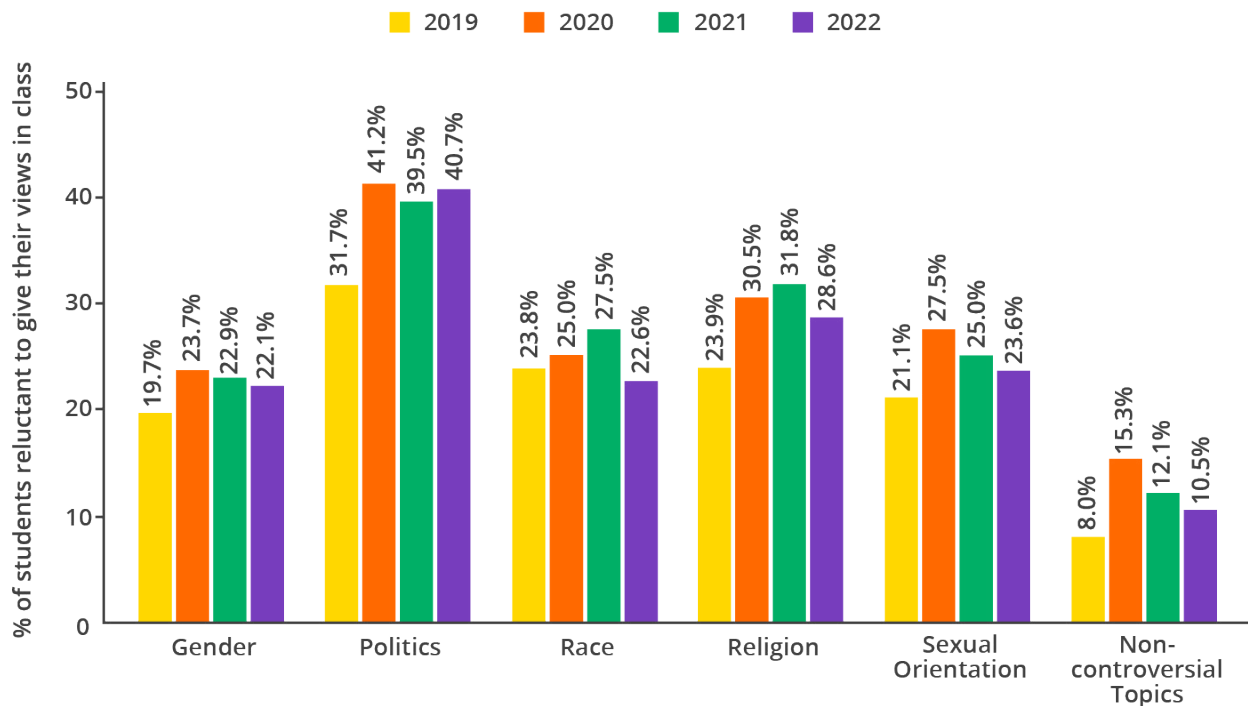
figure 8

Students were also asked about their reluctance to discuss three special topics included in the 2022 survey. The most controversial of these topics was abortion, with **29% of students reporting a reluctance to discuss abortion in class**. With COVID, 16.4% of students reported a reluctance to discuss that topic in class. Free speech itself appeared not to be a controversial topic with just 12.5% of students reporting a reluctance to discuss, similar to the rate for noncontroversial topics reported in Figure 8.

Students were also reluctant to discuss special topics asked about in 2022:

29%
of students were reluctant to discuss abortion
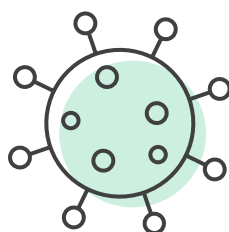
16.4%
of students were reluctant to discuss COVID
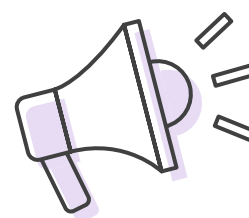
12.5%
of students were reluctant to discuss free speech

Students' Political Orientation and Demographics Associated with Reluctance

Exploratory analyses were conducted to understand how various self-reported demographic information was or was not related to students' reluctance to discuss controversial topics in class.

The data shows that students' political orientation was associated with their reluctance to discuss the controversial topics asked about, with **self-identified Democrats being the least reluctant to discuss controversial topics** of politics, race, gender, and sexual orientation compared with all other political orientation categories. **Self-identified Republican students were the most reluctant to discuss controversial topics** of race, gender, and sexual orientation compared with all other political orientations.

Students' reported reluctance to discuss specific topics by self-identified political orientation

Democrat (n = 631) Republican (n = 311) Independent (n = 314)
Libertarian (n = 53) Other (n = 86) Don't Know (n = 169)

