



SPEECH FIRST



FRESHMAN DISORIENTATION:

HOW COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES LAY THE
GROUNDWORK FOR STUDENT INDOCTRINATION

ABOUT SPEECH FIRST

Speech First is a membership association of students, parents, faculty, alumni, and concerned citizens committed to restoring the freedom of speech on college campuses through advocacy, education, and litigation. Launched in 2018, Speech First is dedicated to preserving the free and open discourse essential to a comprehensive education and counteracting the increasingly toxic censorship culture on college campuses

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Freshman orientation programs at American universities receive a remarkable lack of critical attention. Our 2022 Freshman Disorientation report offers an unprecedented window into the themes and material covered in the new student orientations of America's largest public universities.

Our findings clearly suggest that these orientation programs overwhelmingly cover issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), while attention to the free speech rights of students on campus or the role of viewpoint diversity in campus/academic health is strikingly absent.

Our report found that only **around 30%** of schools surveyed mention *free speech or viewpoint diversity* (30% and 33%, respectively) in their orientation programs, while **91%** stress *DEI topics*.

Furthermore, quantifying the coverage of different themes, we found that in the 2021-2022 orientation programs of the 51 schools surveyed, there was **3.71 times** more orientation *slide* material, **4.9 times** more orientation handout material, and **7.37 times** more orientation *video* material related to *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion* when compared to material related to *free speech and viewpoint diversity*.

Like never before, it is clear that our public universities do not provide incoming students with a foundation of respect for free speech, open discourse, and civic education. Instead, they focus exhaustingly on issues regarding race, sexual orientation, gender identity, and guilt-tripping incoming students into a culture of political correctness.

INTRODUCTION

Freshman orientation programs, the first gatherings through which universities begin to shape the thinking of students entering the gates of their campus, present an invaluable opportunity to educate and inspire students about the themes that lie at the foundation of liberal education: viewpoint diversity and free speech. And yet these academic pillars are increasingly imperiled on campuses across the country – a threat only made worse by the freshman orientation programs that belittle their importance.

Our findings are supported by a recently published Knight-Ipsos report, *College Student Views on Free Expression and Campus Speech*, which reveals the frail state of free speech at America's universities. Since 2019, the percentage of students saying speech rights are secure **has dropped 12%** (this decline was even sharper for students of color, who believe that their speech is even less protected).¹

Furthermore, a 2021 joint-study conducted by FIRE, College Pulse, and *RealClear Politics* revealed that more than **80%** of students in the U.S. *self-censor* their viewpoints at their college – **two thirds** of students (66%) deem it acceptable to *shout down* a speaker to prevent them from speaking on campus, and **one in four** (23%) deem it acceptable to use violence to stop a campus speech.²

All of these reports suggest a lack of free speech reinforcement from university officials, which has led to confusion among students' understanding of what is considered acceptable speech on campus.

RESULTS

Upon examining all orientation material, we found that:

- **32%** of schools mention free speech in their orientation program
- **39%** of schools mention viewpoint diversity in their orientation program
- **91%** mention Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) topics³ in their orientation program

