



## **Canadian Student Views on University Campus Climate, Expression, Politics, and Policies**

Gina L. Cormier<sup>1</sup> & Yangyilin Guo<sup>2</sup> & Brian Yim<sup>3</sup> & Ayse Turkoglu<sup>1</sup> & Alix Wong-Min<sup>4</sup> & Rui Tang<sup>4</sup> & Robin Dionne<sup>5</sup> & Yuan Ji<sup>4</sup> & Martin Drapeau<sup>1,6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada

<sup>2</sup> Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC, Canada

<sup>3</sup> Department of Psychology, Adelphi University, New York, NY, USA

<sup>4</sup> Department of Psychology, McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada

<sup>5</sup> Department of Psychology, Concordia University, Montreal, QC, Canada

<sup>6</sup> Department of Psychiatry, McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada

Correspondence: Martin Drapeau, McGill University, Montreal, QC, Canada

Email: martin.drapeau@mcgill.ca

DOI: 10.53103/cjess.v6i1.463

### **Abstract**

Universities are significant drivers of economic prosperity, train future generations of thinkers and professionals in various fields, advance knowledge in a multitude of disciplines, and shape the minds of many students. To meet their goals, universities must offer quality education and an open learning environment. This environment is made possible, in part, by the safeguard of academic freedom. There is evidence to suggest that academic freedom may be under threat in universities, perhaps especially in the United States. However, data on these issues is scarce for Canadian universities. The present study aimed to address this gap by documenting the perceived state of academic freedom, self-censorship, openness versus reluctance to discuss sensitive topics, anticipated consequences of expressing oneself, and other related issues. Data was collected from 2409 participants at universities throughout Canada. Results show that, similar to the American findings, there is relatively high reported self-censorship among Canadian university students, and high student reluctance to discuss sensitive or controversial topics on campuses or in the classroom. Among other findings such as students' ratings on reasons for reluctance of expression, these suggest a need for continued and urgent emphasis on improving discourse to allow students to fully engage with their studies without fear of question or comment.

Keywords: Academic Freedom, Expression, Censorship, Diversity, Campus Climate

### **Canadian University Student Views on Campus Expression, Climate, and Policies**

Scholars have cited challenges related to conformity of expression and threats to academic freedom on university campuses throughout the United States and United Kingdom (e.g., Kaufman, 2021; Stiksma, 2020; Zhou & Barbaro, 2023). Some have used the term “campus culture wars” to depict universities at the front lines of value clashes within the larger society. Others have described how Western universities have become entrenched in a “victimhood culture” wherein politically progressive values have grown increasingly predominant, a phenomenon that some have referred to as a “new religion” (e.g., Campbell & Manning, 2018; Lukianoff & Schlott, 2023; McWhorter, 2022). Critics caution, however, that rights to freedom of expression should not be invoked as defence for inconsiderate behaviour (Dea, 2021; McKay-Panos, 2023), that too much freedom of expression may lead to hateful speech towards vulnerable groups, and that we must be mindful of upholding classrooms as model spaces for social responsibility and be cognizant of concrete barriers that exist for disadvantaged groups. Some have pointed out that debate on academic freedom tends to lose sight of the true meaning of the term by focusing more on the merits of an idea or topic than on academic responsibilities (Dea, 2019). Others have argued that legislating protections can come with the risk of turning academic freedom into a political weapon or causing harm (Ives, 2022).

Research on censorship among professors (e.g., Dummitt & Patterson, 2022; Kaufman, 2021; Norris & Inglehart, 2021) suggests that there are some limitations to freedom of expression in academia, yet less data is available from the student perspective, particularly in Canada. US scholars have investigated this topic since 2019 through an annual Campus Expression Survey directed at American university students (Zhou & Barbaro, 2023). The survey has highlighted a high student reluctance to discuss controversial topics on campuses, suggesting a need for continued training or emphasis on improving dialogue across ideologies or differing views (Zhou & Barbaro, 2023; Zhou & Zhou, 2022). A 2024 survey on this topic found that 80% of a sample of approximately 4700 US university students were at least somewhat reluctant to discuss certain topics on campus (Jones et al., 2024). A 2023 survey indicated that nearly 2 in 3 students at American universities felt that campus climate prevented them from openly stating their beliefs for fear of offending others. It has been argued that campus culture wars debates have been used as political scapegoats for a populist narrative (Grigoriadis & Canpolat, 2023; Hanlon, 2019; Sachs, 2019; Turk, 2020; Yglesias, 2018); nonetheless, universities continue to be sites of serious value or perspective clashes (Bellet et al., 2020; Campbell & Manning, 2018; Etzioni, 2019; Fenton & Smith, 2019; Haidt & Lukianoff, 2019; Norris & Inglehart, 2021; Zhou & Barbaro, 2023). Further investigation is needed, particularly in Canadian contexts where little data is available.

## **Methods**

This survey-based study focused on Canadian university students. A survey was developed drawing on questions from Zhou and colleagues' (2019–2023) Campus Expression Surveys and from the Centre for the Study of Partisanship and Ideology's Students Survey (Kaufman, 2021), which we adapted to the Canadian context. The final survey included 33 questions; for a full list of questions, refer to the Appendix. The survey was distributed to university students at 23 institutions across Canada through the Qualtrics survey platform and was made available online in both French and English. Participants were offered the chance to win a \$50 gift card for completing the survey. We obtained Research and Ethics Board approvals from the primary university as well as REB approvals from the remaining 22 universities formally surveyed. The survey was closed after five months and the data were downloaded from Qualtrics as an Excel file and cleaned by trained research assistants. The cleaned data was then uploaded into IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29, and a filter was applied to exclude participants who were outside the target age range or who did not provide consent for their data to be used. Frequencies and percentages were then calculated for each response category, and no statistical analyses were performed beyond calculating descriptive information on the data.

## **Results**

We received 2409 responses, of which some were excluded from the analysis in response to subsequent participant requests that their data not be used, for a final sample of 2156. Fifty-three percent of responses contained a missing response to at least one question; as such, response totals below are noted per question. Fifty-nine percent of participants completed the survey in English and 41% completed it in French. Seventy-five percent of participants reported their gender as female, 19% reported male, and 4% reported as gender non-conforming. Ages ranged from 18 to 64 ( $M = 24.76$ ;  $SD = 7.39$ ). The majority of participants (62%) were White/Caucasian whereas additional cultural and ethnic backgrounds varied as depicted in Figure 1. The level of study of participants was primarily undergraduate (78%); master's level students represented 11% and doctorate level students represented 7% of the sample. The universities and fields of study of the participants are depicted in Figures 2 and 3 with the majority (74%) coming from social sciences and humanities.

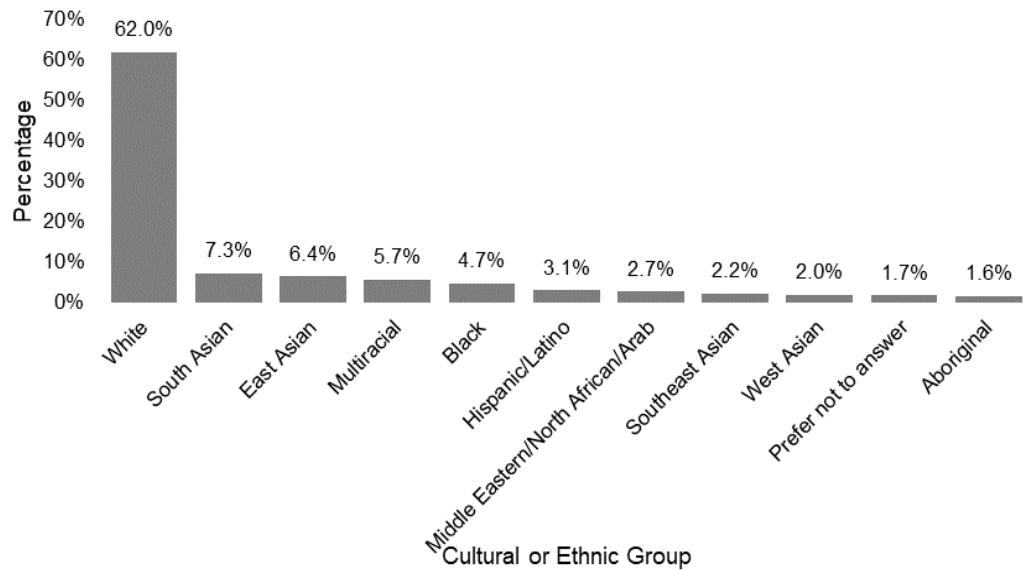


Figure 1: Cultural and ethnic backgrounds of respondents

Note. Based on  $n = 2155$  responses.

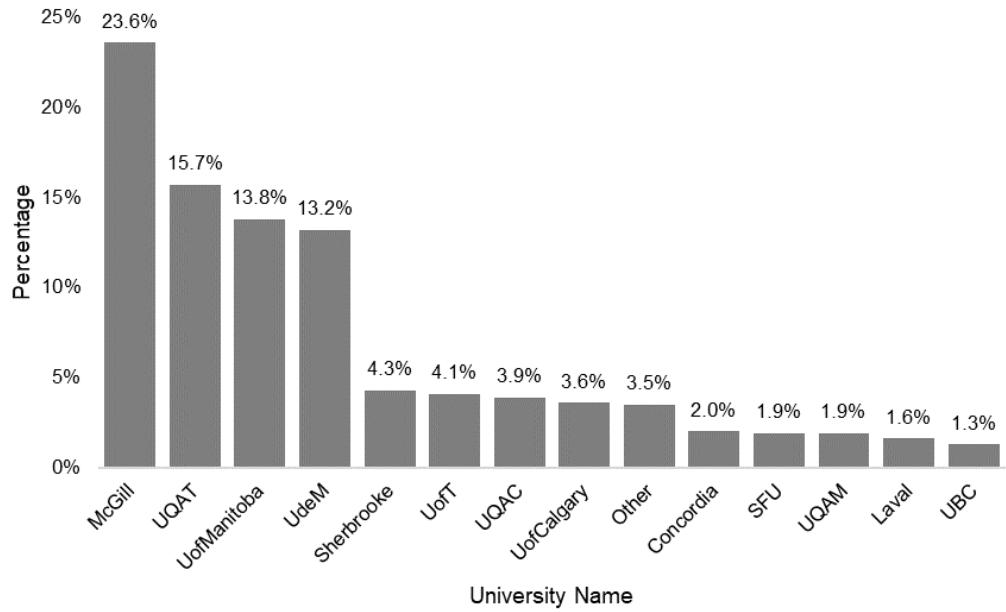


Figure 2: Universities of respondents

Note. Based on  $n = 2150$  who responded to this question, excluding 136 responses from universities comprising fewer than 1.3% of respondents each (McMaster, Queen's, University of Alberta, Western, Wilfred Laurier University, University of Ottawa, Bishops, Dalhousie, Trent, University of Quebec Outaouais, University of Quebec in Trois-Rivieres, University of Saskatchewan, and Waterloo).

