

**The Balancing Act:
Freedom of Speech and Inclusivity on U.S. College Campuses**

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Undergraduate Honors Thesis
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Durham, NC
December 2017

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ABSTRACT

College campuses are faced with reconciling two opposing values—promoting freedom of speech and ideological diversity, versus censoring speech that marginalizes minority students and threatens the learning environment. Colleges have instated speech codes of varying degrees of harshness in order to limit offensive speech. This study assesses whether undergraduate students' attitudes toward freedom of speech differ depending on whether they attend universities with restrictive versus unrestrictive speech policies. I administered an anonymous survey to undergraduates at Duke, Emory and Davidson. The findings illustrated a like-mindedness across college-generation students despite varying speech policies at their universities. Students revealed a slight preference for curtailing offensive speech in order to protect minority sentiments and foster a positive learning environment. Females were more likely than men to take action against offensive speech. The results also illustrated how a majority of respondents felt that students would feel uncomfortable with expressing their socially conservative views. This trend was observed across the three schools and both genders. In conclusion, colleges are becoming increasingly more inclusive of minorities, but students with conservative viewpoints are being forced to self-censor, thereby limiting constructive ideological discourse on U.S college campuses.

INTRODUCTION

On March 2nd 2017, students at Middlebury College erupted in violent protest at an event where Charles Murray was invited to speak. The students were motivated by concerns that Murray was a “White nationalist” who postulated theories that linked lower socio-economic status with genetic racial inferiority. Conservatives lashed back by calling the disruption a symbol of growing intolerance to unconventional and unpopular viewpoints. They maintained that the liberal agenda was quashing the soul of U.S. higher education—its respect for freedom of thought and speech. Protests such as this one have not occurred in isolation; the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education(FIRE) found that 11 speakers had been officially disinvited from U.S. universities in 2016.

The incident at Middlebury College embodies the growing polarization on college campuses. Students who identify as liberal advocate for policing speech in order to suppress offensive speech and foster a positive learning environment, whereas conservative students retaliate because they fear being forced to adhere to certain “acceptable” views. Universities are thus faced with reconciling two opposing values—need for an inclusive campus environment and respect for free speech. It has become more challenging to balance the two with the increase in political correctness—the avoidance of forms of expression that marginalize a community that is socially disadvantaged. Various universities have implemented speech codes, anti-harassment policies, and email regulations in keeping with the political correctness movement.

The oldest measure of political correctness on college campuses has been speech codes. Speech codes impose varying degrees of restrictions on the speech that is permitted on campus; some university codes prohibit speech based on content and some restrict free speech to designated spaces on campus. The extent to which universities restrict speech and impose

punishments for violating those restrictions contributes to the campus environment. This paper explores how student attitudes toward free speech vary in differing campus environments, as determined by the harshness of their campus speech policies. The research examines students from three universities, two with restrictive speech policies and one with a less restrictive speech policy, in order to assess how differing speech policies influence attitudes.

RESEARCH QUESTION

How do undergraduate students' attitudes toward freedom of speech and academic freedom vary among private universities with restrictive versus unrestrictive speech policies?

HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The U.S. Constitution and Freedom of Speech

The hallmark of the First Amendment to the United States Constitution is that the government can make no law that restricts the freedom of speech of its citizens. The Supreme Court protects free speech because it is not only an individual right, but is also a fundamental tool to abet the search for truth (Stanner, 2006, p.387). The First Amendment's commitment to free speech is encompassing enough that it does indeed protect speech that adversely targets individuals based on a facet of their identity such as race, gender or sexual orientation. There are very limited and specific forms of expression that are considered unlawful, and such unprotected speech is primarily related to a breach of peace. The forms of unprotected expression that have been linked to incidents on college campuses fall under the categories of "fighting words", "advocacy of illegal action", "true threats", and "obscenity" ("First Amendment").

"Fighting words" are words that would incite a violent reaction from the person they are addressed to. They must be personal abuses that are uttered in a face-to-face interaction, distinguishing them from unpopular or provocative political and social views ("Fighting Words"). *Chaplinsky v. New Hampshire* is the first and only case where the Supreme Court has upheld the "fighting words" doctrine. In 1942, Chaplinsky called a City Marshal a "God damned racketeer" and a "damned Fascist"; the Court ruled these words as likely to "provoke the average person to retaliation", setting the only precedent for this form of unprotected speech (Gard, 1980, p. 533). "Advocacy of illegal action" refers to speech that incites illegal activity and presents an imminent threat; such speech must pass a two-part Brandenburg test of advocating for immediate lawless action, and actually producing such action following the speech ("Categories of Unprotected Expression"). The Brandenburg test provides the highest degree of protection for

contentious political speech because it *only* restricts speech that results in a clear and present danger. In 1973, the Supreme Court held that Gregory Hess' statement, "we'll take the fucking street again", does not pass the Brandenburg test as the illegal action would be at "some indefinite future time" (Hudson, 2009). "True threat" refers to intimidating speech whereby the speaker expresses his or her intention to carry out violent acts against an individual or group of individuals. Since the basis of the "true threats" provision is to protect individuals from the fear of violence and the ensuing disruption that fear creates, it does not require that the speaker actually carry out the threat. Courts have applied varying tests to ascertain whether speech would qualify as a "true threat". In *United States v. Cassel*, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals used a "subjective intent" test against a man who threatened people from buying a plot of land next to his own; the court found that the man had subjectively intended for his comments to be interpreted as serious intimidation. In other cases, courts have used an "objective test"—speech would be a "true threat" if an objective or reasonable party would regard it as a genuine expression of intent to cause harm (Hudson, 2008). In 2002, an anti-abortion website provided a list of abortion providers, with lines drawn through the names of doctors who had been killed by militant anti-abortion activists. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals decreed that the website constituted a "true threat" because an objective third party would view the owners of the website as targeting abortion providers with violence (Hudson, 2009). Lastly, a form of expression can only be labeled as "obscene" if it passes a comprehensive three-prong Miller test—the speech, image or text should appeal to a prurient interest, it must have explicitly sexual content, and should lack literary, artistic, political or scientific values.

The protections afforded by the First Amendment relate solely to government interference in the lives of individuals and do not extend to interference by private institutions. While public

universities are extensions of the government and are bound to the First Amendment, private universities count as private organizations that have greater leeway in their policymaking (Silverglate, French and Lukianoff). Private universities are legally permitted to define their policies and missions based on a religious or political belief, however most of them have chosen to remain as secular institutions.

Role of the American University in Encouraging or Limiting Free Speech

The American university system has been hailed as the utopia of free thought, where diverse viewpoints encourage debate and challenge presuppositions. Sociologist Jonathon Cole emphasizes that the core values of a postsecondary education are rooted in the research university as a mecca for new ideas, however radical or offensive those ideas might be (2005, p. 6). He clarifies that encouraging free speech should not undermine the quality of discourse, and that rigorous research should be done to ascertain the accuracy of individuals' controversial theories (Cole, 2005, p.14). This viewpoint is rooted in the importance of academic freedom, or "the freedom to conduct research, teach, speak, and publish...without interference or penalty, wherever the search for truth and understanding may lead" (AFT Higher Education, 2007, p.1). Any such opinions expressed by students or faculty do not represent their university's position on the matter—a university does not endorse opinions as right or wrong, but rather serves as an enclave for multiple voices to engage in debate and deliberation. Although academic freedom in the classroom and freedom of expression outside its walls are deemed the hallmark of education, certain academics have proposed reasons for universities to regulate speech.

Students do not have equality of access to education if they are placed in a hostile environment and victimized based on defining factors such as race, gender, or sexual orientation (Byrne, 1991, p.407). Mitchell emphasizes how universities have a legal obligation to "thwart

racist, sexist and homophobic language, ideas and attitudes” because the principle of equal liberty in the U.S. Constitution guarantees students the right to a harassment-free education (1992, p.805). Since minority students have historically been excluded from higher education institutions, they are often considered peripheral participants on college campuses. Sociologists Aguirre and Messineo theorize that White students view the steadily increasing number of minorities in colleges as a threat to their dominant position, prompting racially motivated incidents (1997, p.28). The statistics speak for themselves— there were 804 hate crimes at U.S. postsecondary institutions in 2014, with race or ethnicity being the most frequent source of bias ("Indicator 23: Hate Crime Incidents at Postsecondary Institutions", 2017). 35% of the 804 hate crimes were racially motivated, but this is likely an underrepresentation as the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA found that only 13% of students report racial incidents (2012, p. 3). Historically publicized incidents include bias crimes at Northern Illinois University and Ohmbe College in 1988; a group of undergraduates at Northern Illinois University verbally harassed an African-American student by calling him a “nigger”, whereas students tore down flyers from the Gay Student Union in Ohmbe College (Schultz, 1993, p.27). Three decades later such incidents continue—in September 2017, White students at Cornell University hurled racist epithets while repeatedly punching an African-American student after he tried to break off an argument (Bever, 2017). LGBT-Q students are also a significant target of bias—a 2003 survey across 14 U.S. college campuses revealed that more than 36% of students have experienced harassment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity (Susan Rankin, p.4).

The U.S Department of Education found that between 1976 and 2014, the percentage of racial minority students at U.S universities rose significantly. Hispanic student enrollment rose from 4 to 17 percent, Asian/Pacific Islander student enrollment grew from 2 to 7 percent, the

number of Black students rose from 10 to 14 percent, and the percentage of White students dropped from 84 to 58 percent (“Fast Facts”, 2016). Since universities have begun to represent an increasingly diverse microcosm of the United States, the need for an inclusive campus culture is further strengthened. This involves teaching students to confront ingrained stereotypes against minority groups and police the use of prejudiced language (Daniels, 1991, p.20). While encouraging diverse viewpoints is integral to preserving a university’s mission, it is equally in the university’s interest to inculcate a sense of mutual respect among its students. Universities pledge to teach students how to rationally defend their ideas; ideas that target students based on a facet of their identity are not presented rationally nor used to provoke debate. Such ideas are designed as personal attacks that provoke violence, creating an environment that is unsafe and hostile to learning (Tthesis, 2010, p.661)

Opponents believe that censoring offensive speech does not solve the underlying problem associated with racial or gender tensions, and will not necessarily contribute to a more inclusive campus climate. Ben O’Neill introduces the idea of a “euphemism treadmill”—replacing an offensive word with a euphemism, which also eventually acquires a negative connotation and has to be replaced (2011, p. 282). This cyclical replacement of words helps explain how people who hold prejudiced views can misuse politically correct or neutral words until they are considered offensive; for instance, a bully could use “differently abled” in the same offensive context as he uses “mentally retarded” (O’Neill, 2011, p. 283). This theory holds that policing speech will fail to create a conducive campus environment because suppressing bigotry at a surface level obscures the need to tackle the root of the bigotry.

