

# **WILL: Study shows more than half of Wisconsin colleges substantially restrict free speech**

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The News: A [review of speech codes](#) at Wisconsin colleges and universities by the Wisconsin Institute for Law & Liberty (WILL) found that more than half of institutions reviewed substantially restrict freedom of speech. Three quarters of Wisconsin's technical colleges and one third of the four-year colleges in the University of Wisconsin system have policies that severely restrict free speech. WILL could not identify one college or university that had no policies that restrict or threaten free speech.

Speech Code Review: WILL rated Wisconsin institutions of higher education according to the [Foundation for Individual Rights in Education \(FIRE\)](#) traffic light system: red means that the school "has at least one policy that both clearly and substantially restricts freedom of speech," yellow means that the school "is one whose policies restrict a more limited amount of protected expression or, by virtue of their vague wording, could too easily be used to restrict protected expression," and green means that the school's "policies do not seriously imperil speech."

Critical findings include:

- 55% of the total institutions WILL rated red.
- 75% of Wisconsin technical colleges WILL rated red.
- 33% of University of Wisconsin four-year colleges WILL rated red.
- No Wisconsin institutions WILL rated green for free speech.

## **Bias Response Systems**

A Bias Response System is a formal way to solicit reports from students, faculty or the community on "offensive" speech. Some schools will often have a bias response team (BRT) in place to respond to such incidences.

- At least a dozen Wisconsin schools explicitly mention "bias" in their policies.

- At least 6 Wisconsin schools mention BRT's, including four-year UW schools like Platteville, Stevens Point, Superior, River Falls and Whitewater.

### Free Speech Zones

Free speech zones are designated areas on a campus where free speech is allowed and thus they are a tool for administrations to control and limit speech on their campuses.

- University of Wisconsin Parkside has two designated "free speech areas," and Northcentral Technical College has a "public assembly area."
- WILL [successfully sued](#) Northeast Wisconsin Technical College for their small free speech zone.

The Quote: Deputy Counsel Anthony LoCoco said, "Free speech is under attack on Wisconsin's college campuses. This review should serve as a resource to students, faculty, administrators, boards, and taxpayers to ensure that Wisconsin's college campuses respect the First Amendment and encourage free and open debate."

Read More

- [Wisconsin Speech Code Review](#), April 2020