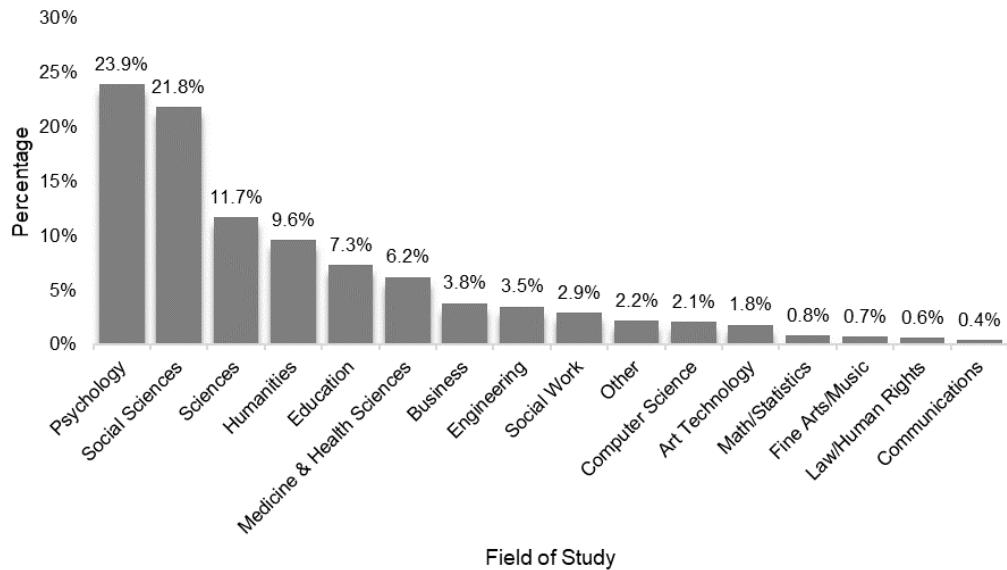


Figure 3: Respondent fields of study

Note. Based on  $n = 2145$  responses.

Political views of respondents were mostly left-leaning, with 60% of participants identifying as broadly left-leaning, 12% as centrist, and 6% as broadly right-leaning; 17% stated they did not know their political views, and 5% stated they preferred not to state them ( $n = 2151$ ). Reported voting trends in the sample were reflective of these political views with 39% stating they would vote NDP, 20% Liberal Party, 20% who were not voting or ineligible to vote, 8% Bloc Québécois, 7% Conservative Party, 5% Green Party, and 1% People's Party ( $n = 2149$ ).

### Political Activism

Students were asked whether they considered themselves political activists; 53% said "no," 24% said "yes," and 8% said "I don't know" ( $n = 1837$ ).

## Censorship

Prior to asking about participants' comfort of expression on specific controversial topics, we asked students more broadly whether they had ever censored themselves in discussions with professors or other students on campus or been censored by others. Of 2008 respondents, 46% said "yes" to self-censoring and 47% said "no." One in four (74%) said "no" to having been censored by others and 1 in 5 (19%) said "yes" ( $n = 2005$ ).

## Campus Climate: Support or Hostility

Students were asked to rate their perceptions of their university ranging from hostile to supportive towards them for their political beliefs. Ratings of campus climate were stated as *somewhat supportive* (43%), *supportive* (35%), *somewhat hostile* (11%), and *hostile* (4%;  $n = 2002$ ).

## Expression on a Controversial Subject and Concern with Repercussions

The survey inquired as to students' comfort levels for discussing topics in the classroom that might be considered controversial such as sexual orientation, gender or gender identity, politics, race, religion, and issues of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusivity (EDI). Results are depicted in Figure 4 with percentages compared to comfort on a non-controversial topic as a baseline item. These indicated that anywhere from 1 in 4 (25%) to nearly 1 in 2 (46%) students were *somewhat* or *very reluctant* to discuss these topics as compared with less than 1 in 10 (8%) who reported the same for a non-controversial topic. The highest areas of discomfort were related to politics (46%), religion (44%), and sexual identity (39%).

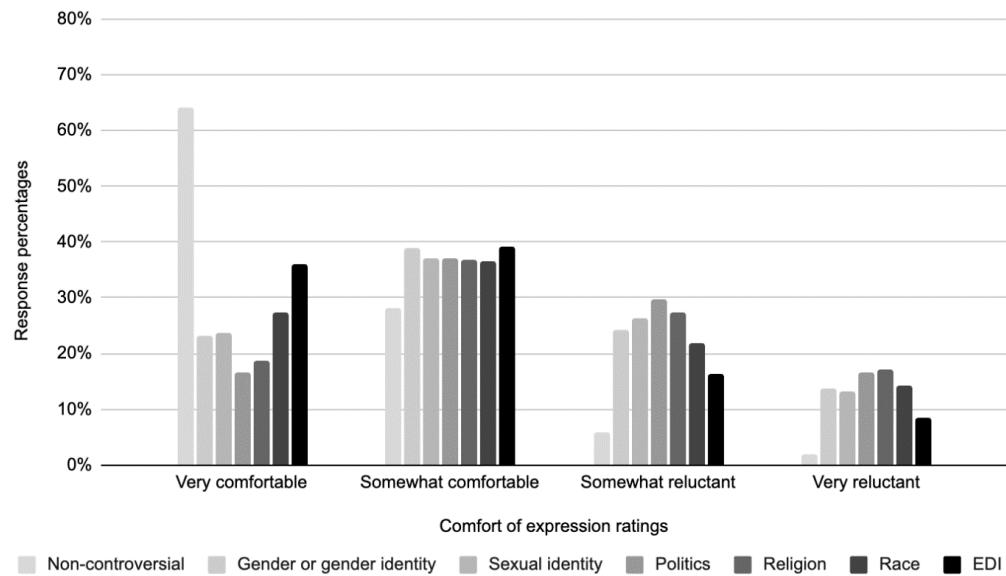


Figure 4: Comfort to discuss a controversial issue in the classroom

Note. Based on  $n = 1996\text{--}2002$  responses (ranged per item). Excludes between 7.1 and 7.4% missing responses.

### Repercussions of Expression

The survey inquired as to students' reasons for not wishing to speak in the classroom or on campus about topics such as the above. Specifically, this question asked, "If you were to speak up and give your views on one of the controversial issues mentioned above during a class discussion, in a class where participation marks are awarded, how concerned are you that the following [repercussions] would occur?". While most respondents (between 51 to 58%) were either *not at all* or *slightly concerned*, between 32 to 37% were *somewhat* to *extremely concerned* about repercussions to expression. The highest degree of concern was for situations in which other students would criticize the respondent's views as wrong or offensive, with 1 in 2 (49%) responding *somewhat to extremely concerned*. Over 1 in 5 (23%) were between *very* to *extremely concerned* about receiving a lower grade for expressing their views (see Figures 5 and 6).

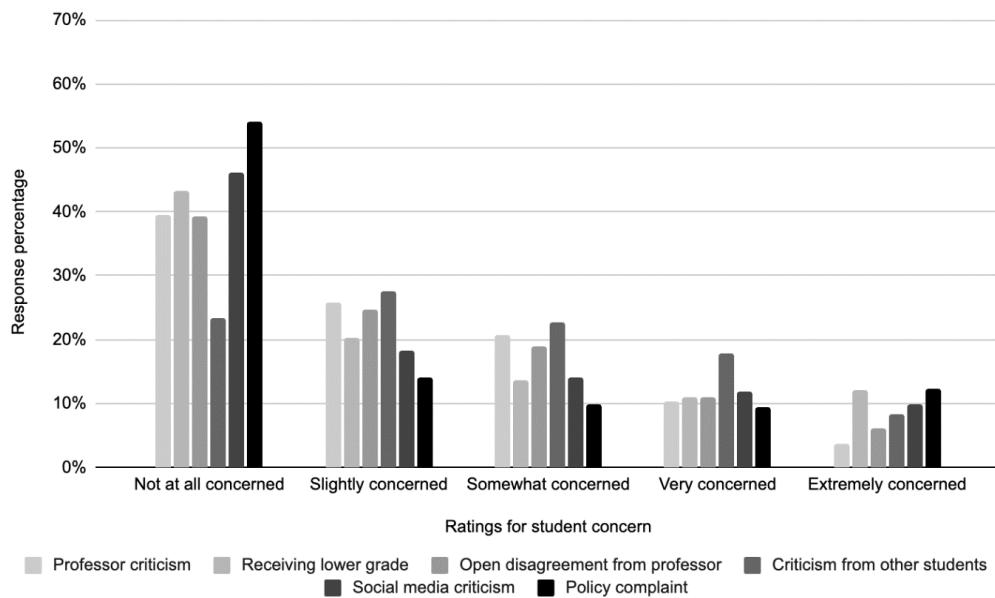


Figure 5: Student concern for repercussions of expression

Note. Based on  $n = 1941\text{--}1946$  responses. Excludes between 9.7 and 10% missing responses.

Similar to the above, we asked how worried students were about reputation damage, facing major adversity, or missing out on professional opportunities should their opinions on potentially controversial topics such as politics, EDI policies, gender identity, or dominant social justice topics be known by others. Percentages of worry (*somewhat* to *very*) for repercussions varied according to topic between 15 and 18% (see Figure 6).