Scholars advocate for policing campus speech and implementing bias policies by providing a legal justification for them. They argue that the relationship of a government with its

citizens fundamentally differs from that of a university with its students. A professor from the Georgetown University Law Center emphasizes that the regulation of speech is implicit in a university's functioning because it should preserve values by disciplining the quality of speech. He points out that upholding these "academic values" is a constitutional provision, effectively giving universities legal basis to police speech (Byrne, 1991, p. 401). His view is corroborated by Mitchell who explains that contrary to statements by anti-political correctness supporters, regulating certain kinds of speech is not a violation of the First Amendment. Mitchell explains how a university's commitment to the free exchange of ideas should be placed in the broader context of fostering academic speech that meets high standards (1992, p. 824). The government, on the other hand, cannot regulate its citizens' speech to such an extent as the government does not have particular morals to uphold and must maintain neutrality at all levels (Byrne, 1991, p. 418).

Political Correctness and Speech Restrictions on College Campuses

Political correctness, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is avoiding language and behavior that might offend political sensibilities, especially those related to matters of race and sex. The term has heavy overtones in the campus free speech debate, and has been used by liberals and conservatives as weapons against one another. Liberals believe political correctness helps enlighten and educate society because it highlights the social sanctions imposed on someone for using words or performing actions that play to unfair stereotypes (O'neill, 2011, p. 279). The political correctness framework, thereby, outlines a clear set of behavioral expectations and makes the use of offensive terms unfashionable (Goncalo, Chatman, Duguid, & Kennedy, 2012, p.2). Conservatives, on the other hand, use political correctness to refer to the liberals' censorship of speech; the term has devolved to "undermine" the expectation that offensive

language should be eliminated (Goncalo, Chatman, Duguid, & Kennedy, 2012, p.2). They take issue that politically incorrect or “offensive” language is not assessed objectively, but is determined based on the identity of the person taking offense; the political correctness framework does not view a White person taking offense at the action of a Black individual with the same lens as a Black person taking offense at the behavior of a White individual. Liberals counteract this view with a reference to the inherent racial hierarchy that has been historically established. Professors at the University of Michigan argue that behavior that is termed oppressive when engaged in by Whites does not have the same threatening character when practiced by minorities (Sykes, 1992).

The political correctness movement started to gain traction in the early 1990s when major news sources, such as the New York Times, published articles commenting on the debate between conservatives and liberals. The articles pointed out how “political correctness” was increasingly being used as a pejorative term by those who felt the movement defined a certain “correct” attitude toward race, feminism, foreign policy and politics (Bernstein, 1990). President George Bush also added to the debate on political correctness while addressing graduating students at the University of Michigan in 1991. He took a conservative stance in describing the movement as something that “began as a crusade for civility” but “soured into a cause of conflict and even censorship”. Some even called the political correctness movement “the new intolerance or the new McCarthyism,” a time during the Cold War when university faculty were indiscriminately fired for being Communist sympathizers (Schultz, 1993, p.7). This Discourse around political correctness continues to dominate U.S. media, with the term appearing more than 4,000 times in major newspapers in just 2011. (Goncalo, Chatman, Duguid, & Kennedy, 2012, p.4).

The primary goal of the politically correct movement, which was to suppress intolerance toward racial minorities, females, and other disadvantaged groups, was met by instating speech codes across college campuses. Speech codes are university regulations that punish, forbid or heavily regulate speech that would have fallen under the category of protected speech “in society at large” (Majeed, 2009, p.484). Speech codes might prohibit speech based on content, or limit it to certain zones on campus; a ban on “disparaging remarks” is content-based speech regulation whereas designated free speech zones are part of location-based restrictions (“What are Speech Codes?”, FIRE). Some scholars hold that speech code policies do not necessarily improve the campus climate and are merely a symbolic change made in order to placate civil rights groups (Majeed, 2009, p.487). While campus speech codes have been in place since the end of the 20th century, “trigger warnings” and “micro-aggression education” have recently become a part of the politically correct movement. Trigger warnings are alerts that professors may issue if their course material has sensitive topics; micro-aggressions are defined as small actions and words that do not overtly convey offense but carry discriminatory and threatening undertones nonetheless (Raff, Lukianoff, & Haidt, 2015).

Scholars are concerned that speech codes conflict with the university’s function as a “marketplace of ideas” (Majeed, 2009, p.501). Those opposing speech regulation are concerned that it suppresses discussions, and teaches students “*what* to think, instead of *how* to think”; they fear that protectiveness will create a generation of students that thinks pathologically (Raff, Lukianoff, & Haidt, 2015). Although advocates for speech regulation agree that a university functions by allowing novel thoughts to flourish, they hold that universities should set standards of speech in order to maintain a certain quality of speech and discourse (Byrne, 1991, p. 416). Furthermore, the empirical evidence indicates that there is not as heavy censorship in universities

as the media portrays. Only three percent of education institutions have reported issues with course curriculum, and speakers have been disinvited for holding controversial views only in ten percent of institutions (Schultz, 1993, p.11).

There are some findings, albeit rare, that refute the widely popularized view that the politically correct framework is harming free speech. A Cornell study found that invoking the politically correct framework increases the salience of the social sanctions imposed on someone for using inappropriate language. This, in turn, reduces any uncertainty about how individuals should interact with one another and such clear expectations encourage comfortable exchange of ideas. This study, however, was performed with a mixed-sex group and the discussions were constrained to only organizational and occupational contexts. There has been significant opposition to this idea that explicitly defined speech codes remove ambiguity regarding what speech is acceptable. Scholars highlight how speech codes are rarely well-defined and are open to broad interpretation. They cite the landmark case of *Doe v University of Michigan* where the court struck down speech codes for being unconstitutionally vague and infringing on the First Amendment (Majeed, 2009, p.490). Ambiguously worded speech policies continue to come under scrutiny—the current John Hopkins speech code, that states the school will not condone “rude, disrespectful behavior”, has become a topic of debate (Majeed, 2009, p.484). Such policies cannot appropriately warn students about what speech is permissible because they do not outline an objective test that determines if a particular form of expression is “disrespectful”.

Summary

The spotlight for political correctness is on college campuses because they have traditionally been deemed as spaces where the free exchange of ideas is championed. Although the motivation behind implementing speech codes is to create tolerant campuses, the resultant

“chilling” of speech can be at odds with a university’s goal of generating new ideas through inquiry and informed discussion. Since the role of free speech on college campuses is being fiercely debated, it is extremely valuable to understand students’ opinions on the issue. This research aimed to see the extent to which students value free speech, and when they feel it should be restricted for creating a more tolerant campus climate. As the literature suggests, campus speech codes have been in place since the 1990s, and institutions continue to face legal and social opposition for the severity of their policies. This study assessed students’ attitudes toward issues of free speech and academic freedom in the context of their university’s speech policies—how do attitudes vary at universities with different kinds of speech codes and restrictions?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Since a majority of the debate surrounding political correctness occurs on college campuses, students form the ideal sample for evaluating the impact of the movement. Students are directly impacted by university policies, making it necessary to assess their attitudes toward balancing free speech against creating an inclusive environment. I used speech codes as a measure of political correctness since these are written university policies that outline specific consequences for those who violate them. Colleges have also been given rankings based on the restrictiveness of their speech policies, helping to evaluate student attitudes in the context of their university's specific policy. While trigger warnings and micro-aggressions also fall under the political correctness umbrella, policies related to them are already addressed in the speech codes of most universities.

The Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) is a non-profit educational organization that publishes rankings of universities based on their speech policies. FIRE aims to protect individual rights on U.S. college campuses, and primarily focuses on issues of free speech. A ranking of “red” implies that the university has at least one policy that clearly and substantially limits free speech. A “clear” restriction is one that unambiguously imposes on free speech, regardless of how the policy is applied; a “substantial” restriction is one that encompasses broad categories of speech that would be protected constitutionally. For instance, a ban on “offensive speech” is a “clear” restriction because it unambiguously restricts free speech, and is a “substantial” restriction as it limits a broad range of protected speech. A ranking of “yellow” implies that the university's speech policies *could* be interpreted to suppress free speech; for instance, a ban on “verbal abuse” might refer to unprotected speech such as

harassment or true threats, but at the same time is broad enough that it *could* restrict speech that is protected. A “green” ranking means that the university’s written policies do not threaten freedom of speech and expression (“Spotlight on Speech Codes”, 2016). I focused on students from two universities, one that has been given a “red” rating and another that has been rated “green”; a “red” rating represents restrictive speech policies whereas “green” represents less restrictive speech policies. I ensured that there was little variation between the two universities in terms of university type (private versus public), university size, student body diversity, and regional location. I wanted to compare student attitudes in the context of the severity of their university’s speech policy, while holding constant the aforementioned variables as they might have impacted student attitudes. I included a third university with a “red” rating as a comparison point. This university had relatively lower diversity, which allowed me to assess whether student attitudes toward free speech were affected if students were less exposed to different ethnicities.

Since public universities are extensions of the government, they are directly bound to honor freedom of speech as accorded by the First Amendment. The guarantees of the First Amendment do not apply to private universities because the First Amendment only regulates government entities. Therefore, private universities have increased flexibility in their speech policies and form better models to study attitudes in varying environments. I subsequently chose to compare only private universities—Duke University and Emory University. Both these universities are located in the Southeast region of the U.S., have a similarly sized undergraduate student body and have a campus diversity index that ranges between 0.63 and 0.65 (“Campus Ethnic Diversity”). Duke University has been given a “green” rating by FIRE whereas Emory University has a “red” rating, providing the basis for comparison. I chose Davidson College as the third institution; Davidson is a private liberal arts college in the Southeast region of the U.S.

with a campus diversity index of 0.44 and speech policy rating of “red”. It differs from both Duke and Emory because it has a significantly smaller and more homogenous student body.

