

How Free Should Campus Speech Be?



LEFT TO RIGHT: Life University; LAURA BUCKMAN/Getty Images; Ted S. Warren/AP Images

In 1994, the well-known literary critic and legal scholar Stanley Fish published a controversial book, *There's No Such Thing as Free Speech . . . And It's a Good Thing Too*. Fish argued that the notion that Americans could or should be able to say anything they like anytime and anyplace was, in fact, deeply flawed—even on college campuses, where the idea of free and open debate has long been held as close to sacred. The selections in this chapter provide strong evidence that the issues that concerned Fish still dominate campus discussions today even though the terms in which those debates are framed has shifted.

The chapter opens with introduction to John Palfrey's 2017 *Safe Spaces, Brave Spaces: Diversity and Free Expression in Education*, in which Palfrey makes an impassioned plea for the value of living in and learning from the tensions between supporting free speech and finding ways to create campus communities where people from all sorts of backgrounds and of all sorts of perspectives can feel they are heard. The second selection, from a 2018 Knight Foundation survey of over 3,000 college students about issues related to free expression on campus, provides strong evidence that a stance such as Palfrey's represents the views of most

U.S. college and university students This fact-based argument demonstrates that the overwhelming majority of students are committed to findings ways to support free speech while promoting an inclusive society welcoming of diverse groups. The challenge, of course, is figuring out how to achieve such a goal.

In the third selection, comedian and actor Ben Schwartz examines questions of free speech in light of the decision of some well-known comedians to stop performing on college campuses because of concerns about what one critic has termed a “humor crisis.” This selection reminds us of both the potential value and the danger of humor as a rhetorical tool.

The next two selections treat the topic of microaggressions. The “I’m Tired” project from Britain offers stark visual images of individuals who are indeed quite tired of the comments made to or about them because of some aspect of their identity, while psychologist Scott Lilienfeld contends that although there should be no denying the reality of prejudice in American society, he has grave concerns about the social science research used in support of the campus programs seeking to contain microaggressions.

Sarah Brown considers the roles that athletes increasingly play as activists for social causes on campus, from taking a knee to making politically charged comments to threatening to boycott playoff games. Such actions by individuals, groups of athletes, or entire teams raise complex questions about the possible limits of free speech, especially for students who, as athletes, are often seen as representing the institution.

The chapter’s final selection by professor Catherine Nolan-Ferrell narrates how the issues raised in selections in this chapter played out in her classroom during and after the presidential election of 2016 at the University of Texas at San Antonio, where nearly half the students identify as Latino. Writing for an audience of professors, Nolan-Ferrell describes how she and her students sought to live in and learn from the tensions described by Palfrey in the chapter’s opening selection. She demonstrates the complex ways in which teaching and learning in classrooms are highly contextualized rhetorical acts, providing multiple opportunities for examining and applying the concepts taught throughout *Everything’s an Argument*.