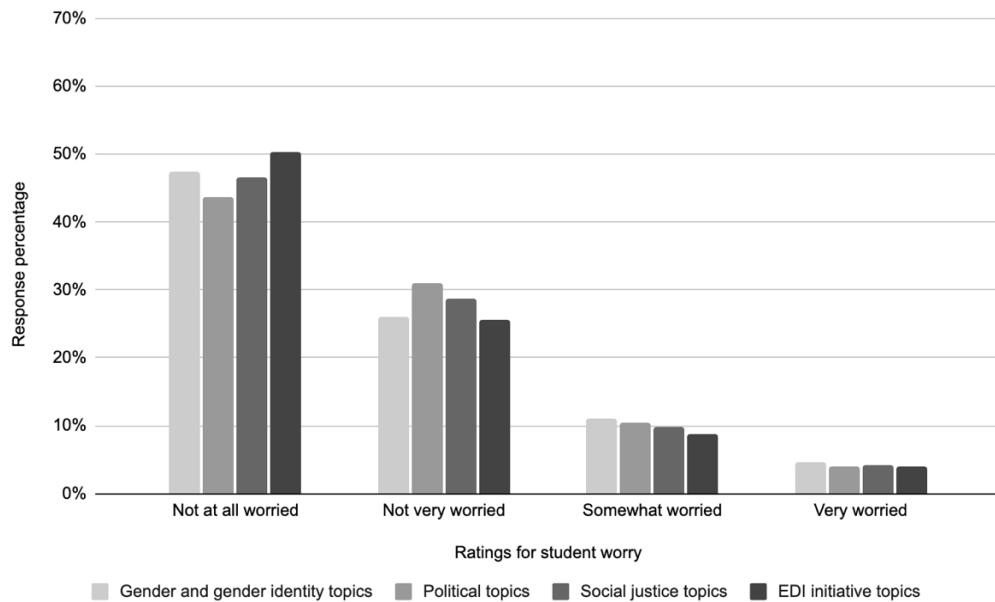


Figure 6: Student worry of their opinions becoming known

Note. Based on  $n = 1917$ – $1926$  responses. Excludes between 10.9 and 11.1% missing responses.

### Perceptions of the University, Professors, and EDI Initiatives

When asked how confident students were that representatives of their university would defend their right to express themselves, 1 in 5 students were *very confident*. Most students (59%) were *somewhat confident* whereas 1 in 5 were *not at all confident* ( $n = 1926$ ).

Respondents also provided rankings on which statements they believed corresponded to the highest purposes of the university and the most important role of professors in universities. On the purpose of the university, most students (54%) ranked “educating students” as the highest purpose, followed by “conducting research and creating knowledge,” and “preparing students for work and contribution to economic prosperity.” Fifty-two percent ranked a professor’s primary role as to “teach and conduct research that aims to advance knowledge of and improve our understanding of the world,” followed by “teach and conduct research that aims to shape and change society,” and to “teach and conduct research that aims to help students find good career prospects.” About half of respondents (51%) ranked “working for social justice and progress” lowest in terms of main purposes of the university (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Rankings on purposes of the university

|   | Highest rank |      | Second highest rank |      | Third rank |      | Lowest rank |      |
|---|--------------|------|---------------------|------|------------|------|-------------|------|
|   | n            | %    | n                   | %    | N          | %    | n           | %    |
| <i>University purpose</i>   |              |      |                     |      |            |      |             |      |
| Educating students  | 1161         | 53.8 | 438                 | 20.3 | 175        | 8.1  | 52          | 2.4  |
| Conducting research & creating knowledge                          | 321          | 14.9 | 697                 | 32.3 | 622        | 28.8 | 186         | 8.6  |
| Working for social justice and progress                           | 90           | 1.2  | 223                 | 10.3 | 418        | 19.4 | 1095        | 50.8 |
| Preparing students for work & contribution to economic prosperity | 254          | 11.8 | 469                 | 21.8 | 611        | 28.3 | 492         | 22.8 |

Note. Based on  
n=1826 responses.

Table 2: Rankings on the Role of University Professors

|   | Highest rank |      | Middle rank |      | Lowest rank |      |
|---|--------------|------|-------------|------|-------------|------|
|   | n            | %    | n           | %    | n           | %    |
| <i>Role of professor</i>  |              |      |             |      |             |      |
| Teach & conduct research that aims to shape & change society  | 372          | 17.3 | 871         | 40.4 | 605         | 28.1 |
| Teach & conduct research that aims to help students find good career prospects                        | 352          | 16.3 | 438         | 20.3 | 1058        | 49.1 |
| Teach & conduct research that aims to advance knowledge of and improve our understanding of the world | 1124         | 52.1 | 539         | 25.0 | 185         | 8.6  |

Note. Based on n = 1848 responses

### Professors

The majority of students (54%) reported that their professors encourage them to consider wider varieties of viewpoints and perspectives either *frequently* (38%) or *very frequently* (16%), whereas 32% said this occurred *occasionally*, and 14% said this occurred either *rarely* (9%), *very rarely* (3%), or *never* (1%; n = 1879). Students were also asked to rate how acceptable it is that a professor would refrain from sharing their views in teaching or academic discussions in class or elsewhere, or avoid pursuing or publishing research for fear of offending others or because of possible consequences to their career from doing so. Approximately 3 out of 4 students (77%) found this either *somewhat acceptable*, *acceptable*, or *very acceptable* (51% rated it as *somewhat acceptable*; 21% as *acceptable*, and 5% as *very acceptable*). About 1 in 4 students (24%) rated it as *not at all acceptable* that professors should limit research and expression to avoid professional consequences (n = 1872).

### **EDI Initiatives, Academic Freedom, Course Content**

On a question dealing with how professors ought to balance research publishing between their research interests and the prioritization of social justice for disadvantaged groups, students responded with a range of views. Based on 1826 responses, about 1 in 3 students (32%) stated that a prioritization of social justice should be considered and that they had strong beliefs in this area. Other responses were divided with about 1 in 5 students replying that they should prioritize social justice, but that the student did not have strong beliefs on this (19%) or prioritize academic freedom, but that the student did not have strong beliefs on this (19%). Another 18% stated they did not have strong beliefs either way on this topic, and 13% supported a prioritization of academic freedom and that they have strong beliefs in this area.

In a forced choice question where students were provided with a false dichotomy asking them to choose between one of two options on what material should be prioritized in university course content—whether course content should feature authors and thinkers of diverse backgrounds, or whether course content should feature the most intellectually foundational knowledge in the field—responses showed that 58% of students matched their views to the former statement on diversity of authors, and 42% matched their views to the latter statement on foundational knowledge ( $n = 1823$ ).

### **University Policies: Admissions, Hiring, Cancelling Events, EDI Initiatives, Petitions**

#### **Admissions**

Students were asked about their views on best practices for university admissions. These included Likert scale ratings indicating the extent to which the respondents agreed with inquiries and decisions from a university admissions committee: 1) to inquire about the gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, race, ethnicity, and/or political stance of student applicants during an admission interview in order to increase diversity in a program; 2) to favour any of the above identities over merit (e.g., relevant experience) when reviewing applications; and, 3) to favour merit or relevant experience over any of the above identities. Results varied in that 1) about half the students (52%) either *somewhat* (20%) or *strongly disagreed* (32%) that admissions committees should inquire about the gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, race, ethnicity, or political stance of students during an admissions interview in order to increase diversity in a program; 2) the majority of students (66%) *somewhat* (21%) or *strongly disagreed* (45%) that admissions committees should favour identity over merit; and 3) when asked if merit should be favoured above identity considerations, the majority of respondents (67%) *somewhat* (32%) or *strongly agreed* (35%) that merit should be favoured over identity (see Figure 7). Regarding considerations on politics of applicants, nearly all students (90%) indicated that

they *somewhat* (8%) or *strongly disagreed* (82%) with rating applicants lower if the applicant demonstrated left-leaning political views. The majority (84%) also *somewhat* (14%) or *strongly disagreed* (70%) with rating applicants lower if they demonstrated right-leaning political views. When political views of applicants were apparent as more radical on the left, a majority of students (83%) again *somewhat* (14%) or *strongly disagreed* (69%) with rating the applications lower. Most students (70%) *somewhat* (14%) or *strongly disagreed* (56%) with rating a student's application lower if it had a radical right political perspective. In sum, up to 9 out of 10 students did not find it appropriate to rate an applicant as lower based on their political views, with higher disagreement for lower ratings when the application had a left-leaning perspective (see Figure 8).

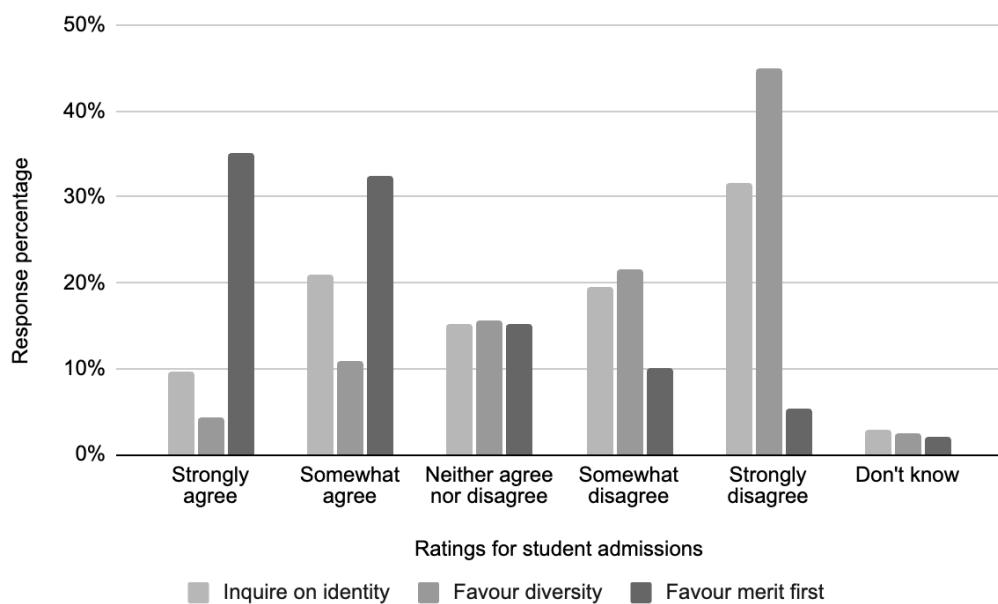


Figure 7: Student views on admissions policies: identity and merit of applicant

Note. Based on n = 1777–1780 responses. Excluded between 17.4 and 17.6% missing responses.