The primary reason that Duke has a “green” rating and Emory has a “red” rating is because of the difference in their policies regarding bias incidents. Both universities agree that bias incidents are motivated by the offender’s bias against facets of the victim’s identity. However, Duke explicitly outlines its limits on disciplining someone who is accused of a bias incident; it emphasizes that the University’s responsibility lies in “appropriately balancing individual freedoms such as freedom of speech and artistic expression” with fair treatment of its students (“Duke University”). Duke explains how it will take into consideration the University’s purpose as a marketplace of ideas when evaluating whether a student’s bias-related conduct violates their expectations. Emory, however, does not qualify bias-incidents in the context of respecting free speech and expression. Emory also includes “name-calling”, “stereotyping”, and language-related cases under bias incidents, whereas Duke defines a bias incident as solely an action or behavior (“Bias Incident Reporting”). Davidson College has also been given a “red” rating for its bias incidents policy. FIRE states that Davidson’s policy is too broad; it deems Davidson’s examples of bias incidents as, such as “professors who make pejorative comments about a protected class of people”, violations of free speech (“Davidson College”).

Data Collection: Survey

I administered an anonymous web-based survey with close-ended questions to undergraduate students at the three universities. The survey design was anonymous because questions about speech policies and campus tensions constitute sensitive topics, and students might have been less honest if their identity was disclosed. Close-ended questions were used because they ensure that students interpret the questions similarly; open-ended questions can be

misinterpreted, which makes it harder to code responses meaningfully and reduces the validity of the research. Close-ended surveys also have higher response rates because they take less time to complete than open-ended surveys, allowing me to assess a greater number of students' attitudes.

I created a vignette survey, with five options on the response scale that are designed to assess the respondent's views on the event in the vignette. Vignettes are short descriptions of hypothetical persons and events that are presented to respondents in order to assess their attitudes or beliefs toward the situation (Finch, 1987, p.105). Vignette studies rely on the assumption that attitudinal responses to a hypothetical situation will mirror how respondents would behave if presented with a similar situation in real life. Vignettes are helpful in gauging attitudes as they specify the context, allowing respondents to make decisions in a scenario that is similar to reality (Finch, 1987, p.106). Furthermore, a detailed vignette description helps achieve uniformity across the respondent population as it prevents them from creating varying versions of the scenario in their imagination (Alexander, & Becker, 1978, p.93). However, one concern with vignette studies is the extent to which the responses can be generalized to situations that are outside the vignette description (Ruzicka, 2014).

The survey contained five vignettes, which describe hypothetical situations where people host events or make remarks that could offend minority groups. This survey was loosely inspired by recently conducted national surveys on the attitudes of college students toward free speech. Gallup, Knight Foundation and Newseum Institute conducted a survey in 2016, in which they assessed whether U.S college students and U.S adults have different attitudes toward free speech and the First Amendment rights. The Pew Research Center conducted a similar study that looked at whether younger generations were more likely to favor speech restrictions. While these studies looked at attitudinal differences across different ages, my survey focused only on

attitudes of college-age students. The five-point response scale for each vignette ranged between Definitely, Probably, Possibly, Probably Not and Definitely Not. The responses gauged whether respondents were more inclined to champion freedom of speech, or whether they believed in restricting offensive speech to further an inclusive environment for all identity groups. The survey also contained an initial section where respondents provided demographic information related to their race/ethnicity, religion, gender identity and sexual orientation.

I released the online survey on relevant Facebook pages and social list serves for each university on September 18th, 2017. My high school friends who are current Seniors and Juniors at Emory University and Davison College helped me gain access to the Facebook pages and list serve emails. I created a separate lottery for respondents from each university in order to incentivize participation—one person from each school received a \$50 Amazon gift card. I also reposted the survey links every two days for a 10-day period to ensure a greater response rate, and closed the survey on September 27th with 629 participants overall. The response rates based on the total undergraduate population of each university were 2.23% for Duke, 1.04% for Emory and 7.13% for Davidson.

Duke students accounted for 56.43% of the total respondent population—57.25% of the females and 54.74% of the males; Emory and Davidson made up 23.21% and 20.34% of the total responses respectively. A majority of respondents were female at both the aggregate and school level—females constituted 63.38% of Duke respondents, 57.53% of Emory respondents and 64.84% of Davidson respondents. (Table I).

TABLE I.

	Duke	Emory	Davidson	Total
Females	225	84	83	392
Males	127	60	45	232
Genderqueer	3	2	0	5
Total	355	146	128	629

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

I structured the results into two sections based on what the vignettes were designed to assess. Responses from Vignette 1, Vignette 2, Vignette 4 and Vignette 5 are analyzed in Section I because they measure whether participants would take action against speech or behavior that could offend minority sentiments. Vignette 3 responses are explored in Section II because that particular vignette evaluates students' perceptions regarding the campus climate—how accepting is the campus to conservative or unpopular viewpoints. I conducted one-tail T-tests with a p-value of 0.05 when testing for statistically significant differences between responses.

Section I: “Political correctness” level

Vignette 1, Vignette 2, Vignette 4 and Vignette 5 each describes a scenario where individuals experience stereotype or threat because of their race, ethnicity or religion. I created a “political correctness” score for each participant by adding the participant’s responses from each of these vignettes. A lower score in each vignette indicates a preference for restricting freedom of expression; the lower the “political correctness” score, the more likely the student is to take actions against “offensive” or racially and religiously insensitive speech. I analyzed the difference in responses across universities and genders for each of the vignettes that constitute the “political correctness” score. This section concludes with an analysis of the average “political correctness” score for each university, and explores whether there is a significant difference among the universities based on the restrictiveness of their respective speech policies.

Vignette 1

Speakers whose views have induced controversy or protests have been disinvited by university administrators from campus events at an increasing rate over the last few years. FIRE reports that 11 “disinvitations” and 13 disruptions occurred in 2016, which is more than double

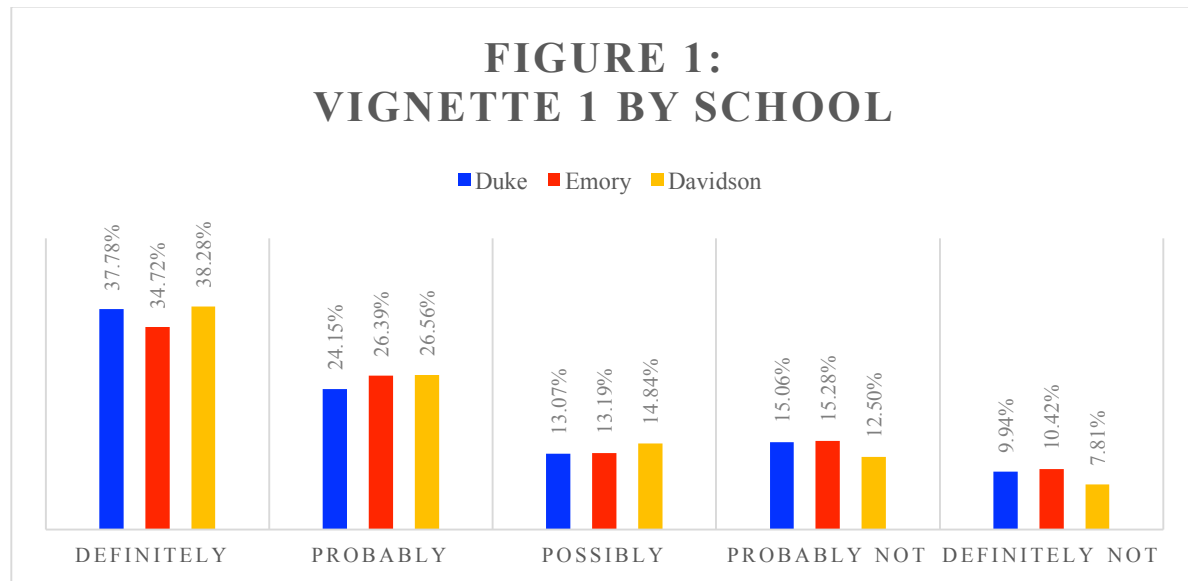
the number of speakers who were disinvited in 2015. Left-leaning students have prompted a substantial majority of these “disinvitations”, citing concerns about speakers’ conservative views on race and gender issues (“Disinvitation Database”, FIRE). Student organizations lead protests against speakers whose views oppose their own; they emphasize that the concerned speaker’s presence might create a negative learning environment and harm the psychological well-being of certain identity groups. In the past, if administrators have not responded to student opposition and proactively disinvited the speaker, protestors have used violence to disrupt the speaker event.

Vignette 1 mirrors an incident that occurred in March 2017 at Middlebury College—violent protestors disrupted author Charles Murray while he was giving a talk to a conservative student group. Murray authored “Bell Curve”, where he proposed the controversial theory that the lower socio-economic status of Black people stems from genetic differences in IQ between Blacks and Whites. Although Murray was scheduled to talk about a different book, protestors jeered him off the stage, deemed him a “White supremacist” and severely injured a faculty member who had invited him. Vignette 1 is as follows:

“Mr. Smith has written a book, which proposes the theory that White people have superior genetics. He has been invited to your university to speak on a topic that is unrelated to his book on superior White genetics. There have been protests on your campus, calling for Mr. Smith to be disinvited because his presence would make students from minority races feel uncomfortable. Do you agree with the sentiments of the protestors?”