% of group reluctant to share views

	Politics	Race	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Religion
Democrat	31%	18%	16%	19%	29%
Republican	41%	27%	30%	31%	25%
Independent	48%	26%	23%	22%	29%
Libertarian	47%	25%	25%	25%	26%
Other	48%	24%	23%	28%	28%
Don't Know	57%	24%	28%	28%	32%
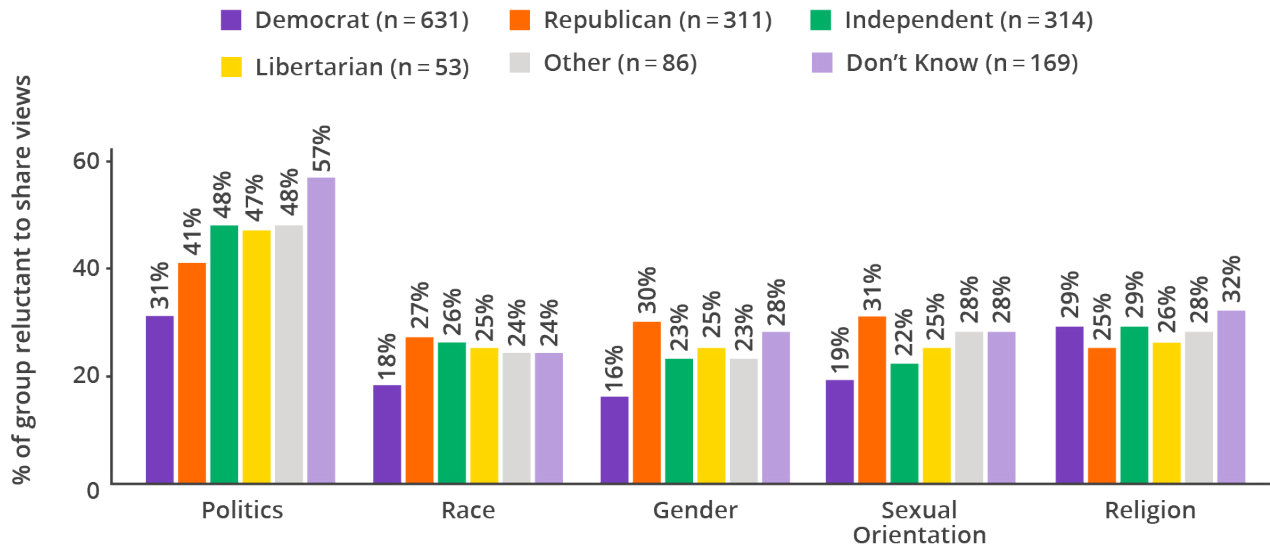
figure 9

Across the controversial topics of politics, race, gender, and religion, self-identified **Black or African American students were the least reluctant to discuss such topics in class**; for the topic of sexual orientation, self-identified Hispanic or Latino students were the least reluctant to discuss in class.

Students' reported reluctance to discuss specific topics by self-identified race and ethnicity

Asian (n = 98) Black or African American (n = 213) Hispanic or Latino (n = 291) Multiracial (n = 60) White (n = 863)

% of group reluctant to share views

	Politics	Race	Gender	Sexual Orientation	Religion
Asian	43%	24%	22%	27%	35%
Black or African American	31%	9%	15%	22%	23%
Hispanic or Latino	40%	17%	20%	18%	27%
Multiracial	48%	22%	27%	30%	27%
White	42%	27%	24%	25%	30%
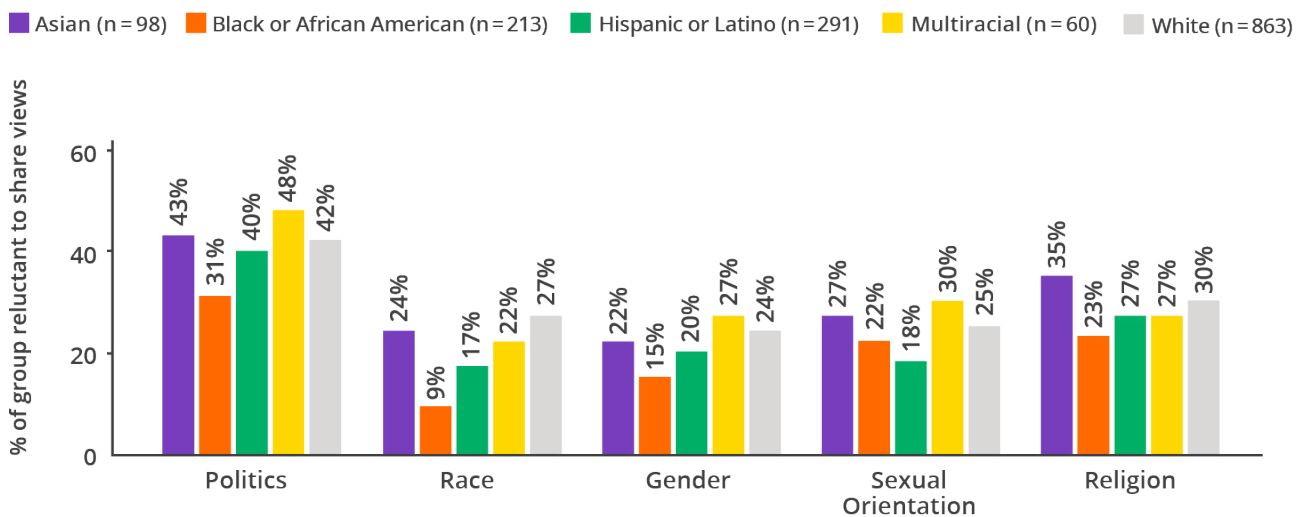
figure 10

Students' self-identified gender was not associated with a reluctance to discuss the five core controversial topics asked about. However, **for the topic of abortion specifically, males were significantly more** **likely to report being reluctant to share their views** (Figure 11). No additional significant differences in reluctance to discuss controversial topics emerged across the remaining demographic variables collected.