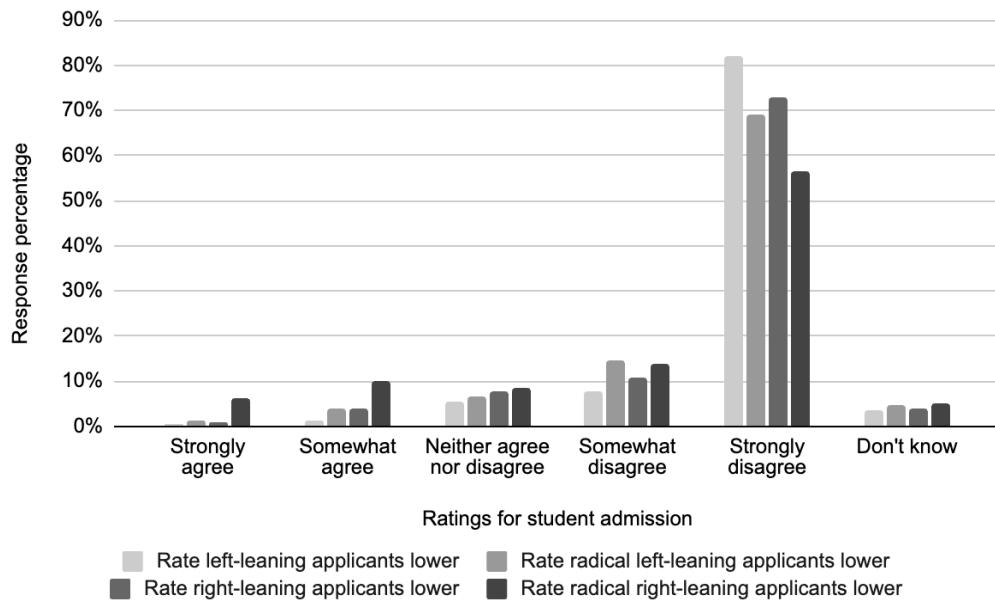


Figure 8: Student views on admissions policies: politics of applicant

Note. Based on  $n = 1773\text{--}1777$  responses. Excludes between 17.6 and 17.8% missing responses.

### Hiring

The survey asked students similar questions on their views about hiring policies and political views of candidates for professor and staff positions. Students *somewhat* or *strongly disagreed* with rating a candidate lower on the grounds of left-leaning politics (90%), right-leaning politics (85%), radical left-leaning politics (81%), or radical right-leaning politics (67%; see Figure 9).

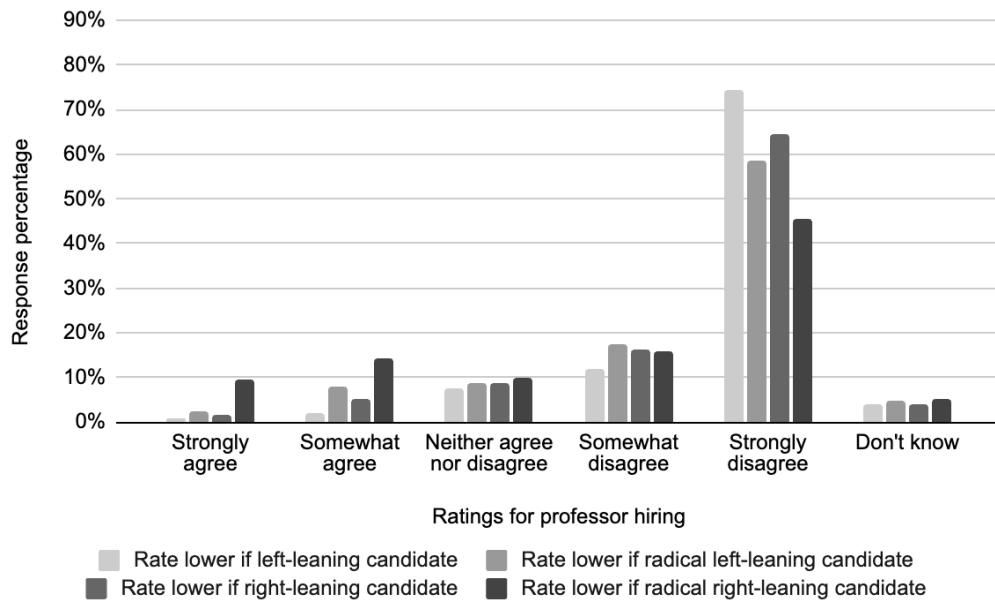


Figure 9: Student views on hiring policies depending on politics of candidate

Note. Based on  $n = 1774\text{--}1778$  responses. Excludes between 17.5 and 17.7% missing responses.

### Cancelling Events

Universities have sometimes faced calls to cancel events or lectures, and students were asked their views about when there should be cancellation of a speaker whose views would be inappropriate on campus for different reasons including political leanings. Students generally disagreed to cancel events based on the political views of a speaker with 80% who either *somewhat* (16%) or *strongly disagreed* (63%) to cancel a speaker who was left-leaning. While somewhat lower, most students (72%) also *somewhat* (20%) or *strongly disagreed* (52%) with cancelling a speaker event when the presenter demonstrated right-leaning politics. Further results are shown in Figure 10 and in Figure 11, depicting somewhat mixed opinions on additional situations when speaker events should be cancelled.

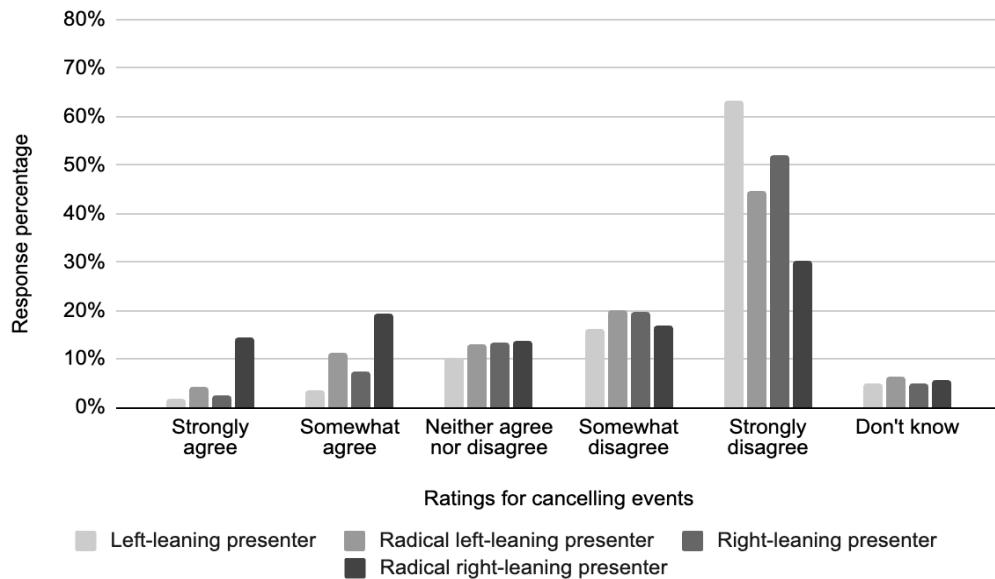


Figure 10: Student ratings on agreement or disagreement to cancel an event depending on politics of the presenter

Note. Based on  $n = 1741$ – $1747$  responses. Excludes between 19 and 19.2% missing responses.

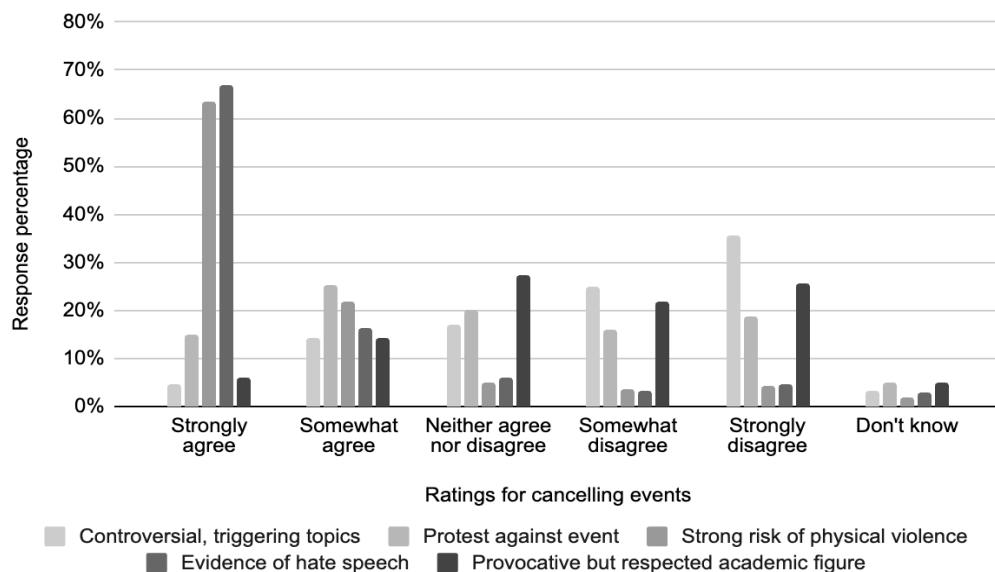


Figure 11: Student ratings on agreement or disagreement to cancel a speaker event for different reasons

Note. Based on  $n = 1738\text{--}1743$  responses. Excludes between 19.2 and 19.4% missing responses.

### EDI Initiatives

In terms of implementing progressive policies aimed at improving diversity in course content and readings, we asked students how and whether diversity should be mandated into reading lists of course content. In this case, students were asked to imagine a new, hypothetical initiative requiring that all course readings must contain at least 30% female authors and 20% from authors of colour to promote greater diversity. We asked to what degree students would support or oppose this initiative, publicly or privately, and how universities should deal with professors who refuse to comply with the initiative. About half of students (53%) stated they would support the initiative either publicly (23%) or privately (30%) compared to about 1 in 4 students (24%) who said they would oppose this initiative publicly (6%) or privately (18%). Many (23%) held neutral views or were unsure on this matter. For non-compliant professors, the prevailing view (80%) was that professors undergo consequences such as implicit bias awareness trainings (37%), indirect sanctions (e.g., less favourable roles or less funding access; 15%), social pressure from colleagues or managers (14%), course cancellation (10%), or employment termination (4%). Seventeen percent responded that professors should undergo no action of any kind (see Figures 12 and 13).