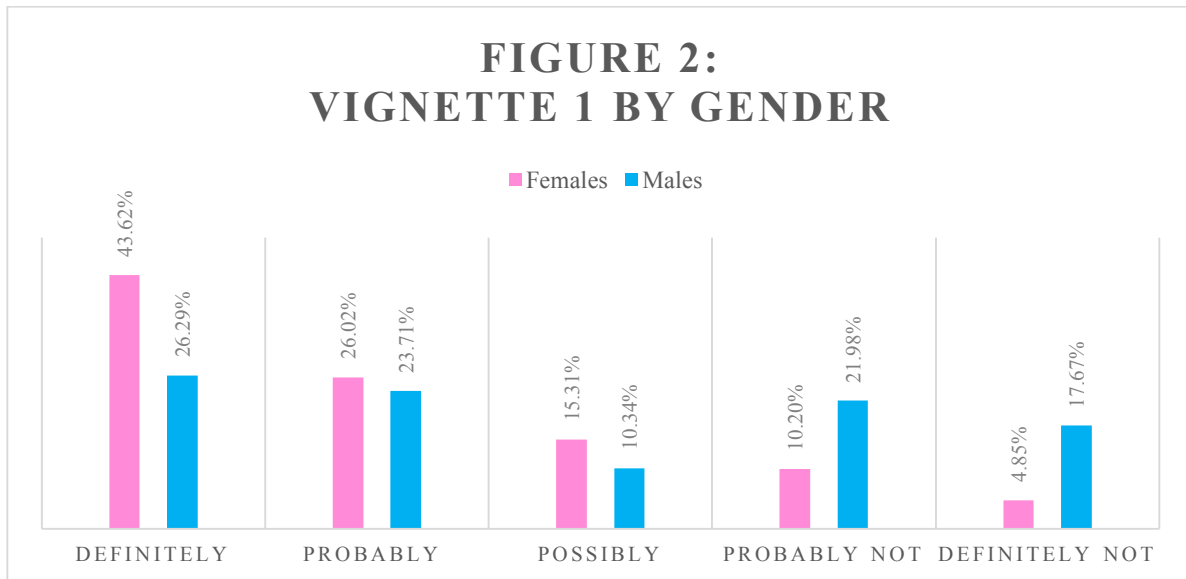
A substantial majority of respondents favored disinviting the speaker and there was no statistically significant difference in aggregate responses across Duke, Emory and Davidson (Figure 1). Approximately 61% of respondents at Duke and Emory would *definitely* or *probably* agree with the sentiments of the protestors, while 64% of students at Davidson would *definitely*

or *probably* agree. A 2017 nationwide survey corroborates this finding; McLaughlin & Associates surveyed 800 undergraduates and found that 58% of respondents believe their college should forbid speakers who have a history of engaging in hate speech. This is an increase from the 2015 version of the survey, where 49% of respondents agreed that such speakers should be forbidden (2017, p.15).



Comparing responses across the schools based on the gender of respondents also revealed no difference. Approximately 50% of males at each school and 70% of females at each school *definitely* or *probably* would agree with the sentiments of the protestors. This pattern, however, reflects a statistically significant difference between females and males at an aggregate level (Figure 2). While a substantial majority of females would disinvite the speaker, male responses did not indicate a strong preference for either disinviting the speaker or encouraging him to espouse his views. At Duke, only 5% of females would *definitely not* agree with the protestors, as compared to 18% of males who would *definitely not* agree. Although Emory and Davidson are red-rated institutions, they showed similar results—only 4% of females at Emory and 5% of females at Davidson would *definitely not* agree, whereas 20% of males at Emory and 13.33% of

males at Davidson would *definitely not* agree. This indicates that female-identifying students are more likely to favor creating an inclusive environment where minority students do not feel threatened, even if it might come at the cost of curbing diversity in thought and speech.



A Brookings Institution Fellow surveyed 1,500 undergraduate students and found that females are more likely than males to believe that hate speech is not constitutionally protected (Villasenor, 2017). Thus, females at Duke, Emory and Davidson might have been more likely to disinvite a speaker with theories on the “superiority of White genetics” because they would have a greater tendency to believe that his views are unconstitutional. A University of Toronto study also illustrates how females demonstrate higher compassion and are more sensitive to offensive discourse, explaining why females were more inclined to protect minority sentiments (Brophy, 2015, p.12). The University of Toronto study further reveals how non-White females are more likely than White females to value being politically correct. The administered survey results corroborate this finding—86.6% of African-American females reported that they would *definitely* agree with the sentiments of the protestors while only 38.5% of White females reported

that they would *definitely* agree. African-American females are more likely to have had real-life experiences where they felt threatened by comments on White superiority, possibly explaining why a substantial majority of them felt offended by the speaker in the vignette and chose to disinvite him.

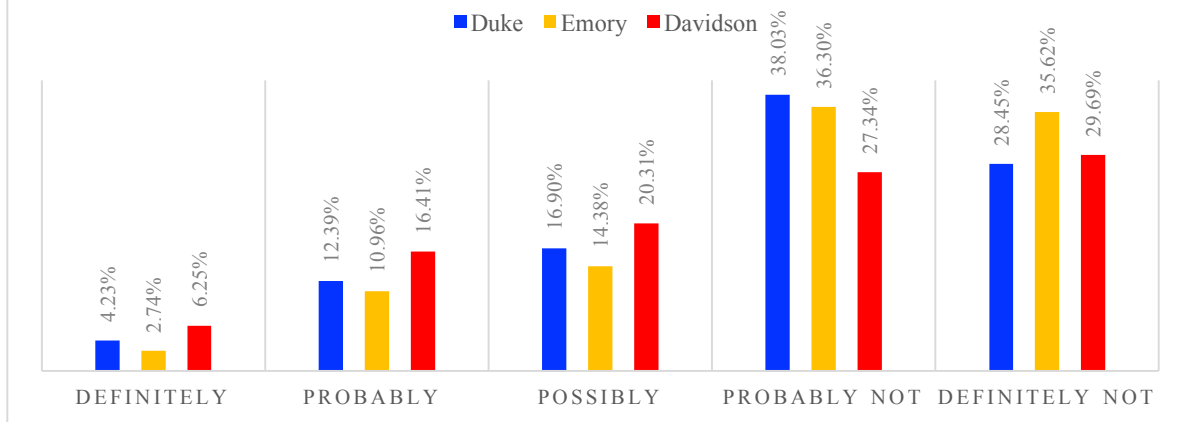
Vignette 2

Vignette 2 also explores the theme of protecting racial minorities, particularly African-Americans, from potentially threatening forms of expression. Vignette 2 is as follows:

“There is a statue on campus commemorating the contributions of one of the university’s primary donors. Although the donor was born after slavery had been abolished, previous generations of his family had been associated with the slave trade. A group of students has started a petition, requesting the university to take down the statue because they believe it disrespects the African-American students and their history. Would you sign this petition?”

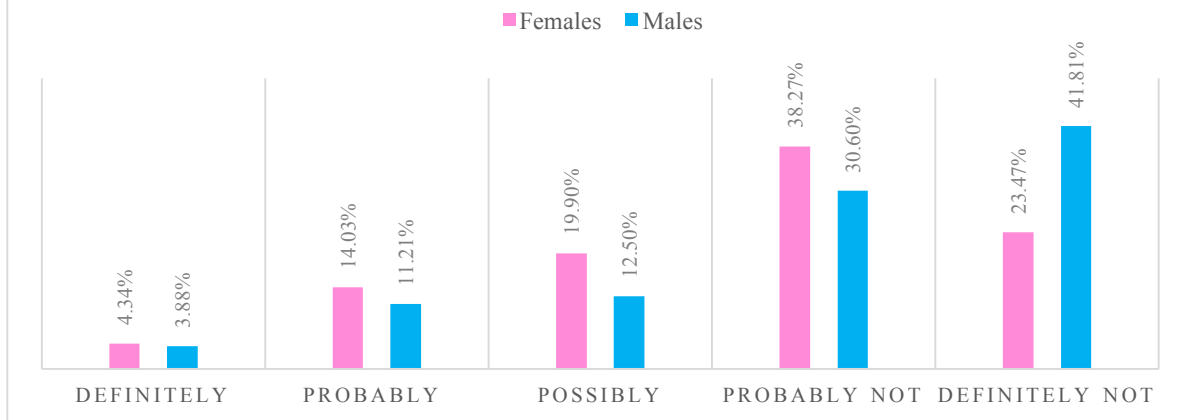
Despite Duke being a green-rated institution, there was no statistically significant difference in aggregate responses between Duke and the two institutions with more restrictive speech codes—Emory and Davidson (Figure 3). There was, however, a slight difference in Emory and Davidson responses; 71.92% of Emory respondents would *definitely not* or *probably not* sign the petition, whereas 57.03% of Davidson respondents would *definitely not* or *probably not* sign the petition. Similar to Vignette 1 findings, Vignette 2 results illustrated how speech policies do not impact student attitudes toward freedom of expression in any particular direction.

**FIGURE 3:
VIGNETTE 2 BY SCHOOL**



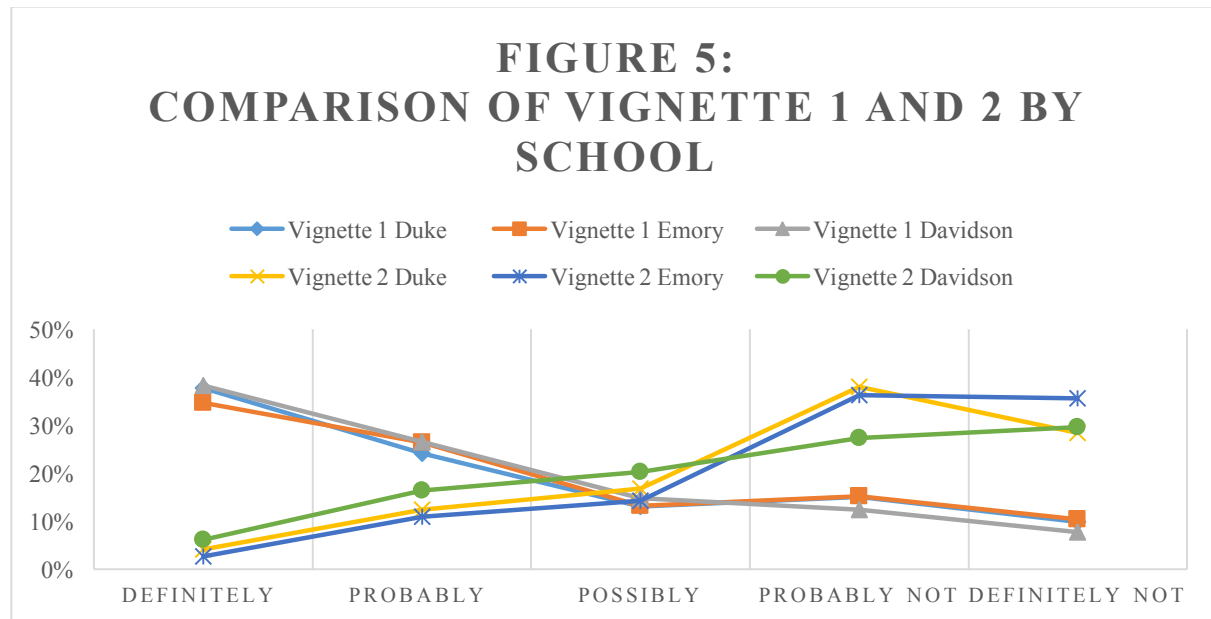
While a 61.73% majority of females and 72.41% majority of males favored retaining the statue, males were more likely to be certain of this decision—41.81% of males would *definitely not* sign the petition, as opposed to 23.47% of females (Figure 4). This once again illustrated how females are more likely to value protecting disadvantaged groups over championing freedom of expression. However, analyzing the results at an aggregate level obscures the difference in responses between schools. Emory and Davidson showed no statistically significant difference between male and female responses, but Duke males were statistically more likely to favor maintaining the statue than Duke females. Despite Emory’s restrictive speech policies, it still had the highest percentage of female respondents, 26.19%, and highest percentage of male respondents, 48.33%, who would *definitely not* sign the petition. This emphasizes how a university with restrictive speech policies does not contribute to the campus climate in a manner that influences its student body to have lesser respect for freedom of expression.