Students' reported reluctance to discuss abortion by self-identified gender; males significantly more likely to report reluctance, *p* < .05

Female (n = 854)   Male (n = 653)   Other (n = 57)
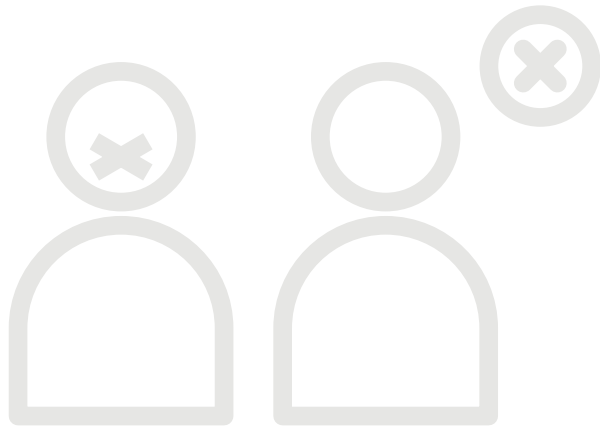
Abortion: 25% (Female), 35% (Male), 18% (Other)

% of group reluctant to share views

figure 11

Takeaway 2: Students' Reluctance Is Associated Primarily with Fear of Negative Social Consequences from Peers

That students reported a reluctance to share views in the classroom, especially on topics seen as controversial, is important. But to help change campus culture, we must also understand why students are reluctant. **The primary reported reason for why students self-censor on controversial topics in the classroom was fear of negative reactions or retribution from fellow students.**

The 2022 CES used two approaches to

understand students' reasons for why they were reluctant to share their views on controversial topics in class. We first asked students to write an open-ended comment in response to the prompt: "Please explain why you are somewhat or very reluctant to express your views. What do you perceive the consequences will be to sharing your views publicly?"

Of the 915 students who expressed a reluctance to discuss at least one of the five

controversial topics (i.e., gender, politics, race, religion, and sexual orientation), 905 provided a response. Our coding of these responses shows that **the top response category provided by students was fear** **from other students**, representing 32.9% of total responses. Examples of negative social consequences shared by students included being attacked, made fun of, ridiculed, judged, or "canceled."

Percentage of students' open-ended comments of why they are fearful of expressing their views on controversial topics in class

Category	%
Fear of negative social consequences from fellow students	32.9%
General dislike for conflict or debate	22.4%
Lacked knowledge on topic and did not want to say something incorrect	10.4%
Did not want to upset or offend others	5.5%
General shyness or awkwardness in speaking up in class	5.5%
Topics are too personal and should not be discussed in group settings	3.6%
Don't care enough about the topic	2.3%
Fear of some sort of physical harm as a result	1.0%
Prefer to listen to what others have to say instead	0.7%

% of students' open-ended comments

figure 12

Students were then provided with a list of eight prefilled reasons why they might self-censure (the same methodology as in previous years). Of the available options, **62.3% of students chose "other students would make critical comments with each other after class" (Figure 13), up more** **than six points from 56.1% in 2021.**

Fifty-seven percent of students in 2022 also reported a reluctance to share their views out of fear that other students would criticize their views as offensive, up nearly five points from 52.2% in 2021 (Figure 13).

Percentage of students who selected each of the eight options for why they are reluctant to share their views in class

■ I would be concerned that...

... other students would make critical comments with each other after class	62.3%
... other students would criticize my views as offensive	57.0%
... someone would post critical comments on social media	31.0%
... the professor would criticize my views as offensive	28.4%
... the professor would say my views are wrong	26.3%
... the professor would give me a lower grade because of my views	22.3%
... someone would file a harassment complaint	22.1%
... I would cause others psychological harm	16.0%

figure 13

Overall, students were most reluctant to share their views due to the fear of fellow students criticizing them in class, on campus, and online.

Only a little over a quarter of students, however, reported they were reluctant to share their views due to the professor being critical or saying their views are wrong.

Mismatch Between Students' Reported Fear of Peers and Their Own Reported Likelihood to Criticize Others

Despite the top reason that students were reluctant to share their views in class was getting negative responses from fellow students, when all respondents were asked what they would do in a situation in which a student shared a different viewpoint in class, only small proportions chose negative responses.

There is **a mismatch between students' expectations of others and their own reported responses**. The top response students chose when asked what they would themselves do if another student expressed a differing viewpoint was "I would ask questions so I can better understand," endorsed by 66.3% of students (Figure 14).

Percentage of students who selected each of the six options for what they would do if a student shared a differing viewpoint in class