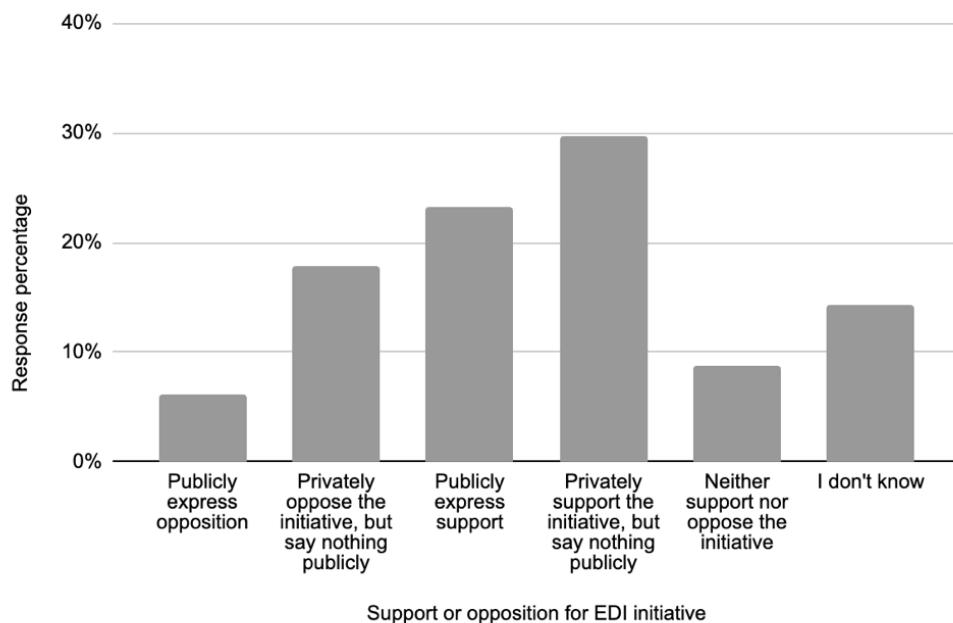


Figure 12: Ratings of support or opposition for a hypothetical EDI initiative

Note. Based on n = 1745 responses. Excludes 19.1% missing responses.

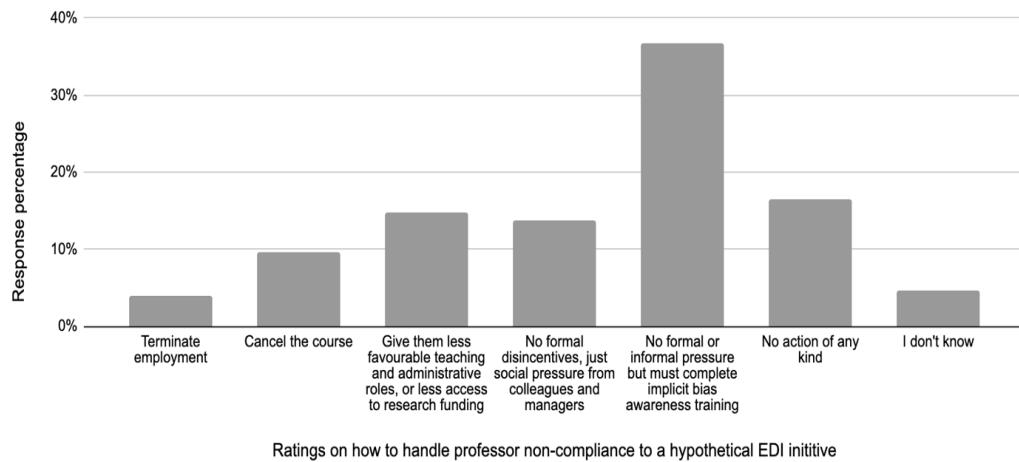


Figure 13: Ratings on how to handle professor non-compliance to a hypothetical EDI initiative

Note. Based on n = 1644 responses. Excludes 23.7% missing responses.

### Support or Opposition for Research on Controversial Topics

The survey asked students how they might act regarding supporting or opposing a petition, publicly or privately, concerning differing hypothetical views between students and professors on conducting research on controversial societal topics. On petitions against professorial research and statements, there were mixed views, and private support or opposition was more common than public support and opposition. For example, when a professor stated that either academic freedom or EDI was more important than the other, in both directions, 1 in 3 students would privately support a petition against the professor, and 1 in 3 students would privately oppose a petition against the professor. On a petition against a professor who questioned access to hormonal therapy for transgender minors, 42% would support the student petition to reprimand the professor (25% privately, 18% publicly), and 48% would oppose the student petition (27% privately, 22% publicly). On a petition against a professor who questioned systemic racism as a significant problem in Canada, both support and opposition for the sanctioning petition were endorsed (publicly and privately) in at least a fifth of students across response options (22–24%). See Figure 14.

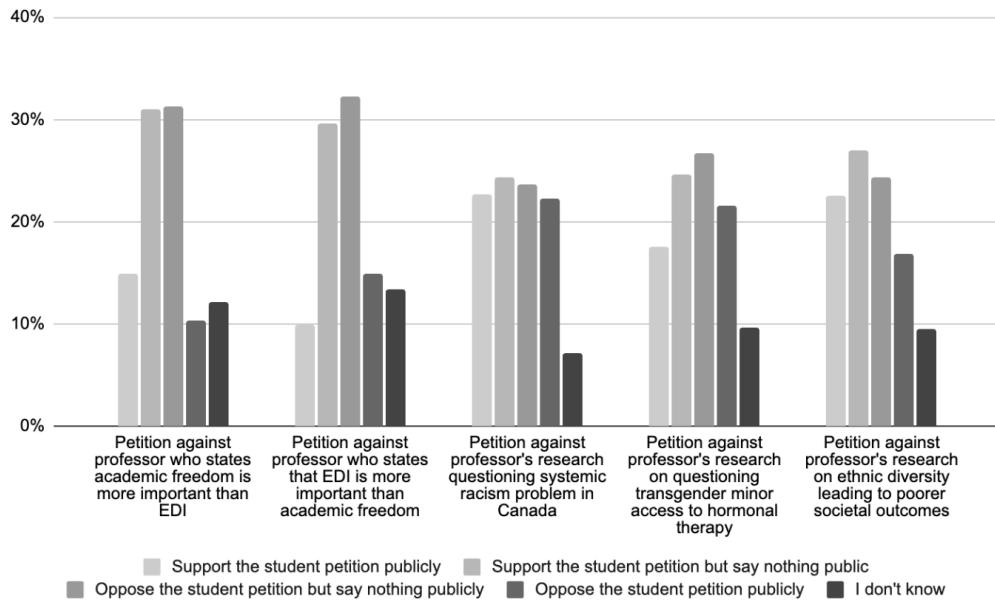


Figure 14: Support or opposition for a petition against a professor who engages with controversial topics

Note. Based on  $n = 1525\text{--}1598$  responses. Excludes between 25.9 and 29.3% missing responses.

## Discussion

This is the first study of its kind in Canada to obtain data from university students throughout the country in both official languages on these issues. We will summarize the results according to the following themes: censorship and conformity, implications for the university, and implications for dialogue and EDI.

### Censorship and Conformity

This study finds that nearly 1 in 2 students reported having censored themselves on campus in discussions with other students or professors, and nearly 1 in 5 reported having experienced being censored by others. Taken at face value, these findings are concerning. Ratings on campus expression can be further understood by questions on comfort of expression by topic, and repercussions of expression. Numbers varied widely according to the topic in that reluctance increased by up to and over 200–400% when topics were more sensitive. Because we do not have definitive baseline data for Canada on what

is considered an average or normal level of censorship or reluctance towards campus dialogue on difficult topics, we can compare with four years of US data showing that on average nearly 2 in 3 university students in the United States reported self-censoring specifically on controversial topics (Zhou & Barbaro, 2023). Our results differ slightly from data on US students, where four-year averages on American students' reluctance of expression were: 38% for politics (compared to 46% in our sample), 29% for religion (vs. 44%), 25% for race (vs. 36%), 24% for sexual orientation (vs. 39%), 22% for gender or gender identity (vs. 38%), and 12% for a non-controversial topic (vs. 8%). These findings are somewhat consistent with US data in that Canadian students are around 5 times more likely to report reluctance to discuss controversial compared to non-controversial topics (US students are up to about 4 times as likely). Findings here do suggest greater reluctance of expression among Canadian students compared to American students (averaged across four years). In sum, our results on reluctance of expression indicate that between 25–46% of students were *somewhat* to *very reluctant* to express themselves on challenging topics. These results depict a concerning lack of comfort of viewpoint expression on sensitive topics within Canadian university classrooms.

Percentages on concern about student repercussions for expressing oneself on controversial topics indicated that at least 1 in 3 students were either *somewhat*, *very*, or *extremely* concerned that a professor would criticize their views as offensive, give them a lower grade, say their views are wrong, or that other students would post critical comments about their views on social media. High concern for peer ostracization suggests pressure to conform and fear of offending peers that seems consistent with data in the US, wherein students were found to overestimate peer negative reactions to their own expressed views by about 3 times (Zhou & Barbaro, 2023). This observation may be further explained by the spiral of silence theory (Noelle-Neumann, 1974) where people change or conceal their opinions if they do not fit with popular or prevailing ideology to avoid being ostracized from the group. Open expression on difficult topics within a classroom dialogue should be reinforced as contributing to learning (Parra et al., 2023), yet the data suggests that such expression is not positively reinforced among students, and that those who hold minority or unpopular views are incentivized to remain silent.

Similar to the above, and more specifically regarding repercussions to students' professional careers whether through reputation damage, adversity, or missed opportunities such as not being nominated for an award or accepted into a graduate program, results indicated that students ranged in worry for such repercussions from 15% to 18% depending on the topic.