**FIGURE 4:
VIGNETTE 2 BY GENDER**



Overall, Vignette 2 responses were skewed to the end of the response scale—a 66% majority of students favored retaining the statue and would *definitely not* or *probably not* sign the petition. This was a notable difference between Vignette 1 and Vignette 2 responses. While most respondents provided the politically correct response of respecting minority sentiments in Vignette 1, they placed greater value on freedom of expression in Vignette 2 (Figure 5). I hypothesize that this variation in responses occurred because students have had greater exposure, either first-hand or through the media, to the exact incident described in Vignette 1. The survey responses are consistent with the trend observed at peer institutions—students are increasingly likely to protest against conservative speakers (Lukianoff, 2014). Emory and Duke have also had speaker disruptions at their very own institutions; David Horowitz was jeered off the stage at Emory for his conservative views on sexual orientation and race, and Asra Nomani received backlash at Duke for her alleged “alliance with Islamophobic groups” (Nomani, 2015; Rizzo, 2017). Although there have been some controversies surrounding the removal of statues in the South, those statues commemorated Confederate soldiers who fought to maintain slavery. Since the statue in Vignette 2 honors an individual who is not directly linked with the slave trade,

students might have also viewed the statue as being less offensive to minorities. It is likely that respondents would be more concerned about a speaker actively influencing students to think in ways that marginalize minorities on their campus; respondents might have considered the statue as a symbol of past oppression, and less likely to affect student views and sentiments.



Vignette 4

A number of living groups have come under scrutiny by university administrators for hosting parties with themes that emphasize stereotypes against ethnic minorities or women. Vignette 4 is based off an incident at Baylor University, where a fraternity hosted a Mexican-themed party called “Cinco de Drinko” in April 2017 (Schmidt, 2017). Students wore costumes featuring sombreros and serapes, and some attendees even painted their faces brown and chanted “build that wall”. The party garnered a lot of negative attention on social media, prompting Baylor to suspend the fraternity. Vignette 4 is as follows:

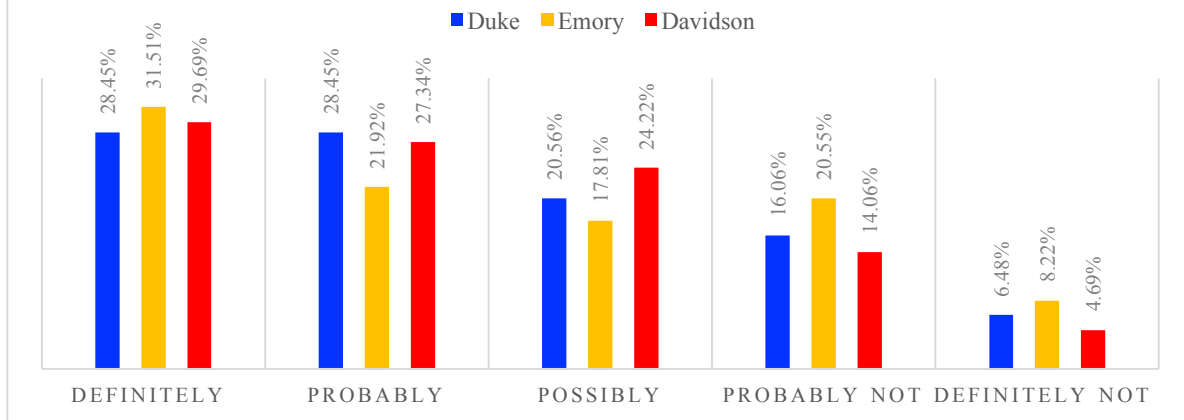
“A social living group creates a Facebook event inviting students to a party. The theme of the party is “Mexican Fiesta”. The invite suggests that students dress as “illegal immigrants”,

“criminals” or “border patrol agents”. The social organization uploads pictures of individuals wearing sombreros and fake moustaches on the Facebook event. After several concerns from students regarding the racial and ethnic stereotypes surrounding the party theme, the social living group cancels the party. Although they cancelled the party, do you think the university administration should put the social living group on probation?”

The hypothetical in Vignette 4 is particularly similar to Vignette 1 because it hypothesizes an event that has garnered notoriety on college campuses, enabling respondents to draw on their real-life experiences while answering the question. A slight majority of respondents, 56%, would *definitely* or *probably* want the university to place the social living group on probation. These results are in line with the administrative response at other prominent private universities such as Dartmouth College and Washington University in Saint Louis, where fraternities were suspended for party themes (Otani & Diamond, 2015). Only 6.5% of respondents would *definitely not* suspend the living group, whereas 21% of respondents responded with the neutral option of *possibly*. I hypothesize that a *stronger* majority did not choose to put the living group on probation because the group did not eventually host the party. Respondents who wanted to prevent a minority group’s culture from becoming a caricature at a party would be less inclined to disband the social group if the party never occurred, and the minority group’s culture was eventually not mocked.

There was no statistically significant difference in aggregate responses across the three schools, reemphasizing how speech codes do not impact student attitudes. A slight majority at each school—56.90% at Duke, 53.42% at Emory and 57.03% at Davidson—would *definitely* or *probably* place the living group on probation (Figure 6).

**FIGURE 6:
VIGNETTE 4 BY SCHOOL**



Breaking down the results by gender revealed no substantial difference when it came to Duke and Davidson—58.22% of Duke females and 54.33% of Duke males, and 57.83% of Davidson females and 55.56% of Davidson males would *definitely* or *probably* place the living group on probation. Emory, however, had significantly more females than males who would *definitely* or *probably* place the living group on probation—57.14% females versus 46.67% males. Compared to Duke and Davidson, Emory had the *lowest* percentage of males, 18.33%, who would *definitely* place the group on probation, and the *highest* percentage of males, 15%, who would *definitely not* place the group on probation; 24.41% of Duke males and 24.44% of Davidson males would *definitely* put the group on probation, while 11.81% of Duke males and 11.11% of Davidson males would *definitely not* place the group on probation. Emory males might have been the least likely group to favor suspending the living organization because males are far more likely than females to host a party at Emory. While Duke and Davidson have co-ed living groups that host parties, Emory’s parties are primarily held by fraternities, which are male-only organizations. Emory males might have identified and empathized most strongly with members of the living group in Vignette 4, accounting for the gender difference.

Since most living groups that have been suspended for hosting parties with offensive themes have been fraternities, I analyzed the difference in responses between fraternity members and unaffiliated students. I found a statistically significant difference at the aggregate level—only 36.48% of fraternity members, versus 59.72% of unaffiliated students would *definitely* or *probably* put the living group on probation.

Vignette 5

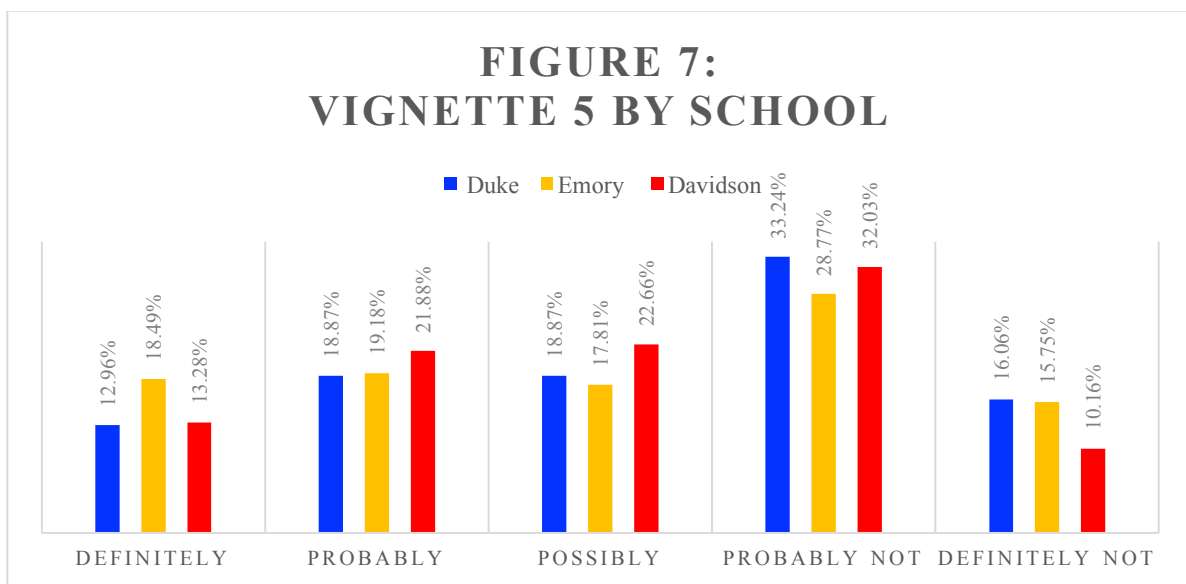
Bias assessment and response teams (BARTs) are formal panels at U.S. universities typically composed of administrators, students and faculty; they investigate student bias reports and recommend the appropriate course of action (New, 2016). Students can typically report any form of expression that they consider offensive or biased against someone's identity.

Administrators explain that BARTs ensure that all students, irrespective of race, gender or sexual orientation, can pursue education in an environment free of harassment or discrimination.

