

Freedom Under Fire on US College Campuses

A new survey of thousands of American college faculty yielded some shocking results on free speech and academic freedom, with nearly 3-in-10 professors stating they feel unable to speak openly over fears about how students, fellow faculty, and administrators might respond.

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This is just one of the eyebrow-raising findings in “Silence in the Classroom: The 2024 FIRE Faculty Survey Report” released by the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE).

“While many faculty remain confident in higher education, and few report explicit threats or experiences of discipline for speech, the broader climate reflects that of rampant self-censorship, worry and fear, particularly among faculty in the political minority,” the study’s executive summary reads.

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Some of the key findings underscore this warning. Thirty-five percent of faculty reported recently toning down writings for fear of sparking controversy.

And when you consider 14% stated they “suffered discipline or threats of discipline for either their teaching, research,

academic talks, or other off-campus speech,” these worries and moves become easier to understand.

In the midst of a cancel culture—one that can threaten livelihoods and careers—the notion people sometimes self-censor is on full display.

This is likely why 40% of faculty expressed worries about damage to their reputations if a person misunderstands their words or deeds, with 23% of faculty fearful about losing their jobs over such a scenario.

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