### **Implications for the University**

Most students reported that it is acceptable for professors to refrain from sharing

views or avoid pursuing research in order not to offend others or due to professional consequences. As explained by Dea (2020), academic freedom in regards to professors is meant to protect them in upholding the university's missions of seeking truth and advancing societal understandings free from influence by government, industry, religion, media, dogma, or public opinion. Without tenure, precariously employed scholars have less robust protection when it comes to academic freedom (Dea, 2020), and perhaps this is what is being communicated by the overwhelming majority of student responses that seem to condone professor restraint on taking controversial chances. It is also possible that public ideological battles, often waged via social media (e.g., for a review, see *Cases* [n.d.]) centering around professor controversies and sometimes resulting in sanctions such as job dismissals (e.g., Prentiss, 2018) may impact university student views. Further study might focus on how to address what appear to be challenges in defining the role of academic freedom for research and public discourse, and whether government interventions are the most effective approaches for safeguarding academic freedom (as has been done in several Canadian provinces in recent years [e.g., Chalupovitsch, 2022]).

### **Implications for Dialogue and EDI**

In a hypothetical situation where a diversity initiative for course content becomes a university policy, about half of students supported the idea that diverse authors on course reading lists should be mandated by quotas and that professors who refused to comply with diversity initiatives should face reprimanding actions ranging in type. Continued research is needed to assess whether and how prescribed or popular interventions to improve diversity outcomes produce desired results.

While most students favoured implicit bias awareness training and other disincentivizing approaches to implement an equity initiative, there are several caveats to consider. In particular, a longitudinal meta-analysis by Bezrukova et al. (2016) found greater effects of diversity trainings on cognitive learning goals as compared with attitudinal or affective learning. Research has also pointed towards important challenges with efficacy of anti-bias trainings that can be counterproductive in general or even harmful for those we hope to protect or empower (Dobbin & Kalev, 2018; Noon, 2018). Challenges are highlighted by findings, for example, that excessive EDI instruction and emphasis can lead participants to believe that they have to tread carefully when engaging with members of a minority population, and as a result may be less likely to try to build relationships or collaborate with people from diverse backgrounds (al-Gharbi, 2020) such that trainings can unwittingly promote exclusionary social groupings. Others found that using terms common to EDI training such as *white privilege* led to less support and engagement for racially progressive policies in online communication (Quarles & Bozarth, 2022), or that workplace discrimination was discounted more in organizations with diversity initiatives compared to

those without these structures (Kaiser et al., 2013). Such findings underscore concerns with method and implementation in that top-down institutional or administrative pressure including punitive action towards professors has at times led to what appears to be less private individual endorsement of EDI values. Some scholars have called for an emphasis on evidence-based suggestions (e.g., trainings with validated psychological effects) or have proposed alternative and additional recommendations for diversity initiatives (e.g., Carter et al., 2020; Russell et al., 2023; Sarkar, 2022) such as adapting trainings to the target groups (Berg-Postweiler et al., 2023) or developing more nuanced understandings of how training impacts participants and minorities.

When considering the freedom of professors to publish on their research interests compared to their freedom to promote social justice for disadvantaged groups, half of students reported that their views aligned with statements prioritizing social justice; one third reported that their views aligned with statements prioritizing academic freedom. When forced to choose between two statements about university course content (whether it should feature authors or thinkers of diverse racial, ethnic, and gender backgrounds, or whether it should feature the most intellectually foundational knowledge in the field), over half of the students endorsed the former statement.

The majority of students in the sample *disagreed* with having admission committees that would inquire about aspects of identity or that would favour identity over merit; alternatively, most students generally *agreed* with admissions committees favouring merit over identity. Regarding situations when political views are evident from an application, whether for university student admissions or for hiring university staff including professors, students generally disagreed with rating applicants and candidates lower based on their political views. These results suggest that at least in principle, students do not agree with political discrimination in admissions or hiring. There was however some bias towards left-leaning politics, which may be expected given the majority politics of the sample. This finding lends support to established theories in organizational psychology that we tend to want to hire candidates who remind us of ourselves (Dipboye & Colella, 2014). Results on cancellations of speaker events suggest that many students may be tolerant of inviting campus speakers with a diverse range of perspectives, and are perhaps open to consider alternative perspectives themselves as suggested by a low agreement with cancelling when a presenter is controversial or discusses so-called triggering topics. Students were most prone to agree with cancelling events if there was evidence of hate speech or strong risk of violence, which perhaps suggest a need for university policymakers to have a clear means of determining when presenter events are at risk of breaching these limits. As Roth (2020) points out, there is an important difference between cancelling a speaker who advocates hateful violence, and cancelling a speaker because their ideas are unpopular, but the distinction must be made clear. In our survey, views were fairly split on whether an event should be cancelled if there was a protest, perhaps reflecting earlier

findings of student reluctance to offend peers. Many students (40%) would agree to cancel an event due to a protest compared to about one third (35%) who would disagree with cancelling for this reason. Regarding espoused political views of the hypothetical presenter, students tended to disagree more with cancelling when the speaker was left-leaning.

On a hypothetical petition against professors for researching controversial, sensitive, or challenging topics that might imply a non-progressive perspective, *private* support or opposition (as opposed to public support or opposition) was generally favoured in responses. There were also several mixed responses to these items suggesting heterogeneity in student views. This finding suggests a need for further urgent research on functionally effective ways to encourage open discussions wherein both definitions of what constitutes discrimination or hateful conduct are clearly stated and respected. As recently found by Parra and colleagues (2023), educational friction and tension on difficult topics can play an important role in democratic learning. Research has also suggests that a policy discussion group with ideological diversity may actually be less polarized than ideologically homogenized groups through deeper comprehensive discussion and problem-solving (Moaz et al., 2023), suggesting that it may be important to consider political or ideological diversity as a strength at a university level. However, open consideration of ideological out-group members' perspectives is not generally reinforced as a cultural norm; rather, in-group favoritism tends to occur in that students are more open-minded to speakers who are members of their own in-groups, and this openness is shown to be moderated by normative perceptions (Ottati & Wilson, 2018; Moaz et al., 2023). As stated in Roth (2020), it is possible for those with both progressive and traditional values to co-exist at a university while still rejecting blatant hate and authoritarianism, and possible to empathize with personally challenging viewpoints without endorsing them (i.e., epistemic empathy; Ferkany, 2019). Universities should do better at cultivating such environments where open and non-hostile exchanges can help to reduce affective polarization, impositions of conformity, political backlash, and the need to stay silent about one's values and viewpoints whatever those may be (Roth, 2020). That being said, we must also consider how group norms and labels impact perceptions of propriety in considering others' ideas; Moaz et al. (2023) found that manipulating group norms produced greater open-mindedness towards others with "different viewpoints" when those others were not overtly identified or labelled as members of an opposing party or ideological group. Further research is warranted on how public (e.g., social media) identity affiliations could influence university campus climate.

This paper is not without its limitations. First, the sample was not representative of all university students in Canada, where gender is overall a 3:2 women to men ratio as opposed to our study's ratio which neared 4:1 (Usher & Balfour, 2023). That said, as Canadian university visible minorities make up 44% of enrolments (Usher & Balfour, 2023), it seems that our sample is relatively consistent with this data. We also had a much

higher number of respondents in psychology, humanities, and social sciences as well as within certain provinces (e.g., Quebec) and universities which may impact the results insomuch as they are more reflective of student experiences in these fields, locations, and institutions. Our survey distribution also encountered challenges in that it was subject to criticism on social media and requests that individuals not participate in this research; here, we received both critical and encouraging feedback for investigating this topic. Given these limitations, the sensitivity of topics, and students' reportedly mixed opinions on many issues, it is important to consider the outcome of these findings with care. Based on the student views represented here, it seems there are campus challenges related to open dialogue and viewpoint plurality. Results of this study indicate a need for further research on demonstrably effective solutions (e.g., strategies and interventions that improve epistemic empathy, critical dialogue, and open-mindedness).

As such, greater empirical research is needed on how to approach challenges around the peaceful and open exchange of ideas on campuses. Prior to attempting interventions to improve university campus dialogue, greater evidence on how to target these concerns effectively is crucial.

### **Conclusion**

This study examined the freedom of expression and censorship among students in academia within the Canadian context. Many students reported engaging in self-censorship or being censured in discussions based on their comfort with the topic and perceived repercussions. Similarly, many students expressed that it is acceptable for professors to self-censor or avoid pursuing research on certain topics due to concerns about potential repercussions or offending others. Most students opposed admission committees' asking about applicants' identities, favoring identity over merit, or evaluating students or staff applications based on political views. Evidence-based interventions aimed to encourage open expression in classrooms may provide ways for students to voice their opinions without concern of repercussions and contribute to their learning. Given the scarcity of research on freedom of expression in Canadian higher education and the everchanging political climate, further research on censorship and the conformity of expression on university campuses is of significant importance.

### **Declarations**

This study was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada and by Heterodox Academy. The funding sources were not involved in the conduction or writing of the study. The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

This study was approved by the McGill Research & Ethics Board (REB File #21-08-013) and by 22 university REBs where the study was distributed (file numbers available on request). Data was collected with informed and active consent.

## References

Al-Gharbi, M. (2020, September 16). Diversity-related training: What is it good for? *Heterodox Academy*. <https://bit.ly/4aYKflx>

Bellet, B. W., Jones, P. J., Meyersburg, C. A., Brenneman, M. M., Morehead, K. E. & McNally, R. J. (2020). Trigger warnings and resilience in college students: A preregistered replication and extension. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied*, 26, 717–723. <https://doi.org/10.1037/xap0000270>

Berg-Postweiler, J., Dankert, L. S., & Leicht-Scholten, C. (2023). One size does not fit all: Applying antibias trainings in academia. *The International Journal of Organizational Diversity*, 24(1), <https://doi.org/10.18848/2328-6261/CGP/v24i01/1-23>

Bezrukova K., Spell C. S., Perry J. L., Jehn K. A. (2016). A meta-analytical integration of over 40 years of research on diversity training evaluation. *Psychological Bulletin*, 142(11), 1227–1274. <https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000067>

Campbell, B. & Manning, J. (2018). *The rise of victimhood culture: Microaggressions, safe spaces, and the new culture wars*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Carter, E. R., Onyeador, I. N., & Lewis, N. A., Jr. (2020). Developing & delivering effective anti-bias training: Challenges & recommendations. *Behavioral Science & Policy*, 6(1), 57–70. <https://behavioralpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Developing-delivering-effective-anti-bias-training-Challenges-.pdf>

Cases. (n.d.). The foundation for individual rights and expression. <https://www.thefire.org/cases>

Chalupovitsch, M. (2022) Canada: Quebec enacts law respecting academic freedom in universities. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/global-legal-monitor/2022-06-29/canada-quebec-enacts-law-respecting-academic-freedom-in-universities/>.