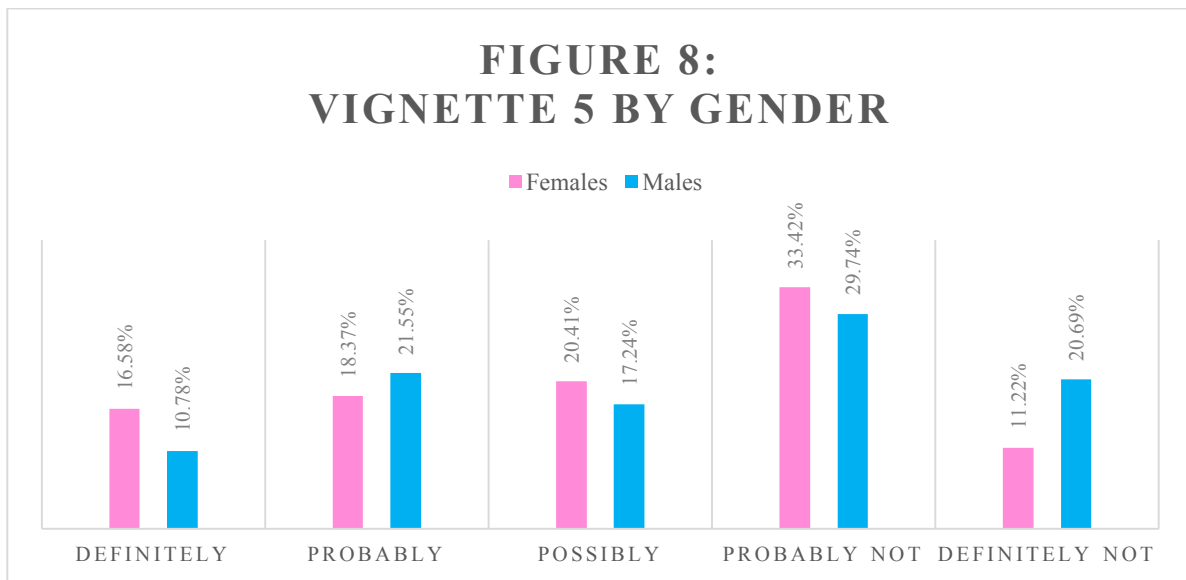
BARTs, however, are criticized for being vague and restricting speech that is protected under the First Amendment. Additionally, free speech organizations such as FIRE are concerned that a bias incident reporting system might discourage students from challenging each other's ideas and espousing different ideologies. Since bias incident reporting mechanisms form a crucial component of university speech policies, I incorporated a bias incident in Vignette 5. The Vignette also describes what a bias incident is, and briefly explains how the student should report the incident. Vignette 5 is as follows:

Maria is sitting in the university café and comments to a friend that she often feels unsafe in the presence of Muslims because she feels their religion “is too radical and promotes terrorism”. Another student overhears this conversation, and reports Maria for a bias incident. Should Maria be reported for a bias incident?*

Despite different bias reporting policies and speech codes at the three schools, there was no statistically significant difference in responses at an aggregate level. Although a greater percentage of respondents, 46.74%, would *definitely not* or *probably not* report the student, there was no clear majority on either end of the response scale. At each school, the highest percentage of respondents chose the *probably not* option—33.24% for Duke, 28.77% for Emory and 32.03% for Davidson (Figure 7). Although Vignette 1 and Vignette 5 both explore offensive speech against racial and ethnic minorities, Vignette 5 did not have a majority of respondents who favored limiting speech. It is possible that this occurred because respondents are not wholly aware of the procedural details behind bias reporting at their school, or the repercussions that students face if they are reported for a bias incident. Respondents might have also thought that the comments made by the student in the vignette are less likely to create an unsafe and hostile environment; a university-endorsed speaker has greater power to influence the thoughts and attitudes of students, whereas the student in the vignette was engaged in a private conversation and did not intend to project her views on an entire student body.



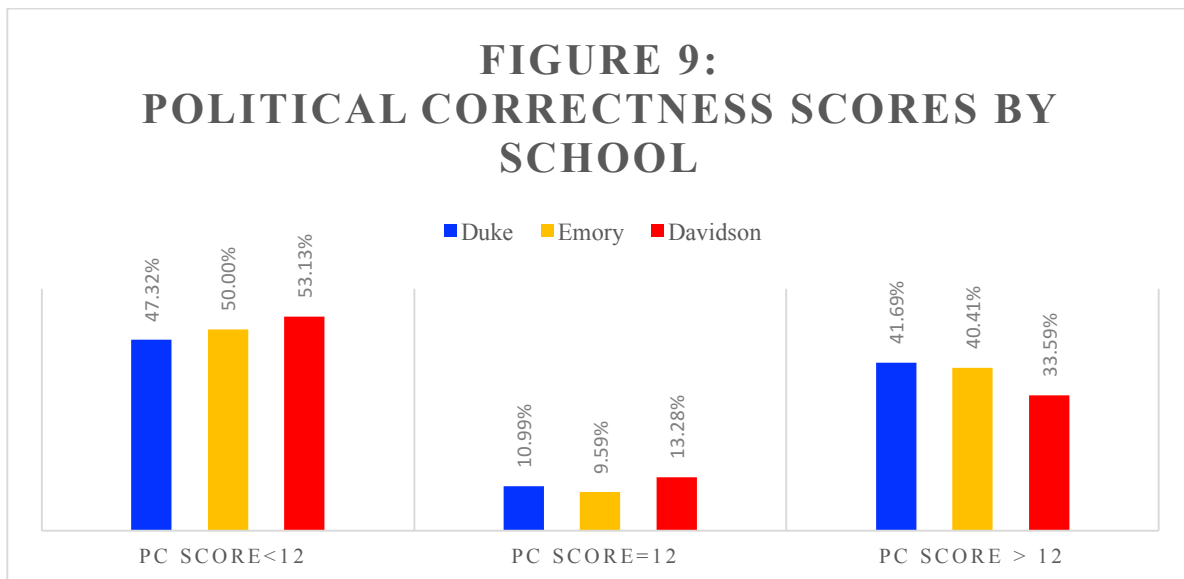
Dividing the responses by gender also revealed no statistically significant difference, either at the aggregate level or within each school (Figure 8). Although 50.43% of males and 44.64% of females would *definitely not* or *probably not* report the student, the results did not reveal a strong majority. At both Duke and Emory, a slightly greater percentage of females than males would *definitely* or *probably* report the student; 34.22% of females versus 27.56% of males at Duke, and 39.29% of females versus 36.69% of males at Emory. These results differed at Davidson where a greater percentage of males than females would have reported the student—40% of males versus 32.53% of females would *definitely* or *probably* report.



Political correctness score

The “political correctness” scores had a possible range from 4 to 20, with a lower value indicating a preference for restricting speech in order to protect minority sentiments. There was no statistically significant difference among the average “political correctness” scores for the three universities; Duke’s average score was 11.738, Emory’s average score was 11.883 and Davidson’s average score was 11.234. Since the median “political correctness” score falls at 12, I used 12 as a threshold value for grouping responses. A “political correctness” score below 12

indicates the respondent is more likely to restrict forms of expression that disparage people based on their identity, whereas a score above 12 implies the respondent values freedom of expression even if that expression is offensive to minorities. The distribution of responses was similar across all three schools—a greater percentage of students at each university had “political correctness” scores below 12. 47.32% of Duke respondents, 50% of Emory respondents and 53.13% of Davidson respondents had “political correctness” scores below 12, as opposed to 41.69% of Duke respondents, 40.41% of Emory respondents and 33.59% of Davidson respondents who had scores above 12 (Figure 9). The average “political correctness” score of each school and the distribution of “political correctness” scores revealed a *slight* preference for curtailing speech in the furtherance of a positive learning environment. Despite differing degrees of speech restrictions at the three schools, there was a strong like-mindedness among college students’ attitudes toward free speech.



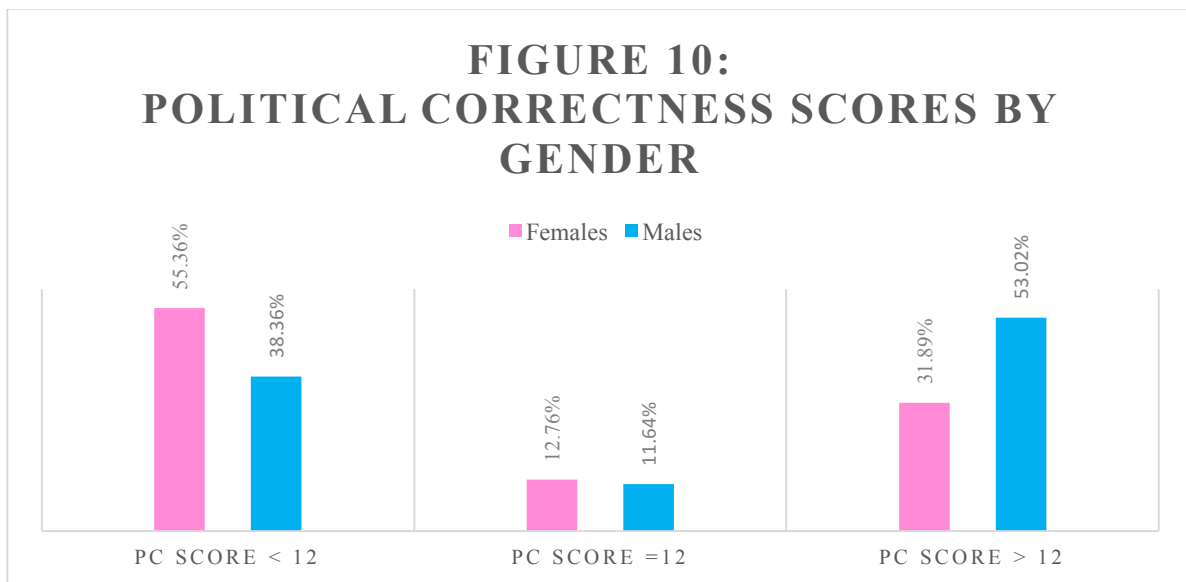
Respondents strongly favored protecting minority sentiments if the offensive remarks were made by someone prominent, such as a campus speaker, who might further

encourage other students to espouse racially offensive theories. Respondents were less concerned about Vignette 5 where a student made insensitive comments about a religious minority in a café; it is likely that they think comments made during a private conversation are less harmful and should not be policed as strongly. The results also illustrated that students are more concerned about an offensive event occurring, rather than the offensive sentiments behind it—only a weak majority of students chose to disband the social living group in Vignette 4, possibly because the party was eventually cancelled. Finally, students consider speech as being far more threatening than symbols or statues; Vignette 2 was the only vignette where students strongly preferred promoting freedom of expression.

