



Understanding the Campus Expression Climate

Supporting Documentation: Methods and Descriptives

Fall 2021

Administration of this survey was overseen by the Heterodox Academy Research Team. The 2021 report, methods, and other documentation were prepared by Steven Zhou in collaboration with Melissa Stikma and Shelly Zhou, Ph.D. Questions may be directed to questions@heterodoxacademy.org.

Sampling

Heterodox Academy contracted Qualtrics, a nonpartisan research firm, to administer this survey to a nationally representative sample of around 1,500 undergraduate students between ages 18 and 24 who were studying at four-year nonprofit colleges or universities in the United States. We requested that 21% of these students be at schools in the Northeast, 24% at schools in the Midwest, 34% at schools in the South, and 21% at schools in the West, based on the Gallup/Knight Foundation 2018 report on free expression on campus. Within each census region, we requested representative samples of respondents by gender and race based on corresponding statistics from the National Center for Educational Statistics.

Data Collection and Treatment

Between September 27 and November 15, 2021, members of Qualtrics' respondent pool who met these criteria completed the Campus Expression Survey for monetary incentives. Following standard data-cleaning procedures (e.g., removing respondents from the data set for taking excessive amounts of time to complete the survey, failing an attention check, or providing obviously false information regarding their university), 1,495 participants were retained for analysis.

Sample Descriptives

The final sample consisted of 61.6% female and 33.4% male. In terms of race, the final sample was 56.2% white, 17.7% Hispanic or Latino, 12.9% Black or African American, 6.4% Asian, 3.7% multiracial, and 1.3% Middle Eastern. Our sample consisted of 44.9% Democrat, 16.1% Republican, 23.9% Independent, and 3.0% Libertarian. In terms of religion, 48.4% of the sample identify as Christian, 14.8% as agnostic, 14.2% as atheist, 2.9% as Muslim, 2.4% as Buddhist, and 1.5% as Jewish. Participation was limited to students between ages 18 and 24: 12.2% were age 18, 16.5% were age 19, 16.8% were age 20, 21.5% were age 21, 12.4% were age 22, 12.1% were age 23, and 8.4% were age 24. Note that percentages do not add up to 100% because of nonresponse options (e.g., “none of the above”).

Survey and Item Format

The core items of the CES asked the extent to which students were comfortable or reluctant speaking their opinions on certain controversial topics during class and their concern over several possible consequences of doing so. These questions about comfort or reluctance in discussing controversial topics asked: “Think about discussing a controversial issue about [X topic] in a class this semester. How comfortable or reluctant would you feel about speaking up and giving your views on this topic?” with the response options being: “I would be very comfortable giving my views,” “I would be somewhat comfortable giving my views,” “I would be somewhat reluctant giving my views,” and “I would be very reluctant giving my views.” Questions about the possible consequences of speaking their opinions on controversial topics during class asked if they were concerned about any of eight such consequences (e.g., other students talking about them behind their backs, other students criticizing them, professor giving them a bad grade); another set of questions also asked if they would enact some of these critical actions toward other students (e.g., talking about them behind their backs, criticizing them during class). For full information on these and other items, please see the Fall 2021 CES codebook.

Analytic Approach

The primary analyses we performed were on the items asking about comfort or reluctance in discussing controversial topics during class. After dichotomizing responses to these questions by collapsing “very reluctant” and “somewhat reluctant” into “reluctant,” and “very comfortable” and “somewhat comfortable” into “comfortable,” we used Fisher’s exact significant tests to examine whether these responses differed by several respondent demographic characteristics. We conducted these comparisons with and without using the Cochran-Mantel-Haenszel test to control for differences in interaction quality, finding that the presence or absence of this control did not meaningfully change these results.