■ I would…

- … ask questions so I can understand better — 66.3%
- … not say or do anything but would think badly of them — 27.4%
- … not say anything during class but would make critical comments after — 21.7%
- … speak out to criticize them as being offensive — 15.6%
- … post critical comments about them on social media — 8.3%
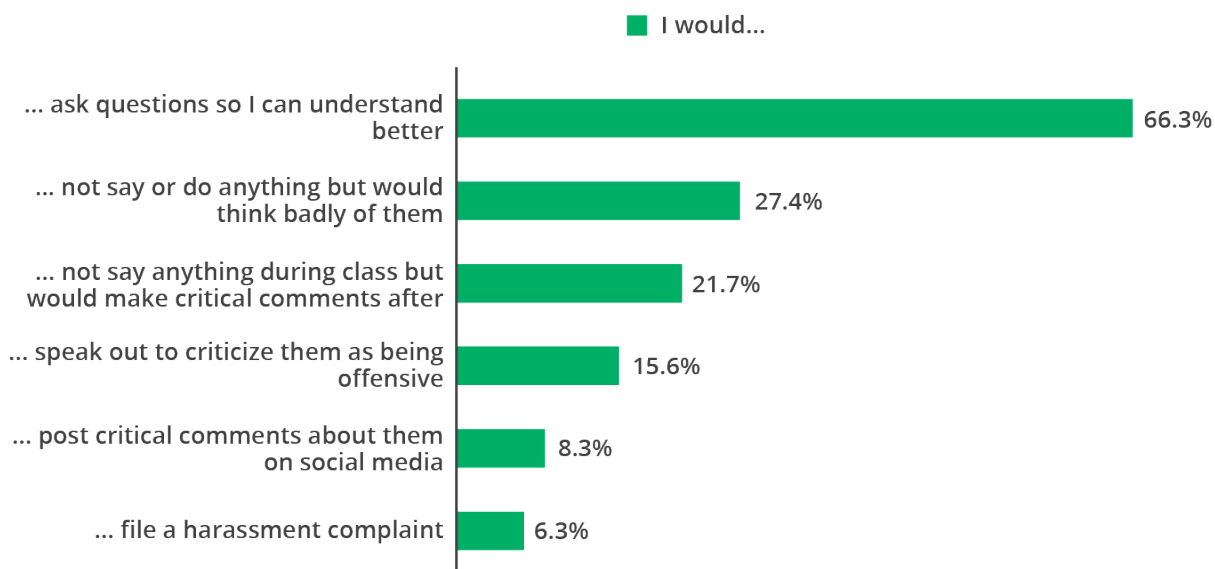- … file a harassment complaint — 6.3%

figure 14

In contrast, only 15.6% of students said they would "speak out to criticize them as being offensive" — down two points from 2021. And 21.7% said they would "not say anything during class but would make critical comments after" — also down about a point from last year (Figure 14).

Overall, **students' reports suggest that they overestimated their peers' negative reactions to their expressed views in class by about 3x**. This mismatch assumes both that students' reports about their own behavior are accurate and that their perceptions of what other students are likely to do are accurate. This reported mismatch presents a puzzle for future observational or experimental research to better understand this reported mismatch.

However, 27.4% of students said they "would not say or do anything but would think badly of them." That students continue to think negatively about peers who share differing viewpoints holds implications for creating campus spaces where constructive disagreement is the norm.

Takeaway 3: High Peer Interaction Is Associated with Greater Expression Among Students

Higher education has experienced rapid and intense changes since the start of the pandemic, especially with regard to online learning. With a near universal shift to online learning in 2020, we witnessed students, faculty, and staff having to make substantial adjustments to teaching and learning.

A consequence of learning primarily online is students' reduced interaction to discuss ideas with peers and faculty, and to get to know other students. The social experience of learning was fundamentally altered in 2020. Prompted by this change, the CES began including questions to assess the modality in which students were learning (e.g., online, in person, or hybrid) and how their social experiences with peers had changed.

In 2022, 7x more students are learning in person compared with 2020 (Figure 15). This shift from 90% of students learning at least partially online in 2020 to nearly 80% of students learning primarily in person in 2022 was also reflected in data patterns of students' social experience.

Students **in 2022 are 3x more likely to report they have a "high amount" of interaction with their peers compared with respondents in 2020** (Figure 16).

Relatedly, students reporting feeling psychologically isolated "often" dropped 15 points between 2020 and 2022 (Figure 17).
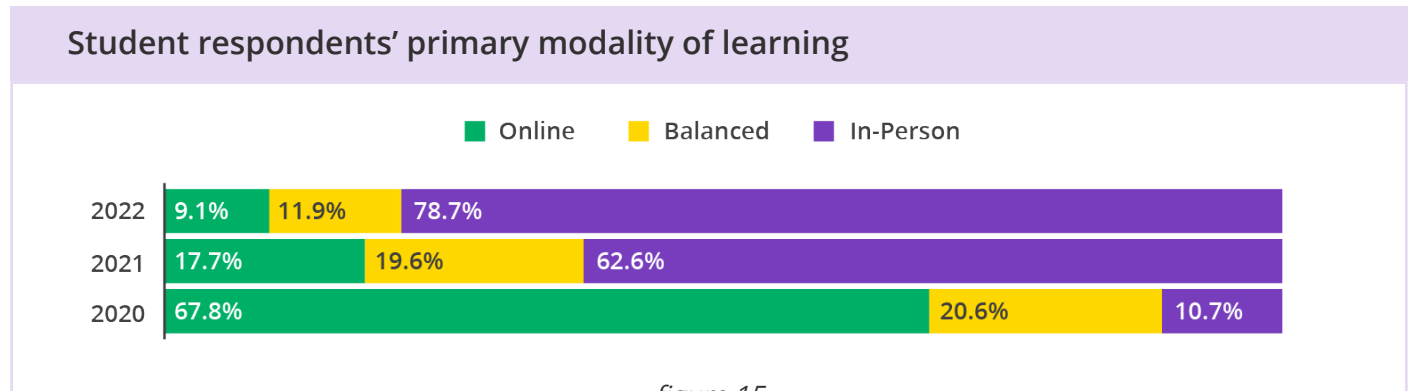
Student respondents' primary modality of learning

Legend: Online, Balanced, In-Person

Year	Online	Balanced	In-Person
2022	9.1%	11.9%	78.7%
2021	17.7%	19.6%	62.6%
2020	67.8%	20.6%	10.7%

figure 15

Percentage of students reporting differing levels of interaction with student peers.

