

Comparison of the CIRP Freshman Survey and College Senior Survey: Attitudes Related to Free Speech

The purpose of this research brief is to summarize data on how the attitudes and behaviors related to free speech of the most recent cohort of Holy Cross's graduating students' (i.e. the class of 2019) changed compared to their first year at the College (2015). The data presented comes from the Higher Education Research Institute's CIRP Freshman Survey and College Senior Survey (CSS).

This memo focuses on six items related to free speech asked on both the CIRP Survey and the CSS. These items can be grouped into three categories: **attitudes toward colleges limiting free speech, frequency of participating in behaviors related to free speech, and ability to have controversial discussions**. The most recent data for which the graduating class can be matched with their first year responses were collected from the class of 2019, and will serve as the focus of this report.

A total of 695 students from the class of 2019 responded to the CIRP Survey in their first year out of the 741 who were invited for a response rate of 94%. In their senior year, 605 students from the class of 2019 responded to the CSS out of 702 who were invited to participate, yielding a response rate of 86%. Data from all students who responded to either survey are used for the proceeding analyses. Additionally, this data will be supplemented with benchmark data from students in the same graduating class at a comparison group of comparable colleges.¹

¹ When the class of 2019 took the CIRP survey, there were two comparison groups selected: highly selective Catholic 4-year colleges, and Catholic 4-year colleges. When the class of 2019 took the CSS, the two comparison groups selected were: Catholic 4-year colleges and all private 4-year colleges. Therefore, for this memo, we only examine the comparison group that the students had in common at both timepoints: Catholic 4-year colleges.

For the CIRP survey, this comparison group included the following colleges: Albertus Magnus College, College of Mount Saint Vincent, Holy Names University, Iona College, Marygrove College, Mount St. Mary's College, Regis College, Rosemont College, Saint Catharine College, Saint Peter's University, Silver Lake College of the Holy Family, Trinity Washington University, Villa Maria College, DeSales University, Dominican University, Emmanuel College, Le Moyne College, Mount St Mary's University, Saint Francis University, St. Mary's University, University of Saint Joseph, Walsh University, Benedictine College, Christian Brothers University, College of the Holy Cross, Creighton University, Fairfield University, Loyola University Maryland, Manhattan College, Providence College, Sacred Heart University, Saint Joseph's University, Saint Mary's College, Saint Marys College of California, Saint Norbert College, Santa Clara University, Seattle University, Siena College, University of Detroit Mercy, and Villanova University.

For the CSS, this comparison group included the following colleges: Ave Maria University, College of the Holy Cross, Creighton University, Fairfield University, Loyola University-Baltimore, Marywood University, Saint Norbert College, Santa Clara University, University of Detroit Mercy, Villanova University, and Xavier University of Louisiana.

Attitudes Towards Colleges Limiting Free Speech

Two items were asked on both the CIRP survey and CSS to assess students' attitudes towards colleges limiting free speech. For each item, students were asked to rate their agreement to these items using a 4-point scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree Somewhat, Agree Somewhat, and Strongly Agree. The items are shown in Figure 1, as well as students' responses to the items.

As shown, students' responses to these items did change over their four years at Holy Cross. However, the responses changed in the opposite direction for the two survey items. **Students further increased in their agreement to the item "Colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus" in their fourth year compared to their first year.** This is shown both in the percentage of students who strongly agreed with the item in their fourth year (54%) compared to their first year (45%), as well as the combined percentage of students who at least agreed somewhat with the item in their fourth year (81%) compared to their first year (76%). **However, students decreased in their agreement to the item "Colleges have the right to ban extreme speakers from campus" in their fourth year compared to their first year.** Again, this is shown both in the percentage of students who strongly disagreed with the item in their fourth year (24%) compared to their first year (17%), as well as the combined percentage of students who at least disagreed somewhat with the item in their fourth year (58%) compared to their first year (55%).