Dea, S. (2019, September 19). *Academic freedom, scholarly responsibility and the new gender wars*. University Affairs. <https://universityaffairs.ca/opinion/dispatches-academic-freedom/academic-freedom-scholarly-responsibility-and-the-new-gender-wars/>

Dea, S. (2020, September 14). *Learning to say goodbye to academic freedom*. University Affairs. <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/dispatches-academic-freedom/learning-to-say-goodbye-to-academic-freedom/>

Dea, S. (2021, February 10). *On the uses and abuses of “academic freedom.”* University Affairs. <https://www.universityaffairs.ca/opinion/dispatches-academic-freedom/on-the-uses-and-abuses-of-academic-freedom/>

Dipboye, R. L., & Colella, A. (2014). Discrimination at work: The psychological and organizational bases. *Psychology Press*, Taylor & Francis Group.

Dobbin, F., & Kalev, A. (2018). Why doesn't diversity training work? The challenge for industry and academia. *Anthropology Now*, 10(2), 48–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19428200.2018.1493182>

Dummitt, C., & Patterson, Z. (2022). The viewpoint diversity crisis at Canadian universities: Political homogeneity, self-censorship, and threats to academic freedom. [https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/20220829\\_University\\_censorship\\_Dummit\\_Patterson\\_PAPER\\_FWeb.pdf](https://macdonaldlaurier.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/20220829_University_censorship_Dummit_Patterson_PAPER_FWeb.pdf)

Etzioni, A. (2019). Allow offensive speech — Curb abusive speech? *Society*, 56(4), 315–321. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-019-00373-6>

Fenton, J., & Smith, M. (2019). ‘You can’t say that!’: Critical thinking, identity politics, and the social work academy. *Societies*, 9(4). <https://doi.org/10.3390/soc9040071>

Ferkany, M. A. (2019). The moral limits of open-mindedness. *Educational Theory*, 69(4), 403–419. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/edth.12377>

Grigoriadis, I. N., & Işık Canpolat, E. (2023). Elite universities as populist scapegoats: Evidence from Hungary and Turkey. *East European Politics and Societies*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/08883254231203338>

Haidt, J., & Lukianoff, G. (2019). *The coddling of the American mind*. Penguin Books.

Hanlon, A. R. (2019, May 3). We don’t need a scapegoat to talk about values in higher education. *Academe Blog*. <https://academeblog.org/2019/05/03/we-dont-need-a-scapegoat-to-talk-about-values-in-higher-education/>

Ives, P., & Haque, E. (2022, June 3). *What is Québec’s bill 32 on academic freedom, and why does it matter?* Academic Matters. <https://academicmatters.ca/what-is-quebecs-bill-32-on-academic-freedom-and-why-does-it-matter/>

Jones, P., Arnold, A., & Tenhundfeld, N. (2024, April). 2023 Campus Expression Survey: Data and methods [Research brief]. *Heterodox Academy*. <https://content.heterodoxacademy.org/uploads/CES-data-and-methods-april-2024.pdf>

Kaiser, C. R., Major, B., Jurcevic, I., Dover, T. L., Brady, L. M., & Shapiro, J. R. (2013). Presumed fair: Ironic effects of organizational diversity structures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 104, 504–519. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0030838>

Kaufmann, E. (2021). Academic freedom in crisis: Punishment, political discrimination, and self-censorship. *Center for the Study of Partisanship and Ideology*, 2, 1–195.

<https://www.hoplofobia.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/2021-Academic-Freedom-in-Crisis.pdf>

Lukianoff, G., & Schlott, R. (2023). The cancelling of the American mind: Cancel culture undermines trust and threatens us all—But there is a solution. *Simon and Schuster*.

McKay-Panos, L. (2023). Should the Charter of Rights and Freedoms protect academic freedom at universities? *Canadian Labour and Employment Law Journal*, 25, 185.

McWhorter, J. H. (2022). *Woke racism: How a new religion has betrayed Black America*. Forum.

Moaz, S., Berryman, K., Winget, J. R., Tindale, R. S., & Ottati, V. (2023). The role of group context in open-minded cognition. In V. Ottati & C. Stern (Eds.), *Divided: Open-mindedness and dogmatism in a polarized world* (pp. 144–161).

Noelle-Neumann, E. (1974). The spiral of silence a theory of public opinion. *Journal of Communication*, 24(2), 43–51. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1974.tb00367.x>

Noon, M. (2018). Pointless diversity training: Unconscious bias, new racism and agency. *Work, Employment and Society*, 32(1), 198–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0950017017719841>

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2021). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge University Press.

Ottati, V., & Wilson, C. (2018, March 28). Open-minded cognition and political thought. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.143>

Parra, S. L., Wansink, B. G. J., Bakker, C., & van Liere, L. M. (2023). Teachers stepping up their game in the face of extreme statements: A qualitative analysis of educational friction when teaching sensitive topics. *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 51(2), 201–232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2022.2145923>

Prentiss, M. (2018, September 12). *Controversial prof fired for privacy breach, harassment, Acadia letter reveals*. CBC News. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/rick-mehta-acadia-university-1.4819220>

Quarles, C. L., & Bozarth, L. (2022). How the term ‘white privilege’ affects participation, polarization, and content in online communication. *PLoS ONE*, 17(5). <https://bit.ly/3NYICKQ>

Roth, M. S. (2020, September 19). *Colleges, conservatives and the Kakistocracy*. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/19/opinion/campus-free-speech.html>

Russell, H. A., Sanders, M., Nofziger, A., Fogarty, C. T., McDaniel, S. H., Rosenberg, T., Fiscella, K., & Naumburg, E. (2023). Addressing sexual harassment and gender bias: Mandatory modules are not enough. *Family Medicine*, 55(4), 253–258. <https://doi.org/10.22454/FamMed.2023.488622>

Sachs, J. A. (2019, December 19). There is no campus free speech crisis: A close look at the evidence. *Niskanen Center*. <https://www.niskanencenter.org/there-is-no-campus-free-speech-crisis-a-close-look-at-the-evidence/>

Sarkar, A. (2022). Designing diversity training program for business executives. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 54(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ICT-07-2020-0091>

Stiksma, M. (2020). Understanding the campus expression climate: Fall 2019. *Heterodox Academy*. <https://content.heterodoxacademy.org/uploads/CES-Fall-2019.pdf>

Turk, J.L. (2020). Universities, the Charter, Doug Ford, and campus free speech. *Constitutional Forum*, 29(2). Retrieved from <https://canlii.ca/t/szzz> (retrieved on 2023-08-01).

Usher, A., & Balfour, J. (2023). *The State of Postsecondary Education in Canada, 2023*. Toronto: Higher Education Strategy Associates.

Yglesias, M. (2018, March 12). *Everything we think about the political correctness debate is wrong*. Vox. <https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2018/3/12/17100496/political-correctness-data>

Zhou, S. & Barbaro, N. (2023). Understanding student expression across higher ed: Heterodox Academy's annual campus expression survey. *Heterodox Academy*. <https://content.heterodoxacademy.org/uploads/CES-Fall-2022-fv-c.pdf>

Zhou, S. & Zhou, S. C. (2022). Understanding the campus expression climate: Three-year report. *Heterodox Academy*. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep61389>

Zhou, S., Stiksma, M., & Zhou, S. C. (2022). Understanding the campus expression climate: Fall 2021. *Heterodox Academy*. <https://content.heterodoxacademy.org/uploads/CES-Report-2022-FINAL-1.pdf>

## **Appendix**

### **Student Survey** **Demographic items**

1. What is your gender?

Woman

Man

Non-binary

Transgender

Other

I prefer not to respond

2. What is your age?

[Sliding bar with ages]

3. What university do you attend?

[Open-ended response option]

4. What field or discipline do you currently study?

[Open-ended response option]

5. Are you currently

a. An undergraduate student?

b. A master's student?

c. A doctoral student?

d. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is your ethnic/racial group?

Aboriginal and Indigenous Person / First Nations / Inuit / Métis

Black / African Canadian / African American

Chinese

Euro-Anglo-Canadian

Euro-French-Canadian

Filipino

Hispanic / Latino or Latina / Latin American

Japanese

Korean

Pacific Islander

South Asian (e.g., Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)

Southeast Asian (e.g., Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam)

West Asian (e.g., Iran, Turkey, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen).

White / Caucasian

Other:

Prefer not to answer

7. In an election, who would you most likely vote for?

Bloc Québécois (leader: Yves-Francois Blanchet)

Conservative Party (leader: Erin O'Toole)

Green Party (leader: Annamie Paul)

Liberal Party (leader: Justin Trudeau)

New Democratic Party (leader: Jagmeet Singh)

People's Party (leader: Maxime Bernier)

Other / Not voting / Not eligible to vote

8. How would you describe your political views on the following scale?

Radical right

Very right-wing / very conservative

Somewhat right-wing / somewhat conservative

Centrist

Somewhat left-wing / somewhat progressive

Very left-wing / very progressive

Radical left

I don't know

Prefer not to say

9. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? "I would consider myself an activist"

Yes/No/I don't know

Comfort Items

We are interested in how you would feel expressing your personal opinions on various topics in your program, either in class or in meetings with professors or other students.

10. Have you ever censured yourself during discussions with professors or other students?

Yes

No

11. Has anyone ever tried to censure you because of your opinions?

Yes

No

12. Overall, do you feel that there is a supportive or hostile climate towards people with your beliefs in your program or department?

Hostile

Somewhat hostile

Somewhat supportive

Supportive

13. For the following questions, think about being at your university in a class with about 20 to 30 students engaged in a class discussion. Using the items in the table below as topics of discussion, how comfortable or reluctant would you feel about speaking up and giving your views on the following topics?

Note: "controversial" refers to topics with a range of divergent viewpoints where there is a high risk of disagreement or of offending others with opposing views.