Legend: Low Amount, Medium Amount, High Amount

Year	Low Amount	Medium Amount	High Amount
2022	13.7%	56.3%	30.0%
2021	20.0%	58.6%	21.4%
2020	41.8%	49.1%	9.1%

Note: Interaction amount refers to students' "opportunity to discuss with or to get to know other students" in their classes.

figure 16

Percentage of students reporting differing levels of psychological isolation

Legend: Often, Some of the time, Hardly ever

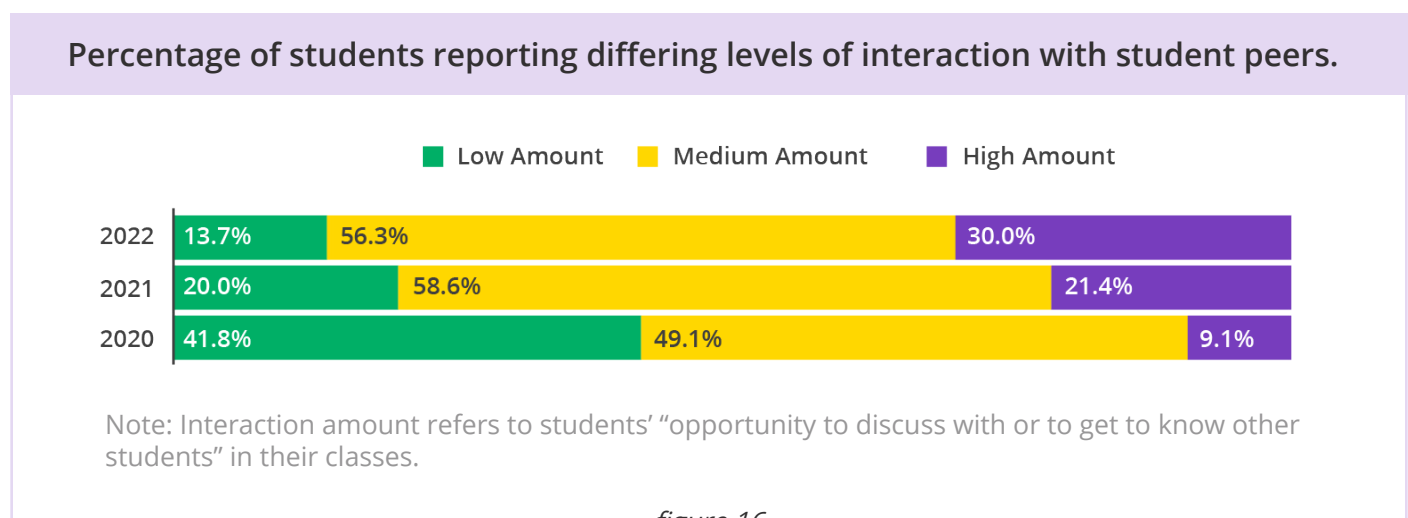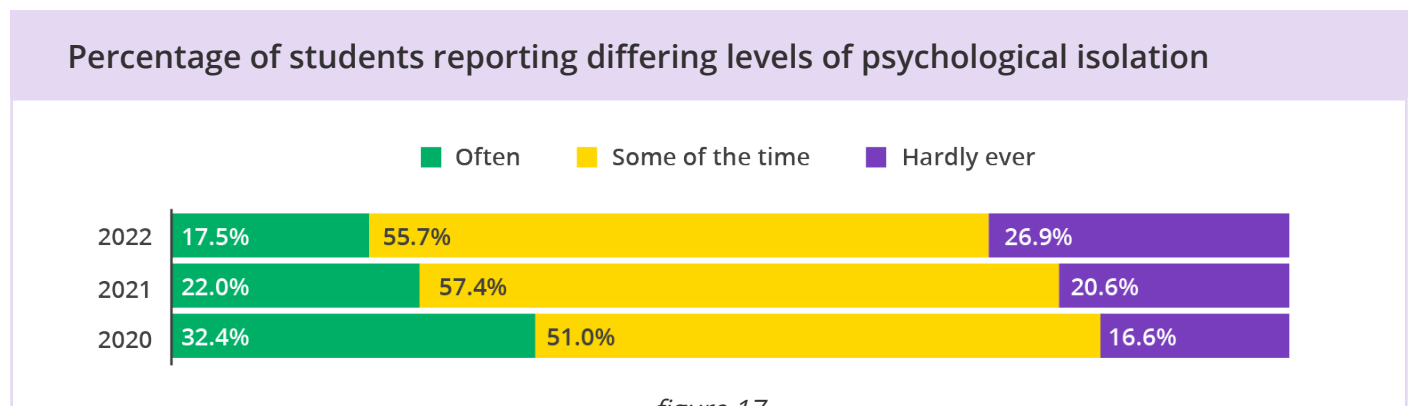| Year	Often	Some of the time	Hardly ever
2022	17.5%	55.7%	26.9%
2021	22.0%	57.4%	20.6%
2020	32.4%	51.0%	16.6%

figure 17

Note: Some bars do not add to exactly 100% due to rounding.