Figure 1: The Class of 2019's Responses to Survey Items About Their Attitude Toward Colleges Limiting Free Speech by Year Answered

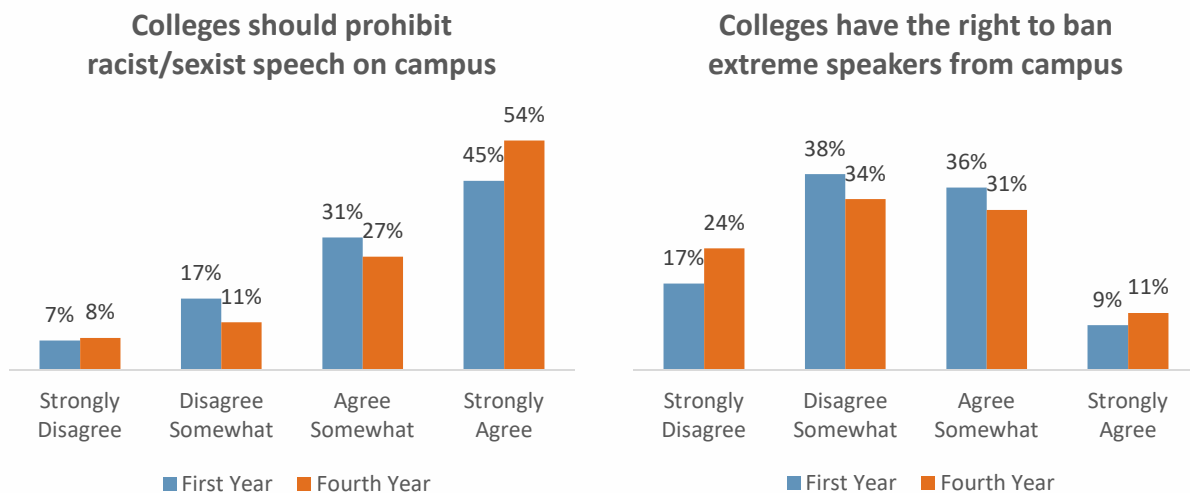


Table 1 compares Holy Cross students' responses to the responses of students in the same class year from 4-Year Catholic colleges. Holy Cross students tended to agree and disagree to the same extent as students from other 4-year Catholic colleges regarding whether colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus. However, **in their fourth year, Holy Cross students tended to agree less than students from other 4-year Catholic colleges that colleges have the right to ban extreme speakers from campus. Over time, it appears that Holy Cross students' disagreement grew stronger, while students from other 4-year Catholic colleges grew in their agreement to the statement.**

Table 1: The Class of 2019's Responses to Survey Items About Their Attitude Toward Colleges Limiting Free Speech by Year Answered Compared to Class of 2019 Students from 4-Year Catholic Colleges

		1 st Year		4 th Year		Change Over Time	
		Holy Cross	Catholic 4-Year Colleges	Holy Cross	Catholic 4-Year Colleges	Holy Cross	Catholic 4-Year Colleges
Colleges should prohibit racist/sexist speech on campus	Strongly agree	45%	42%	54%	50%	9%	8%
	Agree somewhat	31%	29%	27%	29%	-4%	0%
	Disagree somewhat	17%	19%	11%	14%	-6%	-5%
	Strongly disagree	7%	10%	8%	8%	1%	-2%
Colleges have the right to ban extreme speakers from campus	Strongly agree	9%	8%	11%	17%	2%	9%
	Agree somewhat	36%	36%	31%	39%	-5%	3%
	Disagree somewhat	38%	39%	34%	29%	-4%	-10%
	Strongly disagree	17%	17%	24%	15%	7%	-2%

Frequency of Participating in Free Speech Behaviors

Two items were asked on the CIRP survey and CSS to assess the extent to which students have participated in certain behaviors related to free speech. For each item, students were asked to rate the extent to which they participated in each activity *within the past year* using a 3-point scale: Not at all, Occasionally, and Frequently.² The items are shown in Figure 2, as well as students' responses to the items.

As shown in the figure, **students in the class of 2019 reported decreases in the frequency that they discussed both politics and religion over their time at Holy Cross.** The decrease in students' frequency of discussing religion is slightly larger than the decrease in discussing politics. Only 16% of students reported discussing religion frequently in their 4th year compared to 37% in their 1st year.