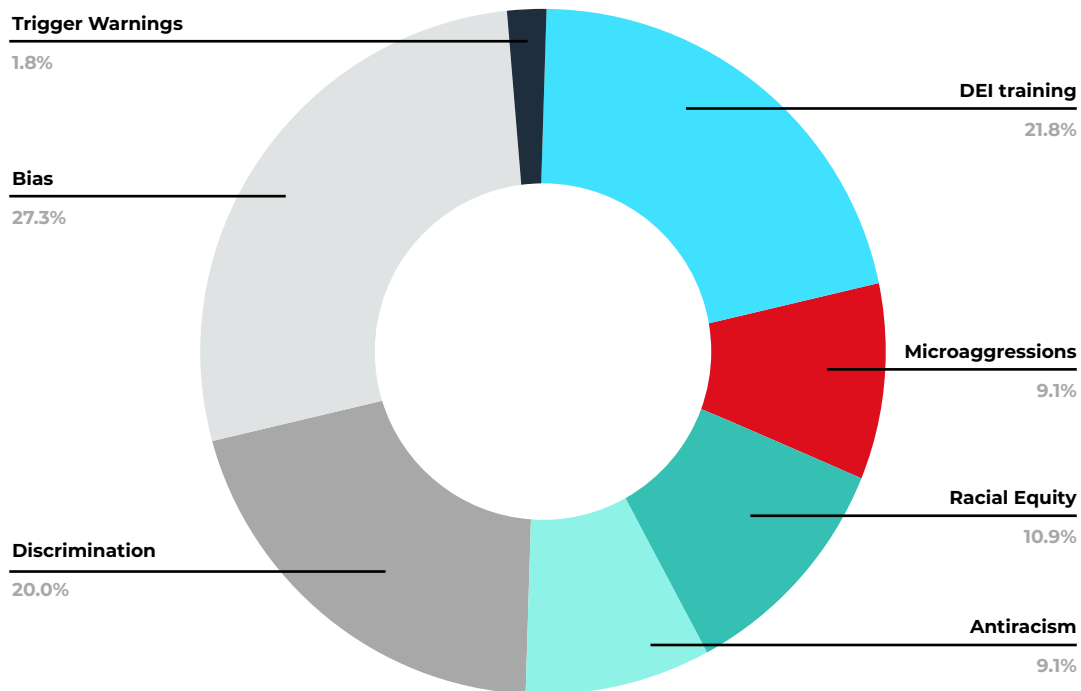
Even these statistics don't entirely reveal the dramatic disproportion in the presence of free speech and viewpoint diversity and DEI themes within freshman orientation programs. Quantifying the actual amount of time/material devoted to each of these themes in the student orientations (broken down by pages, slides, and video minutes devoted to each theme), we found that in general there was⁴:

- **3.71** times more orientation slide material related to DEI themes than Free Speech/Viewpoint Diversity
- **4.9** times more orientation page material related to DEI themes than Free Speech/Viewpoint Diversity
- **7.37** times more orientation video material related to DEI themes than Free Speech/Viewpoint Diversity



Breaking down further the themes often covered under the umbrella of DEI:

CATEGORIES OF DEI EMPHASIS IN ORIENTATION PROGRAM MATERIALS



ALARMING EXAMPLES

At Northern Kentucky University, an orientation video entitled *Creating an Inclusive Community* states, “We have all participated in microaggressions ... ‘Where are you from?’ is a microaggression. ‘I don’t see race’ means you don’t recognize someone’s identity. ‘I am not racist because I have black friends, or I am not homophobic because I have gay friends’ does not exempt you from continuing to intentionally better yourself and work on your microaggressions ... If you have not been to a drag show yet we are going to make sure you have that opportunity.”

The **State University of New York at New Paltz** requires students to take an implicit bias test⁵ (the **University of California at Irvine** encourages students to take the same test, though it is optional). This test has students match skin color with negative and positive words and objects, and weapons. There is also a test that requires students to match negative and positive attributes based on gender identity. The even scarier fact is that this is hosted on a Harvard University website and when you dig deeper into the organization behind the creation of these tests, you find that they have facilitators at universities across the country— so it is safe to say that our research is only scratching the surface regarding materials like this. Below are screen shots of questions asked in an “Implicit Association Test” that students are asked to take during freshman orientation.⁶

Implicit Association Test

Next, you will use the 'E' and 'I' computer keys to categorize items into groups as fast as you can. These are the four groups and the items that belong to each:

Category	Items
Good	Delight, Spectacular, Pleasure, Friend, Delightful, Excitement, Adore, Cherish
Bad	Evil, Scorn, Despise, Sick, Pain, Yucky, Detest, Nasty
	
	

There are seven parts. The instructions change for each part. Pay attention!

Continue

Next, you will use the 'E' and 'I' computer keys to categorize items into groups as fast as you can. These are the four groups and the items that belong to each:

Category	Items
Harmless Objects	
Weapons	
Black Americans	
White Americans	

There are seven parts. The instructions change for each part. Pay attention!

Press 'I' for Harmless Objects or White Americans

Press 'E' for Weapons or Black Americans



If you make a mistake, a red X will appear. Press the other key to continue.