It is well known that meaningful interpersonal interactions are foundational to learning experiences across all levels of development and education. Our data indicates that greater peer interaction is also important for viewpoint expression in the classroom.

The data from 2022 shows that **students who reported high levels of interaction with fellow students were less likely to** **self-censor** and more likely to feel confident to share their views in the classroom. In fact, across the controversial topics asked about in the survey, a reluctance to share views in the classroom increased at least 10 points for students who reported lower amounts of peer interaction compared with students who reported a high amount of peer interaction (Figure 18).

Percentage of students reporting a reluctance to share their views across five controversial topics by peer interaction level

figure 18
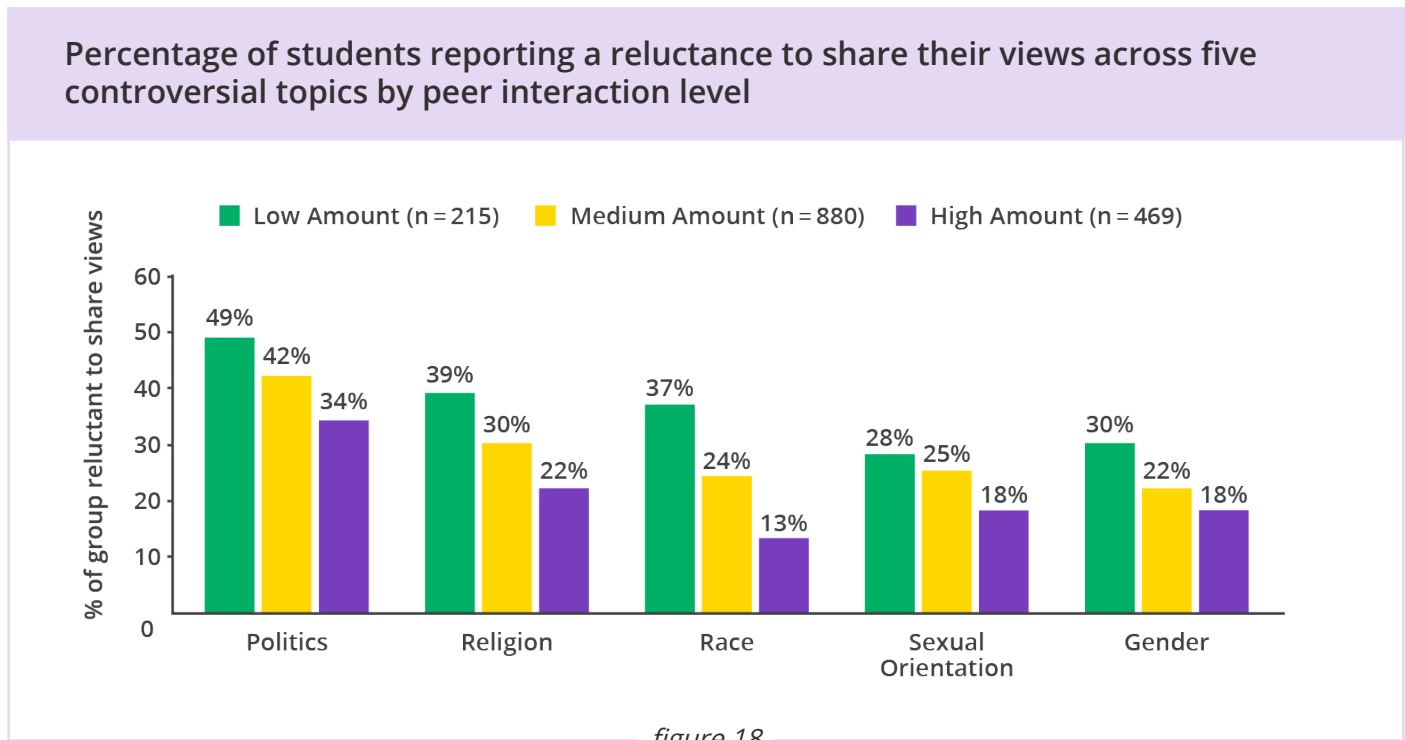
Additional analyses show that students who reported learning primarily in person were significantly more likely to also report experiencing high amounts of interactions with peers ($p < .0005$), but students' reported reluctance to discuss controversial topics did not significantly vary by learning modality. This means that, in our sample, in-person learning was more conducive to high peer interaction, but it *does not* imply that online learning was driving students' reluctance to share their views in the classroom.

Takeaway 4: Campus Culture Needs Continued Improvement to Foster Viewpoint Diversity

Campuses are communities of not only students but faculty, staff, and administrators. Campus leaders have an important and influential role when setting the tone, mission, values, and norms of these vibrant and diverse communities.

The CES has been tracking data on students' perceptions of the overall climate on their campuses. Our data shows that **61% of students reported that their university** **"frequently" or "very frequently" encourages students to consider a wider variety of viewpoints** and perspectives on issues. This is a 17-point increase since 2021, but similar to 2019 levels.

Although this affirmative perspective is encouraging news, this means that 39% of students reported that their institutions are not explicitly encouraging viewpoint diversity frequently on campus.