² On the CIRP survey, an additional question related to free speech behaviors was asked to gauge how often students "demonstrated for a cause" *in the past year*. The CSS also asks this question, but asks students to how often they have demonstrated for a cause *since entering college*. Therefore, the two versions of this questions were not directly comparable and were excluded from this analysis.

Figure 2: The Class of 2019's Responses to Survey Items About Their Frequency of Participating in Free Speech Behaviors by Year Answered

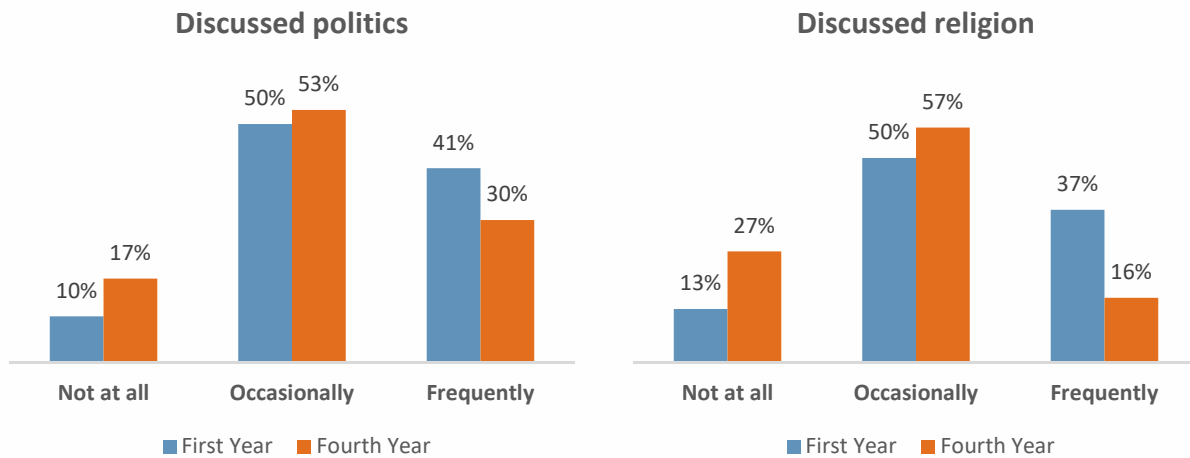


Table 2 compares Holy Cross students' responses to the responses of students in the same class year from 4-year Catholic colleges. **Holy Cross students reported higher frequencies of discussing politics in their first year compared to students from other 4-year Catholic colleges.** However, the percentage change of Holy Cross students reporting not discussing politics at all in their fourth year compared to their first year was greater than that same percentage calculated for students at other 4-year Catholic colleges. That said, it appears **Holy Cross students had a slightly larger decrease in their frequency of discussing politics over time than students from other 4-year Catholic colleges.** Regarding discussing religion, students from other Catholic 4-year colleges show relatively identical response patterns as Holy Cross students, with the exception of **Holy cross students reporting slightly more frequent discussions of religion in their first year compared to other Catholic 4-year college students.**

Table 2: The Class of 2019's Responses to Survey Items About Their Frequency of Participating in Free Speech Behaviors by Year Answered Compared to Class of 2019 Students from 4-Year Catholic Colleges

		1 st Year		4 th Year		Change Over Time	
		Holy Cross	Catholic 4-Year Colleges	Holy Cross	Catholic 4-Year Colleges	Holy Cross	Catholic 4-Year Colleges
Discussed politics	Frequently	41%	33%	30%	24%	-11%	-9%
	Occasionally	50%	50%	53%	55%	3%	5%
	Not at all	10%	18%	17%	20%	7%	2%
Discussed religion	Frequently	37%	35%	16%	17%	-21%	-18%
	Occasionally	50%	47%	57%	57%	7%	10%
	Not at all	13%	17%	27%	27%	14%	10%

Ability to Engage in Controversial Discussions

Two items were asked on the CIRP survey to assess the strength of students' ability to engage in controversial discussions. For each item, students were asked to rate themselves using a 5-point scale: A Major Weakness, Somewhat Weak, Average, Somewhat Strong, and A Major Strength. The items are shown in Figure 3, as well as students' responses to the items.