Press 'I' for Harmless Objects or Black Americans

Press 'E' for Weapons or White Americans



If you make a mistake, a red X will appear. Press the other key to continue.

Press 'I' for Harmless Objects or Black Americans

Press 'E' for Weapons or White Americans



If you make a mistake, a red X will appear. Press the other key to continue.

Questionnaire

Page 1 out of 6

Which statement best describes you?

I strongly prefer Dark Skinned People to Light Skinned People

I moderately prefer Dark Skinned People to Light Skinned People

I slightly prefer Dark Skinned People to Light Skinned People

I like Light Skinned People and Dark Skinned People equally

I slightly prefer Light Skinned People to Dark Skinned People

I moderately prefer Light Skinned People to Dark Skinned People

I strongly prefer Light Skinned People to Dark Skinned People

Tip: For quick response, click to select your answer, and then click again to submit.

Press 'E' for Bad words or Transgender People

Press 'I' for Good words or Cisgender People

or

or

Part 3 of 7



Use the **E** key for Transgender People and for Bad words.
Use the **I** key for Cisgender People and for Good words.
Each item belongs to **only one** category.

If you make a mistake, a red X will appear. Press the other key to continue. Go as fast as you can while being accurate.

Press the **space bar** when you are ready to start.

Implicit Association Test

Next, you will complete the IAT. You will use the 'e' and 'I' computer keys to categorize items into groups as fast as you can. These are the four groups and the items that belong to each:

Category	Items
Good words	Nice, Pleasure, Laughter, Glorious
Bad words	Nasty, Agony, Hurt, Rotten
Cisgender People	
Transgender People	

There are seven parts. The instructions change for each part. Pay attention!

Continue

At the **University of Minnesota**, an orientation script titled *Piece of the Puzzle* insists that microaggressions, “whether intentional or unintentional, communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative prejudicial slights and insults towards any group ... These are repeated experiences of dismissal, alienation, insults, and invalidation that reinforce differences in power and privilege, and perpetuate racism and discrimination ... So, we all need to check our own biases, think before we speak, and just do better.”

The **University of Washington's** orientation program insists to its students: “Your role as a UW Student. ..understanding your own biases, others perspectives, and individual narratives ... We affirm that Black Lives Matter.”

James Madison University shows incoming freshmen a PowerPoint presentation containing a total of 34 slides on the topics of diversity, power, and oppression. The purpose of this presentation is to emphasize the importance of students' engagement in inclusive behavior, yet there was zero mention of free speech or viewpoint diversity anywhere in their orientation program.

The **University of Las Vegas** provides a list of definitions stating that “Bias” is “a tendency to believe that some ideas are better than others...” And specifies that “racism” is specifically based on a “socially constructed racial hierarchy that privileges white people.” This is in addition to their identity wheel that specifically asks students to analyze their identities and examine common stereotypes people have about them or where they come from.

LAUDABLE EXAMPLES

Some institutions, however, did display an exemplary devotion to the principles of free speech and inquiry in their orientation programs.

George Mason University's orientation program states unequivocally that on their campus, they “include and embrace a multitude of people and ideas in everything we do and protect the freedom of all members of our community to seek truth and express their views. Freedom of expression in an intellectually and culturally diverse environment provides all members of our community the opportunity to learn, grow, and contribute to our shared mission to create a more just, free, and prosperous world ... Members of the Mason community maintain the right to criticize and contest speech they disagree with ... But freedom of expression does not permit disrupting or preventing another person's ability to speak or hindering the ability of others to see or hear that speech. The First Amendment protects the right to peacefully protest, demonstrate, and speak in opposition to others' speech, as long as it does not impede the constitutionally protected speech of others ... Individuals are encouraged to speak, write, listen, challenge, and demonstrate as a natural platform for intellectual engagement. This is the true spirit of freedom and learning.”

Moreover, George Mason University has a web page dedicated to its policies related to speech and expression where, if a student believes their “freedom of speech or expression has been disrupted, [they] may report an incident of disruption of constitutionally protected speech” on the web page.