This distribution of “political correctness” scores is in line with nationwide survey findings, which reflect an increasing preference for limiting offensive speech on U.S campuses. The Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA administers an annual survey to incoming college freshman to gauge their views on many topics, including free speech and campus inclusivity. The 2015 results showed that 71% of freshmen agreed that “colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus”—the highest percentage that has ever been documented (Rampell, 2016). A 2017 Brookings Institute survey showed that a slight majority of students preferred “creating a positive environment” by prohibiting potentially offensive speech, to “creating an open learning environment” where students are exposed to all viewpoints, including prejudiced ones (Villasenor). Thus, the “political correctness” scores from Duke, Davidson, and Emory match the nationwide trend of championing a sheltered campus environment over freedom of expression.

Analyzing the “political correctness” scores by gender reaffirmed the finding from the individual vignettes that females were more likely than males to take action against speech and

behavior that hurt minority sentiments. Females had significantly lower “political correctness” scores as compared to males—the average “political correctness” score was 11.05 for females and 12.7 for males. It follows that the distribution of female and male responses at the aggregate level were diametrically opposite; a slight majority of females, 55.36%, had “political correctness” scores below 12, while a slight majority of males, 53.02%, had “political correctness” scores above 12 (Figure 10).



Similarly, a comparison of male and female “political correctness” scores within each school revealed that female scores were statistically lower at both Duke and Emory. While females at Davidson also had lower “political correctness” scores than Davidson males did, this difference was not as statistically significant (Table II). Although Emory is rated red for its more restrictive speech policies, Emory males had the highest average “political correctness” score, or were the least likely respondent group to restrict freedom of speech in favor of inclusivity. This shows how restrictive speech policies do not necessarily encourage students to adopt attitudes in favor of the political correctness movement. Finally, there was no statistically significant

difference among male responses at Duke, Emory and Davidson, or among female responses at the three schools. This highlights how students of the same gender have similar attitudes toward free speech on college campuses, irrespective of the nature of speech policies at their university.

TABLE II.

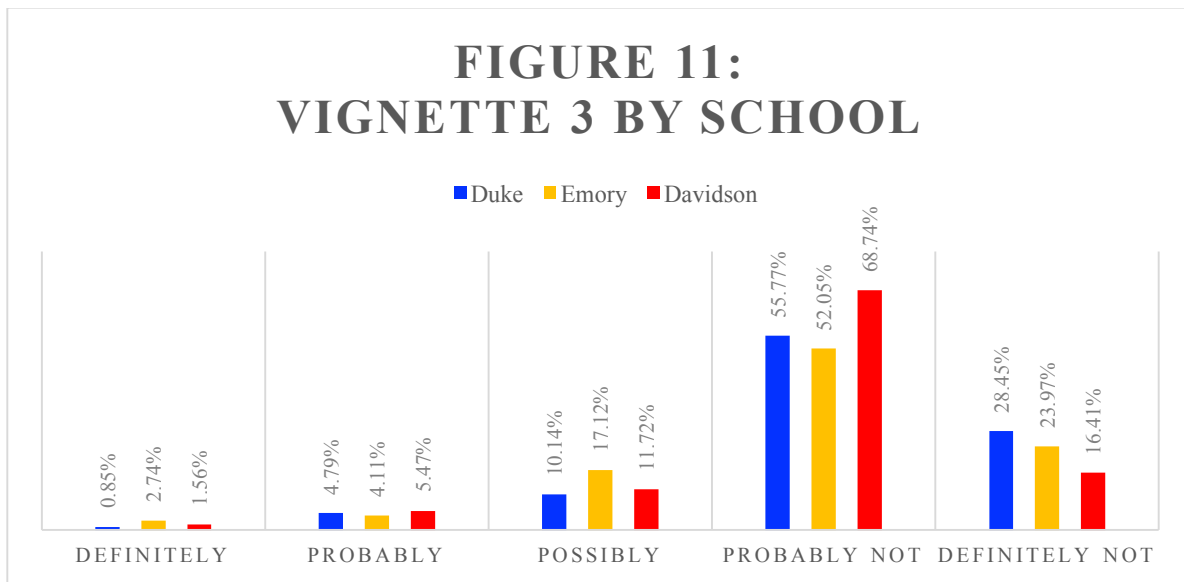
	Male “political correctness” score	Female “political correctness” score
Duke	12.77	11.155
Emory	13.08	11.02
Davidson	11.97	10.83

Section II: Closet conservatives

Vignette 3’s score was not used in computing the “political correctness” score because it does not test a respondent’s preference for freedom of speech versus sensitivity, but assesses the respondent’s understanding of the campus climate. Vignette 3 asks respondents whether students would be comfortable expressing conservative viewpoints in the safety of an academic setting. A higher score on this vignette indicates that respondents feel that conservative students are less likely to express their viewpoints for fear of liberal retaliation. The Pew Research Center found that liberal support for gay marriage is as much as 44 percentage points higher than conservative support for gay marriage—85% of liberals support gay marriage as compared to only 41% conservatives (“Changing Attitudes on Gay Marriage”, 2017). I used this data to support the notion that students who do not support gay rights hold conservative views. Vignette 3 is as follows:

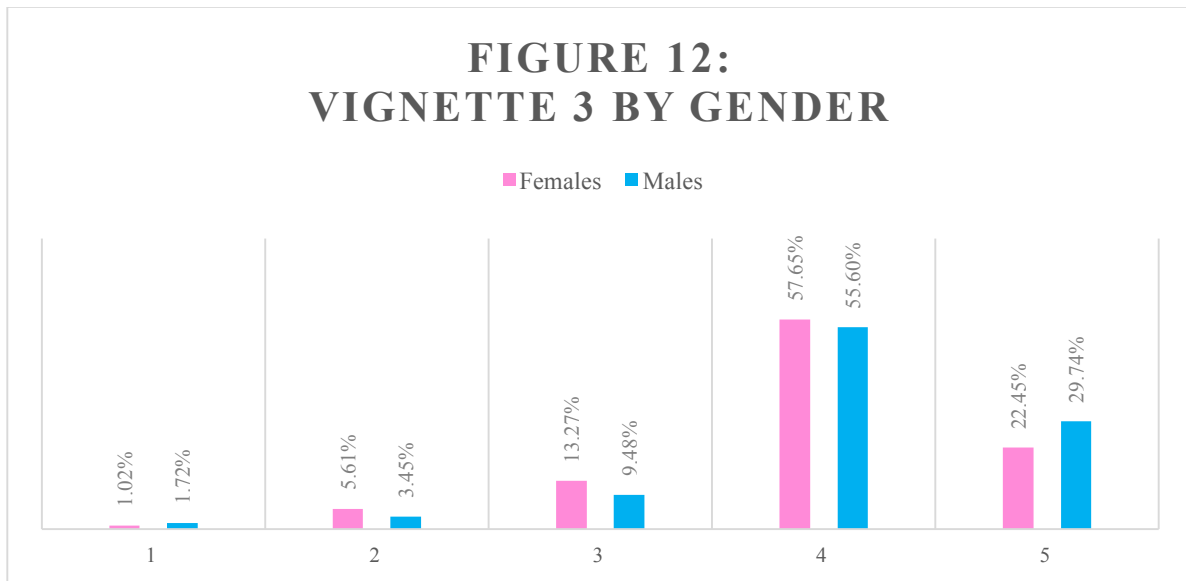
“You are in a class about ethics and the professor is discussing LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning) rights. He asks students in the class to raise their hand if they do not believe in gay rights. Do you think students who do not believe in gay rights would raise their hand in front of the entire class?”

The results illustrated that a strong majority of respondents, 81.7%, felt that students would *definitely not* or *probably not* raise their hand if they did not believe in “gay rights”. There was no statistically significant difference in responses across the schools, with a majority of students choosing the *probably not* option at each school—55.77% at Duke, 52.05% at Emory and 68.74% at Davidson (Figure 11). Although Duke has been classified as a “green” institution with no restrictions on free speech, it had the highest percentage of respondents—84.22 %—who believed that a student would *definitely not* or *probably not* espouse their conservative views. This indicates that less restrictive speech policies do not impact campus climate to the extent that students feel all viewpoints are deemed acceptable.



Dividing the responses by gender revealed no statistically significant difference at the aggregate level, or within each school. 80.10% of females felt that a student who did not believe in gay rights would *definitely not* or *probably not* raise his hand, and 85.34% of males were of this view (Figure 12). Duke also had the highest percentage of both females and males who answered *definitely not* or *probably not*—82.88% of females at Duke, versus 76.19% of females

at Emory and 78.31% of females at Davidson, and 88.19% of males at Duke, versus 78.33% of males at Emory and 86.57% of males at Davidson.



Results from Vignette 3 strongly indicate that college campuses are becoming liberal echo chambers, where a “conservative” identity might be stigmatized. Previous research and literature alludes to this trend—a Wallstreet Journal article published in April 2016 called conservative professors “campus unicorns” who are a “stigmatized minority” (Shields & Dunn). Jon Shields and Joshua Dunn had interviewed 153 conservative campus professors and found that a third of the conservative professors passed themselves off as liberals till they were granted tenure. Professors fear that holding conservative viewpoints might harm their chances at a promotion, highlighting how conservative viewpoints are viewed as subordinate even among faculty. If professors silence their conservative opinions and arguments, students will be further discouraged from espousing such views, limiting the university’s function as a marketplace of ideas. A Heterodox Academy survey, which was administered to 483 college students, also highlights how the consensus on college campuses is that it is more acceptable to hold liberal viewpoints (Stevens, 2017). Their results highlighted that while conservative students were

concerned about other students criticizing their views on race and gender issues and deeming them offensive, liberal students expressed low levels of fear for discussing issues on any topic.

CONCLUSION

Principal Findings

Student attitudes toward freedom of speech did not vary in any particular direction based on the restrictiveness of a university's speech policy. Despite Duke imposing no restrictions on speech, and Emory and Davidson limiting it in certain aspects, students at the three schools demonstrated a like-minded attitude toward the campus debate on free speech. Survey responses reflected an increasingly progressive climate on U.S. college campuses—Section I revealed that students' "political correctness" scores tended *slightly* toward curtailing speech if it would foster an inclusive campus environment; Section II showed how a *strong majority* of students feared backlash from their peers if they were to espouse unpopular or conservative views.