Student agreement and disagreement as to whether their university encourages students to consider a wider variety of viewpoints and perspectives on issues
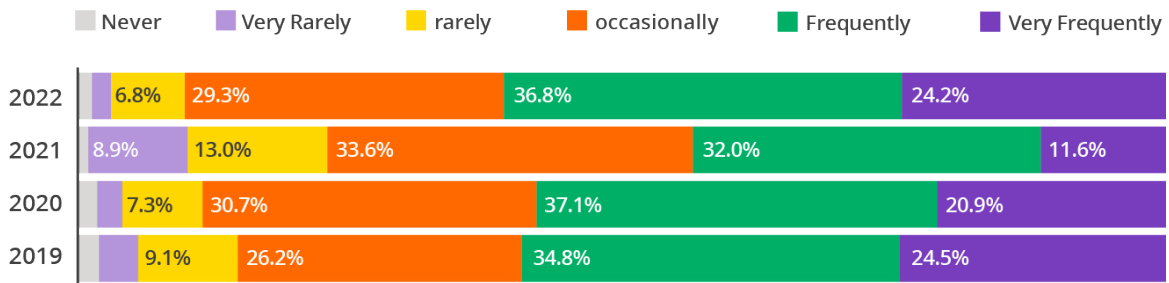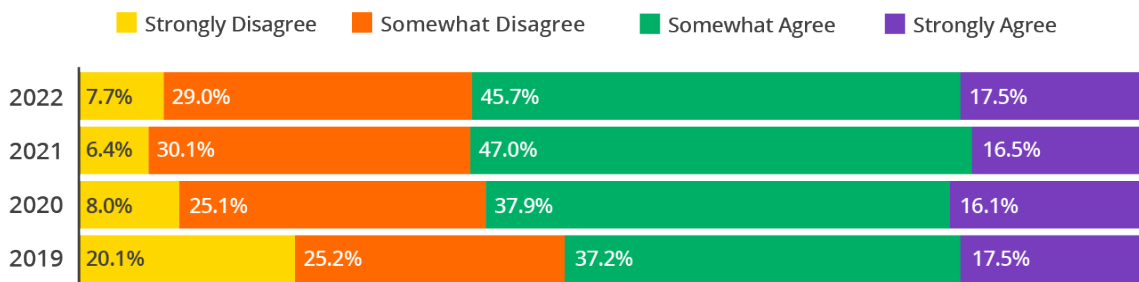
Legend: Never | Very Rarely | rarely | occasionally | Frequently | Very Frequently

Year	Very Rarely	rarely	occasionally	Frequently	Very Frequently
2022		6.8%	29.3%	36.8%	24.2%
2021	8.9%	13.0%	33.6%	32.0%	11.6%
2020		7.3%	30.7%	37.1%	20.9%
2019		9.1%	26.2%	34.8%	24.5%

figure 19

As we saw above, students were reluctant to share their views in the classroom out of fear that they or their views would be labeled as offensive by other students. This perspective translates to broader campus climate as well:

63.2% of students somewhat or strongly agreed that the climate on their campus prevents people from saying things they believe because others might find those views offensive which has increased nearly 10 points since 2019 and 2020.

Student agreement and disagreement as to whether the climate on their campus prevents people from saying things they believe because others might find them offensive.

Legend: Strongly Disagree | Somewhat Disagree | Somewhat Agree | Strongly Agree

Year	Strongly Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Somewhat Agree	Strongly Agree
2022	7.7%	29.0%	45.7%	17.5%
2021	6.4%	30.1%	47.0%	16.5%
2020	8.0%	25.1%	37.9%	16.1%
2019	20.1%	25.2%	37.2%	17.5%

Note: Numbers do not add up to 100% due to some participants skipping the question in 2020.

figure 20

This data presents a paradox: Students reported that there are frequent top-down reminders from institutions for students to consider varying perspectives, but there appears to be a lack of translation to students' perception of campus climate. Future research should explore the most effective ways for leadership to reduce student reluctance to express their perspectives on campus.
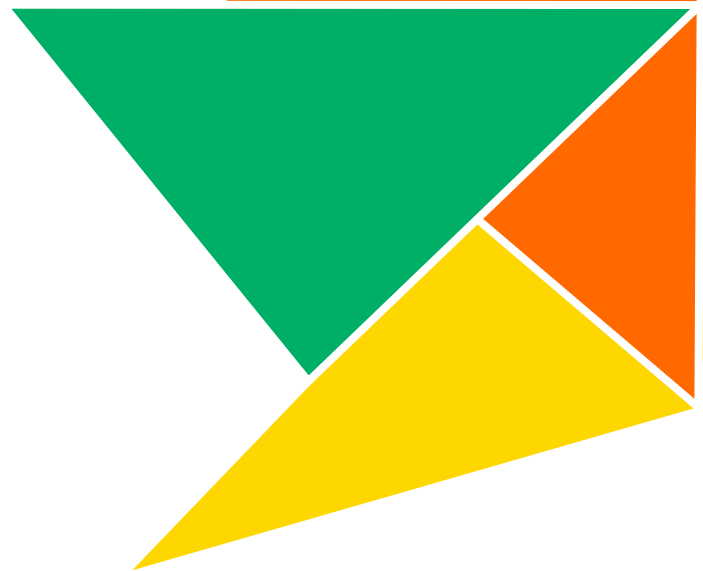
Strategies to Improve Campus Expression

Heterodox Academy's Annual Campus Expression Survey (CES) serves as a yearly benchmark of students' reluctance to speak openly in classrooms and on campus. The data presented here in this report becomes increasingly valuable each year as we are able to identify how campus expression from students' perspective is changing.