Louisiana State University also showed dedication to preserving free speech on their campus. In its freshman orientation materials, LSU included a section devoted to encouraging freedom of speech among students and faculty. According to Permanent Memorandum 79 on Free Speech and Expression, LSU states “LSU unequivocally supports free speech and free expression among its students, faculty, and staff. The University strives to ensure the fullest degree of intellectual freedom and free expression on campus. It is not the proper role of the University to shield individuals from speech protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America...Including without limitation ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.” This memorandum was provided to students in the free speech section of the university’s freshman orientation materials, which they were required to read.

CONCLUSION

Universities are designed to educate their students and grow them intellectually. At present, this opportunity is being subverted. Intellectual growth is not something that happens in a vacuum, students must be able to express their ideas and opinions on political and social issues in order to exercise the critical thinking process that is so vital to intellectual development. If students are told as soon as they step on campus that they must feel guilty, ashamed, and they must be hyper-sensitive towards their peers, then they will be afraid to express their thoughts, ultimately limiting their knowledge to whatever they are told rather than expanding their minds through discourse, debate, and inquiry. They will remain stagnant in their own abilities and will be forced to conform to the narratives of university administrators.

Our findings show that new student orientation programs exclusively steep students in all things diversity, equity, and inclusion while leaving out fundamental principles that support intellectual curiosity such as free speech and viewpoint diversity. Students instead have to begin their college careers being told they are implicitly biased against certain races and ethnicities, and that they are privileged if they look a certain way. They are told that no matter where they came from or what their background is, they have an inherent bias that they must focus on rectifying. This puts an undue burden on the students’ shoulders as they enter what is supposed to be the most rigorous and studious time in their lives. And instead of focusing on their studies, their ideas, and challenging others’ ideas, they must walk on eggshells, avoid upsetting anyone with simple questions, and focus on correcting a subjective bias they might have against others who don’t look like them.

This emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion in freshmen orientations is not an oversight; it is intentional, and it is clearly designed with the goal of creating insecurities where there were none before. What’s left is straight from the playbook of identity politics- a sense of enmity amongst students rather than camaraderie.

Freshman orientation programs must be restructured. Currently, students have very little understanding of their free speech rights and the value this adds to their education. Often, they feel so outnumbered, so concerned that their ideas and questions may get them in trouble or destroy their college experience/ career, that they are not able to find the courage to speak up. Many students admit they’ve never read the U.S. Constitution, while hundreds of thousands of other students are here on student visas that require no knowledge or understanding of the individual rights recognized in America. New student orientations are vital moments in the college experience where the concepts and principles valued in American culture and our tradition of vigorous political debate can be introduced.

CALL TO ACTION

In recent months, excellent administrators at several institutions of higher education have taken the lead – shining light on a path towards incorporating such material in freshman orientation programs. In February of 2022, the Iowa Board of Regents announced the release of a new free speech training module that will be administered to all three public universities in Iowa – a module that “is important to [the Board’s] efforts in educating the campus community about First Amendment rights to free expression.”⁷ Just two weeks later, the Rochester Institute of Technology announced its plan to “integrate free speech programming into New Student Orientation to help establish free speech as a pillar of RIT culture as soon as students enter campus.”⁸

It is critical that other university administrators and state legislatures follow suit – that they assume responsibility to establish free speech as a pillar of their institution’s culture as soon as students enter campus. Students themselves hold a parallel responsibility to remain steadfastly curious and committed to understanding their rights as protected under the First Amendment.

During this process, we found significant resistance from universities to cooperate and provide the records we requested even though they are obligated to do so in a timely manner per state Freedom of Information Act laws. This project took almost a year to complete, and we know we are only scratching the surface of the attempts by universities to coach and guilt students into seeing one another as potential enemies with the goal of suppressing dissenting voices.

Therefore, we are launching a **Freshman Orientation Tip Line** that will allow for students to anonymously submit videos, presentations, handouts, and policies they find disconcerting and want the public to know about. We believe that students ultimately want to learn, they want to expand their minds and develop a sense of fellowship with their peers. This goes out the window when their college experience is burdened with dogmatic, ideological pressures associated with their school’s political goals. The Freshman Orientation Tip Line will continue to expose universities’ nefarious attempts to avoid transparency and their responsibility to their communities of students, parents, and the academy.

APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

Through the submission of over fifty Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) requests, we acquired all of the presentations, hand-outs, videos, modules, and any other records disseminated by 51 American Universities⁹ in their new student orientation¹⁰ related to the following categories:

1. diversity and inclusion;
2. racial equity, racial justice, racism, anti-racism, and critical race theory;
3. harassment, intimidation, and bullying;
4. social media and online speech;
5. campus computer and network policies

We examined all new student orientation material acquired, quantifying:

1. Whether or not the school mentioned free speech in any of their orientation materials
2. Whether or not the school mentioned viewpoint diversity in any of their orientation materials
3. Whether or not the school mentioned Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), in any of their orientation materials
4. The number of document pages, presentation slides, and video minutes devoted to DEI and free speech/viewpoint diversity themes, respectively, within each school's orientation materials.
5. The finer categories of DEI themes stressed within the materials of schools that covered DEI (categories including: microaggressions, anti-racism, trigger warnings, bias, racial equity, DEI trainings, and discrimination).

APPENDIX B: LIST OF THE 51 UNIVERSITIES WE RECEIVED RESPONSES FROM

Boise State University
California State University-Northridge
City University of New York-Hunter
Evergreen State College
Fort Lewis College
George Mason University
Georgia Institute of Technology
Indiana University-Bloomington
James Madison Univ.
Kent State University
Louisiana State University
Michigan State University
Missouri State University
Montana State University
North Carolina State University
Northern Kentucky University
Ohio State University
Oregon State University
Portland State University
Rutgers University
State University of New York-Buffalo
State University of New York-New Paltz
Towson University
Univ. of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
University of Alaska-Anchorage
University of California-Irvine

University of California-Los Angeles
University of Central Florida
University of Central Missouri
University of Colorado- Boulder
University of Illinois-Chicago
University of Iowa
University of Kansas
University of Louisiana
University of Massachusetts-Amherst
University of Michigan
University of Minnesota
University of Mississippi
University of Nebraska
University of Nevada- Las Vegas
University of Nevada-Reno
University of New Mexico
University of Oklahoma
University of Texas-Arlington
University of Texas-Austin
University of Washington
University of Wisconsin
University of Wyoming
Utah State University
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
Virginia State University



APPENDIX C: UNIVERSITIES THAT DID NOT RESPOND TO OUR FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUESTS (FOIA), DESPITE THEIR PUBLIC OBLIGATION TO DO SO

Arizona State University
Colorado State University- Fort Collins
University of California-Berkeley

ENDNOTES

- 1 The Knight Foundation, College Student Views on Free Expression and Campus Speech 2022, The Knight Foundation, January 25, 2022, <https://knightfoundation.org/reports/college-student-views-on-free-expression-and-campus-speech-2022/>.
- 2 FIRE, "The 2021 College Free Speech Rankings," The Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression, September 21, 2021, <https://www.thefire.org/the-2021-college-free-speech-rankings/>.
- 3 DEI Topics are defined in our FOIA requests as (1) diversity and inclusion; (2) racial equity, racial justice, racism, anti-racism, and critical race theory
- 4 All calculations are based on the median values for each category: the median number of slides, minutes, and pages devoted to DEI topics and SF/VD topics per school, respectively (to resist the skew of outlier values).
- 5 Harvard, Implicit Bias Test, Project Implicit, <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/aboutus.html>
- 6 Ibid
- 7 Kate Perez, The Daily Iowan, Daily Iowan, February 21, 2022, <https://dailyiowan.com/2022/02/01/state-board-of-regents-to-announce-required-free-speech-training-for-university-of-iowa-iowa-state-university-university-of-northern-iowa/>.
- 8 Jenna Warren, Creating a Free Speech Campus Culture, *Rochester Institute of Technology*, February 14, 2022, <https://www.rit.edu/news/creating-free-speech-campus-culture>.
- 9 A list of all schools surveyed can be found in the Appendix of Universities Surveyed on p. 9.
- 10 All materials acquired were those disseminated in freshman orientation programs between August 1, 2020 to the present.