[Matrix items]

A NON-CONTROVERSIAL issue

- I would be very comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat reluctant giving my views
- I would be very reluctant giving my views

A controversial issue about GENDER or GENDER IDENTITY

- I would be very comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat reluctant giving my views
- I would be very reluctant giving my views

A controversial issue about SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- I would be very comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat reluctant giving my views
- I would be very reluctant giving my views

A controversial POLITICAL issue

- I would be very comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat reluctant giving my views
- I would be very reluctant giving my views

A controversial issue about RELIGION

- I would be very comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat reluctant giving my views
- I would be very reluctant giving my views

A controversial issue about RACE

- I would be very comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat reluctant giving my views
- I would be very reluctant giving my views

A controversial issue about equity, diversity and inclusion

- I would be very comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat comfortable giving my views
- I would be somewhat reluctant giving my views
- I would be very reluctant giving my views

Consequence Items

14. If you were to speak up and give your views on one of the CONTROVERSIAL issues mentioned above during a class discussion (in a class where participation marks are awarded), how concerned would you be that the following would occur?

[Matrix items]

The professor would criticize my views as offensive

- Not at all concerned
- Slightly concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Very concerned
- Extremely concerned

The professor would give me a lower grade because of my views

- Not at all concerned
- Slightly concerned

- Somewhat concerned
- Very concerned
- Extremely concerned

The professor would say my views are wrong

- Not at all concerned
- Slightly concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Very concerned
- Extremely concerned

Other students would criticize my views as wrong and/or offensive

- Not at all concerned
- Slightly concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Very concerned
- Extremely concerned

Someone would post critical comments about my views on social media

- Not at all concerned
- Slightly concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Very concerned
- Extremely concerned

Someone would file a complaint claiming that my views violated a campus policy or code of conduct

- Not at all concerned
- Slightly concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Very concerned
- Extremely concerned

15. How worried are you about having your reputation damaged, facing major adversity, or missing out on professional opportunities (e.g., being nominated for an award, being accepted into a graduate program, etc.) should one of the following occur?

[Matrix items]

if your political opinions became known

Very worried  
Somewhat worried  
Not very worried  
Not at all worried

If your opinions about university policy regarding equity, diversity and inclusion became known  
Very worried  
Somewhat worried  
Not very worried  
Not at all worried

If your opinions about gender and gender identity became known  
Very worried  
Somewhat worried  
Not very worried  
Not at all worried

If your opinions about dominant notions regarding social justice became known  
Very worried  
Somewhat worried  
Not very worried  
Not at all worried

16. How confident are you that representatives of your university would defend your right to express yourself?  
Not at all confident  
Somewhat confident  
Very confident  
Mission of university items

17. By clicking and sliding the items below, please rank the following in priority (1-highest; 4-lowest) as to what you see as the purpose of a university:  
Educating students  
Conducting research and creating knowledge  
Working for social justice and progress  
Preparing students for the workforce and to contribute to the economic prosperity of society

18. By clicking and sliding the items below, please rank the following in priority as to what you think should be the most important part of a professor's job:

Teach and conduct research that aims to shape and change society

Teach and conduct research that aims to help students find good career prospects

Teach and conduct research that aims advance knowledge of and improve our understanding of the world

19. How often do your professors encourage students to consider a wider variety of viewpoints and perspectives?

Very frequently

Frequently

Occasionally

Rarely

Very rarely

Never

20. How acceptable is it that a professor would refrain from sharing their views in teaching or academic discussions in class or elsewhere, or avoid pursuing or publishing research, for fear of offending others or because of possible consequences to their career from doing so?

Not at all acceptable

Somewhat acceptable

Acceptable

Very acceptable

21. When considering the freedom of professors to publish research on their interests compared to the freedom of professors to promote social justice for disadvantaged groups, which comes closest to your view?

I prioritize social justice, and have strong beliefs in this area

I prioritize social justice, but don't have strong beliefs in this area

I don't have strong beliefs in this area

I prioritize academic freedom, but don't have strong beliefs in this area

I prioritize academic freedom, and have strong beliefs in this area

22. If you had to choose, which statement do you think best matches your views?

University course content should feature authors/thinkers of diverse racial/ethnic/gender backgrounds

University course content should feature the most intellectually foundational knowledge in the field

**Practice items**

23. To what extent do you agree that the following inquiries and decisions would be acceptable for a University ADMISSIONS committee?

**[Matrix items]**

To inquire about the gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, race, ethnicity, and/or political stance of student applicants during an admission interview in order to increase diversity in a program

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

To favour gender identity, sexual orientation, religious, racial, ethnic and/or political considerations over merit (such as relevant experience) when reviewing applications

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

To favour merit (such as relevant experience) over gender identity, sexual orientation, racial, ethnic, religious, and/or political considerations when reviewing applications

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

To rate a student's application lower if it had a politically left-leaning perspective

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

To rate a student's application lower if it had a radical left political perspective

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

To rate a student's application lower if it had a politically right-leaning perspective

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

To rate a student's application lower if it had a radical right political perspective

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

24. To what extent do you agree that the following inquiries and decisions would be acceptable for a University HIRING committee?

[Matrix items]

When evaluating an academic job (professor) application, to rate it lower if the application had a politically left-leaning perspective

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

When evaluating an academic job (professor) application, to rate it lower if the application had a radical left political perspective

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

When evaluating an academic job (professor) application, to rate it lower if the application had a politically right-leaning perspective

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

When evaluating an academic job (professor) application, to rate it lower if the application had a radical right political perspective

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

25. Universities have sometimes faced calls to cancel events or lectures. For the following scenarios, to what extent do you agree that the University should cancel an event?

[Matrix items]

Where the presenter clearly has a left-leaning political position

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Where the presenter clearly has a radical left political position

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Where the presenter clearly has a right-leaning political position

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Where the presenter clearly has a radical right political position

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Where the presenter is controversial or discusses triggering topics

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Where there will be a protest against the presenter

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Where there is a strong risk of physical violence

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Where the presenter, based on clear evidence, expresses hate towards certain segments of society

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

Where the presenter is a respected but provocative academic figure

Strongly agree

Somewhat agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Somewhat disagree

Strongly disagree

Don't know

26. For the following questions, what would be your response to these situations involving differing views between university students and professors?

[Matrix items]

If a professor stated that academic freedom is more important than equity, diversity, and inclusion in universities, and students petitioned to have them sanctioned, reprimanded or fired, would you

Support the student petition publicly

Support the student petition but say nothing publicly

Oppose the student petition but say nothing publicly

Oppose the student petition publicly

Don't know

If a professor stated that equity, diversity, and inclusion is more important than academic freedom in universities, and students petitioned to have them sanctioned, reprimanded or fired, would you

Support the student petition publicly

Support the student petition but say nothing publicly

Oppose the student petition but say nothing publicly

Oppose the student petition publicly

Don't know

If a professor did research that questioned the idea that systemic racism is a significant problem in Canada, and students petitioned to have them sanctioned, reprimanded or fired, would you

Support the student petition publicly

Support the student petition but say nothing publicly

Oppose the student petition but say nothing publicly

Oppose the student petition publicly

Don't know

If a professor did research that questioned the idea that transgender people who are minors should have access to hormonal therapy, and students petitioned to have them sanctioned, reprimanded or fired, would you

Support the student petition publicly

Support the student petition but say nothing publicly

Oppose the student petition but say nothing publicly

Oppose the student petition publicly

Don't know

If a professor did research that suggested the idea that higher ethnic diversity leads to increased societal tension and poorer social outcomes, and students petitioned to have them sanctioned, reprimanded or fired, would you

Support the student petition publicly

Support the student petition but say nothing publicly

Oppose the student petition but say nothing publicly

Oppose the student petition publicly

Don't know

27. Please imagine there was a new initiative in the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences at your institution stipulating that on each reading list, at least 30% of readings

must come from women and 20% from authors of color to promote greater diversity.

Would you:

Publicly express opposition

Privately oppose the initiative, but not say anything publicly

Neither support nor oppose the initiative

Privately support the initiative, but not say anything publicly

Don't know

28. How should the university deal with professors who refuse to alter their reading lists to comply with the above racial and gender curriculum quotas?

Terminate employment

Cancel the course

Give them less favorable teaching and administrative roles, or less access to research funding

No formal disincentives, just social pressure from colleagues and managers

No formal or informal pressure, but must take extra implicit bias awareness training

No action of any kind

Don't know

Perception of others items

29. Now that you have told us how comfortable YOU feel in classroom discussions, please tell us how you think members of various OTHER groups on campus feel in those classroom discussions. Think carefully about each of the following categories of students at your school. Do you think that students in that category may be more comfortable sharing their views in a classroom discussion compared to the average student, less comfortable compared to the average student, or about the same as the average student?

[Matrix items]

Left-leaning or progressive students

More comfortable sharing their views than the average student

About the same as the average student

Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

Right-leaning or conservative students

More comfortable sharing their views than the average student

About the same as the average student

Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

White / Caucasian students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

Black / African-Canadian / African-American students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

Hispanic / Latino or Latina students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

Indigenous students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

Asian students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

Female students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

Male students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

Transgender students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

## LGBTQIA2S+ students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

## Straight students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

## Christian students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

## Jewish students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

## Muslim students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

## Atheist students

- More comfortable sharing their views than the average student
- About the same as the average student
- Less comfortable sharing their views than the average student

30. Is there any other group, not listed above, that you think may be especially uncomfortable sharing their views?

[Open-ended response option]

The following questions are about your experiences ON CAMPUS IN GENERAL - including classroom activities, public events with speakers, meetings of student organizations, informal gatherings, and conversations with other students.

31. Please indicate the frequency of your experience being treated badly or unfairly for

any of the following reasons:

[Matrix items]

Because of your POLITICAL VIEWS?

- Every day
- More than once a week
- Every few weeks
- A few times a year
- Once a year or less
- It never happens

Because of your RACE or ETHNICITY?

- Every day
- More than once a week
- Every few weeks
- A few times a year
- Once a year or less
- It never happens

Because of your RELIGIOUS BELIEFS?

- Every day
- More than once a week
- Every few weeks
- A few times a year
- Once a year or less
- It never happens

Because of your SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

- Every day
- More than once a week
- Every few weeks
- A few times a year
- Once a year or less
- It never happens

Because of your GENDER?

- Every day
- More than once a week
- Every few weeks

- A few times a year
- Once a year or less
- It never happens

32. Is there anything else you wish to share?

[Open-ended response option]

Do you consent for your de-identified data to be used for future, unspecified use?

Yes

No