Overall, we observe that student self-censorship is a continuing issue to be addressed by all members of the higher education community. Colleges are intended to be institutions that foster creative and innovative thinking. Yet they have become increasingly characterized by orthodoxy in what types of questions can be asked and the perspectives that can be shared. Students reported being most reluctant to share their views freely out of fear from fellow students, and a quarter of students reported reluctance due to perceived fear of negative reactions from faculty as well.

To achieve a vision of the academy where students and faculty can draw on a range of ideas, perspectives, and paths of inquiry, we must cultivate an academic culture underpinned by the core principles of viewpoint diversity, open inquiry, and constructive disagreement.

CES data offers us a starting point from which campus faculty and leaders can begin enacting evidence-based strategies to improve the overall climate on their campus, and create learning environments in which students feel free to express their viewpoints and engage in constructive disagreement with their peers.

Below are four actionable strategies for faculty, staff, and administrators who are committed to positive culture change on our campuses. For even more actionable strategies to improve campus culture, we encourage you to read our 2022 Best Practices Guide.

### 1 Prioritize Opportunities for Students to Interact

The 2022 CES data shows that students who reported high levels of interaction with fellow students were less likely to self-censor and more likely to feel confident sharing their views in the classroom. It's a well-documented psychological phenomenon that people are more open to differences when interacting in person as opposed to impersonal text mediums.

As campus leaders and faculty continue to innovate and iterate on pedagogy and campus life, it's necessary to prioritize meaningful interaction opportunities among students. As peers get to know one another, they learn that their peers are complex, holistic people whose viewpoint on a particular topic may be but only one facet of who they are.

Our data suggests that in-person learning is more conducive to high peer interaction, but it does not preclude that meaningful interactions cannot be achieved in online

environments. As we continue to revive our classroom and campus communities coming out of the pandemic, ensuring quality interaction among students can have a positive impact on students expressing their views freely in the classroom.
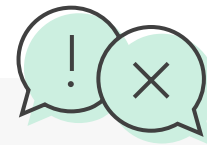
2 Cultivate Norms of Open Inquiry and Constructive Disagreement in Classrooms

The primary reported reason for why students self-censure on controversial topics in the classroom was fear of negative reactions or retribution from fellow students, and in particular, students were most fearful of critical comments from students and being labeled as "offensive." It is, of course, natural for students to be self-conscious about sharing their perspectives on controversial topics. After all, students are pursuing higher education to learn how to think critically and engage productively with others.

Faculty play a foundational role in cultivating classroom environments in which students feel comfortable to express viewpoints for critical discussion. Especially important is for faculty to set the norms of engagement that can help reduce reluctance by students to contribute their thoughts for critical discussion. Classroom activities to help students form more meaningful connections with peers and practice engaging constructively with peers with whom they disagree are additional options.
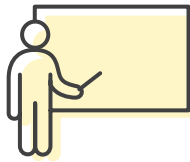
3 Model HxA Norms in Leadership Positions

Our data shows that 63.2% of students agreed that the climate on their campus prevented people from saying things they believe because others might find those views offensive. Top-down communications and modeling of favored norms from those occupying leadership positions at higher education institutions is necessary to foster a climate that values diverse perspectives.

To best promote open inquiry, viewpoint diversity, and constructive disagreement, we suggest leaders follow a set of norms and values that we call The HxA Way. Sustained culture change takes time, but consistency and communication of norms that value evidence, openness, and constructive engagement can ultimately move campus culture and climate in a positive direction.

4 Share Data with Colleagues

We see the university as a place where diverse scholars and students can approach questions, ideas, and problems from different perspectives in pursuit of knowledge, discovery, growth, and innovation. We're working toward a future in which viewpoint diversity, open inquiry, and constructive disagreement are explicitly valued on college campuses.

Many people and organizations are pushing for change in higher education, but change won't come through activism alone. Ideas are the currency of the academy, and advocates for change need the best ideas and evidence available to be effective.

The data available from our annual Campus Expression Survey is one indicator of how students perceive the climate of expression on their campus, and identifies variables associated with expression on campus that can lead to actionable strategies to address self-censorship. We encourage you to share this data and the report with your colleagues to accelerate the pace of change toward a more open university culture.

About Heterodox Academy

Heterodox Academy is a New York City–based nonpartisan nonprofit that works to improve the quality of research and education by promoting viewpoint diversity, open inquiry, and constructive disagreement across higher education. The HxA membership is made up of more than 5,600 faculty, staff, and students who come from a range of institutions — from large research universities to community colleges. They represent nearly every discipline and are distributed throughout 49 states and across the globe.

Acknowledgments

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Media inquiries

Please contact press@heterodoxacademy.org.

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Become a Member

Heterodox Academy is the world's largest member organization of university professors and administrators committed to promoting the ideals of viewpoint diversity, open inquiry, and constructive disagreement in higher education.

If you support the HxA values and work in higher education or are a student, you may be eligible. Become a member and join your 5,600 peers who are dedicated to improving academic culture.

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