None of the vignettes showed a statistically significant difference in responses between green-rated Duke and each of the red-rated institutions. Emory and Davidson also had no statistically significant difference in responses except for Vignette 2; this difference, however, cannot be attributed to campus speech policies since both schools are rated red. Specific results further emphasized how speech policies do not pressurize or influence students to conform to a particular line of thinking. More restrictive speech policies do not necessarily discourage students from championing freedom of expression—Emory is rated red but it still had the highest percentage of respondents who would *definitely not* sign the petition to remove the statue in Vignette 2, and the highest percentage of males who would *definitely not* place the living group on probation in Vignette 4. Similarly, unrestrictive speech policies do not always foster an environment where all viewpoints are deemed acceptable. Although Duke has no restrictions on freedom of speech, it still had the highest number of respondents who said that students would feel uncomfortable with expressing their conservative views.

Comparing male and female “political correctness” scores at an aggregate level revealed that females were more likely than males to favor an inclusive environment over promoting free speech. At the individual vignette level, females and males had either no statistically significant difference in responses, or a higher percentage of females would take action against offensive speech. Males were less likely to disinvite the controversial speaker in Vignette 1, were less inclined to have the potentially offensive statue removed in Vignette 2, and were less likely to place the living group on probation for throwing a culturally insensitive party; these results illustrate that males are less likely to suppress freedom of speech, even if that speech is offensive. Vignette 3 was the only case where males and females had very similar responses that indicated their strong discomfort with expressing conservative views.

Implications of Findings

The survey findings from this study are in line with nationwide trends—Millennials, individuals born between the early 1980s and early 2000s, are more likely than older generations to support speech restrictions for the purpose of protecting minority sentiments (Poushter, 2015). The attitudinal shift illustrates that U.S. students are becoming increasingly respectful of individuals who are not part of the traditional dominant class—white heterosexual males. Students’ inclination to take action against speech that marginalizes individuals based on their race, gender or sexual orientation shows that the U.S is moving toward a more inclusive society.

While the survey responses predict an optimistic path for minorities in U.S. society, the responses also illustrate a concerning trend regarding the state of ideological debate on college campuses. Responses from Vignette 3 indicated that a majority of students believe the campus climate prevents students from voicing socially conservative viewpoints. Even within the safety of an academic setting, students with conservative views on gender and race issues are likely to

self-censor themselves. This provides a misleading picture of the true percentage of conservatives and liberals on U.S. college campuses, which might further discourage students with a conservative ideology from engaging in academic discussions. The 2016 U.S. Presidential Election polls might have underestimated college students' support for the conservative candidate, Donald Trump, because of conservative students' tendency to misrepresent their views. An experimental study found that since it was socially undesirable to support Trump, college-educated students were more reticent to admit their support to live pollsters (Mercer, Deane & McGeeney, 2016).

Furthermore, students' self-censorship limits ideological debate on campuses. Encouraging students to engage in constructive discourse in a civil and mutually respectful manner is essential in aiding the search for truth. Students and professors will only be able to expose the flaws behind bigoted thinking if students who hold prejudiced views feel comfortable disclosing them; the survey shows that students who hold unpopular views on gender and race are too afraid to voice them, making it harder for others to challenge the rationality in their thinking. As mentioned in the literature, the political correctness movement silences the use of offensive speech, but it does not necessarily tackle the root motivations behind espousing such speech (O'Neill, 2011, p. 283).

The Heterodox Academy found that students are reluctant to espouse socially conservative opinions because they fear retaliation from professors in the form of lower grades and are afraid of criticism from their peers (Stevens, 2017). The literature review emphasizes how universities pledge to value academic freedom and ideological diversity, making them responsible for ensuring that students are not afraid to voice and defend their opinions. Professors would break their intellectual commitment if they were to give students lower grades

for holding a certain ideology; instead, professors should encourage students to question their inherent prejudices and urge them to build rational arguments grounded in fact. As mentioned earlier in the literature, universities must enforce high standards for the quality of discourse and the nature of research undertaken by students. The university provides the ultimate forum for young adults to fortify their opinions, and will succeed as a “marketplace of ideas” if students engage in constructive debate and stay clear of personal attacks. Educational philosopher Robert Hutchins eloquently sums up this idea— “the cure for ideas we oppose lies through open discussion rather than inhibition.”

In summary, misogynist, racist and homophobic expression can slowly be eliminated if students use purposeful debate to ascertain that discrimination is inconsistent with a university’s mission. Silencing one side of a debate undermines the purpose of higher education and creates an illusion of colleges as liberal echo chambers.

Limitations and Further Research

Limitations in the survey methodology and distribution prevent the results from being generalized to undergraduate students throughout the U.S. Since the survey was only administered to students who study in the Southeast region of the U.S., its findings might not be applicable to students who study on the West Coast or in New England. A professor at Sarah Lawrence College found that the ratio of liberal to conservative professors was 3:1 in the South, but 6:1 on the West Coast and 28:1 in New England (Sweeney, 2016, p.1). A disproportionately greater presence of left-leaning professors at West Coast and New England colleges might affect the campus climate profoundly, preventing the extrapolation of results beyond Southeastern schools. Additionally, the survey was posted on social media pages and was entirely voluntary, producing a selection bias. Since the participants were not selected randomly, it is possible that

their responses do not accurately reflect the views of their respective universities' student populations. Finally, the demographics of the respondents might have skewed the results. 62.32% of the respondents were females, and since females are more likely to restrict free speech, the results might have overstated how likely college students are to limit freedom of speech in furtherance of a positive learning environment.

The survey results illustrated that college students demonstrated similar attitudes toward freedom of speech, regardless of the restrictiveness of speech policies at their university. Nationwide findings reveal how college generation students are more likely than older generations to favor restricting offensive speech; a potential research project could be interviewing individuals from different age groups and assessing the factors that contributed to a generational shift in attitude toward free speech. It would also be interesting to explore how student attitudes toward freedom of speech vary based on ethnicity. This study did not analyze responses based on the ethnicity of participants as there were not a sufficient number of non-White respondents from Emory and Davidson.

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APPENDIX

Appendix I: Vignette Survey

Hello, my name is Sakshi Khanna. I am conducting research as part of my undergraduate Public Policy Honors Thesis at [university]. You are eligible to participate in this survey only if you are 18 years and above.

This online survey involves answering general demographic questions and questions about freedom of speech on college campuses. The survey takes AT MOST 5 minutes to complete. Your participation is completely voluntary, and your responses will be completely anonymous.

In return for your time, one participant will randomly be chosen through a drawing to receive a \$50 Amazon gift card. You have about a 1/150 chance of winning this lottery. Please provide your email address at the end of the survey if you want to enter the drawing. Your email cannot be traced back to the data you provided and will only be used to contact the winner of the Amazon gift card. Once the winner of the Amazon gift card has been contacted, all emails will be deleted.

If you have any questions about the research, feel free to email me at sakshi.khanna@duke.edu.

Electronic consent

Clicking the "agree" button below indicates that:

You have read the above information

You are voluntarily agreeing to participate

You are at least 18 years of age

You understand that one participant of this survey will randomly be chosen to receive a \$50 Amazon gift card

Agree

Please specify your year

Freshman

Sophomore

Junior

Senior

Please identify your gender

- Male
 - Female
 - Genderqueer
 - Other (please specify) _____
 - Prefer not to say
-

Please specify your sexual orientation

- Heterosexual
 - Homosexual
 - Bisexual
 - Other (please specify) _____
 - Prefer not to say
-

Please specify your ethnicity

- White
 - Black or African American
 - Asian
 - Hispanic or Latino
 - American Indian or Alaska Native
 - Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
 - Other (please specify) _____
 - Prefer not to say
-

Please specify which religion you associate yourself with

- Christian
 - Muslim
 - Hindu
 - Buddhist
 - Jewish
 - Atheist
 - Agnostic
 - Other (please specify) _____
 - Prefer not to say
-

Please select your social affiliation

- Fraternity
 - Sorority
 - Other _____
 - Unaffiliated
-

You will be presented with 5 hypothetical situations that occur on a college campus. Please read them carefully and select the appropriate response.

Mr. Smith has written a book, which proposes the theory that White people have superior genetics. He has been invited to your university to speak on a topic that is unrelated to his book on superior White genetics. There have been protests on your campus, calling for Mr. Smith to be disinvited because his presence would make students from minority races feel uncomfortable. Do you agree with the sentiments of the protestors?

- Definitely
 - Probably
 - Possibly
 - Probably Not
 - Definitely Not
-

There is a statue on campus commemorating the contributions of one of the university's primary donors. Although the donor was born after slavery had been abolished, previous generations of his family had been associated with the slave trade. A group of students has started a petition, requesting the university to take down the statue because they believe it disrespects the African-American students and their history. Would you sign this petition?

- Definitely
 - Probably
 - Possibly
 - Probably Not
 - Definitely Not
-

You are in a class about ethics and the professor is discussing LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Questioning) rights. He asks students in the class to raise their hand if they do not believe in gay rights. Do you think students who do not believe in gay rights would raise their hand in front of the entire class?

- Definitely
 - Probably
 - Possibly
 - Probably Not
 - Definitely Not
-

A social living group creates a Facebook event inviting students to a party. The theme of the party is "Mexican Fiesta". The invite suggests that students dress as "illegal immigrants", "criminals" or "border patrol agents". The social organization uploads pictures of individuals wearing sombreros and fake moustaches on the Facebook event. After several concerns from students regarding the racial and ethnic stereotypes surrounding the party theme, the social living group cancels the party. Although they cancelled the party, do you think the university administration should put the social living group on probation?

- Definitely
 - Probably
 - Possibly
 - Probably Not
 - Definitely Not
-

Maria is sitting in the university café and comments to a friend that she often feels unsafe in the presence of Muslims because she feels their religion “is too radical and promotes terrorism”. Another student overhears this conversation, and reports Maria for a bias incident*. Should Maria be reported for a bias incident?

*Bias incidents refer to behavior motivated by the offender's bias against a facet of the victim's identity such as their race, color, religion, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, etc. Bias incidents are reported to the Bias Response Advisory Committee and the Office of Student Conduct that provide guidance on how to proceed with the given case.

- Definitely
- Probably
- Possibly
- Probably Not
- Definitely Not

One participant of the survey will randomly be chosen to receive a \$50 Amazon gift card. Would you like to enter the drawing for a chance to win?

- Yes
- No