As shown, for both items, **students reported increases in their strength in their controversial discussion abilities over their time at Holy Cross**. This is shown both in the number of students reporting that these abilities were major strengths for them in their fourth year compared to their first year, as well as the percentage of students reporting that they were at least somewhat strong in each ability in their fourth year compared to their first year. Changes in the proportion of students who rated their openness to having their views challenged as a strength was slightly larger than the changes in the proportion of students who rated their ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues as a strength.

Figure 3: The Class of 2019's Responses to Survey Items About Their Ability to Engage in Controversial Discussions by Year Answered

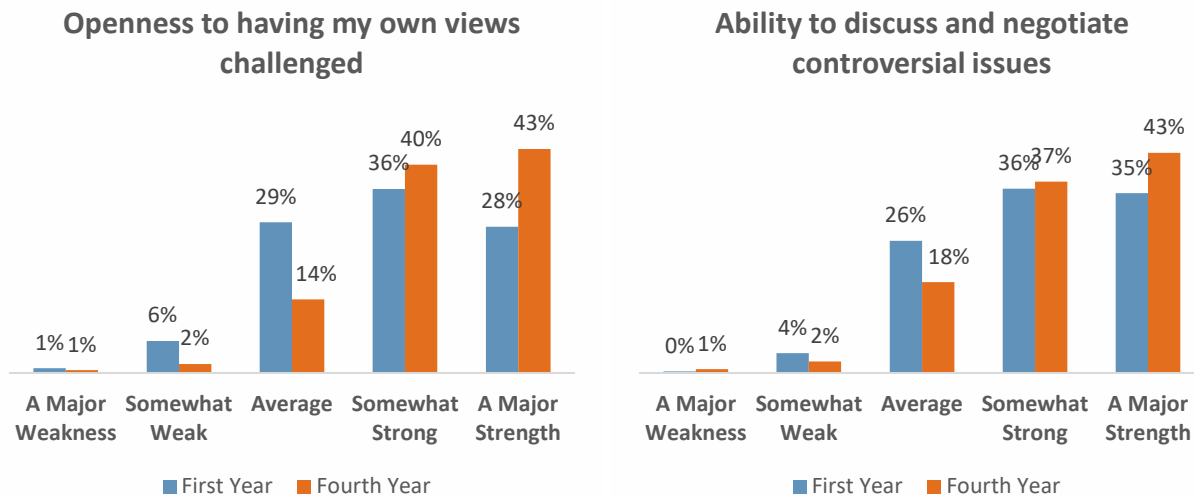


Table 3 compares Holy Cross students' responses to the responses of students in the same class year from 4-year Catholic colleges. As shown, **while Holy Cross students and other 4-year Catholic college students responded to both of these items in the same proportions their 1st year, by their 4th year, Holy cross students rated themselves higher than students from other 4-year Catholic colleges**. For both items, the largest difference between the two groups of students was the proportion of students selecting "A Major Strength", and how this proportion changed over time from 1st to 4th year.

Table 3: The Class of 2019's Responses to Survey Items About Their Ability to Engage in Controversial Discussions by Year Answered Compared to Class of 2019 Students from 4-Year Catholic Colleges

		1 st Year		4 th Year		Change Over Time	
		Holy Cross	Catholic 4-Year Colleges	Holy Cross	Catholic 4-Year Colleges	Holy Cross	Catholic 4-Year Colleges
Openness to having my own views challenged	A Major Strength	28%	28%	43%	31%	15%	3%
	Somewhat Strong	36%	36%	40%	44%	4%	8%
	Average	29%	29%	14%	21%	-15%	-8%
	Somewhat Weak	6%	7%	2%	4%	-4%	-3%
	A Major Weakness	1%	1%	1%	0%	0%	-1%
Ability to discuss and negotiate controversial issues	A Major Strength	35%	35%	43%	36%	8%	1%
	Somewhat Strong	36%	35%	37%	39%	1%	4%
	Average	26%	25%	18%	20%	-8%	-5%
	Somewhat Weak	4%	5%	2%	4%	-2%	-1%
	A Major Weakness	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	0%

Conclusions and Recommendations

These analyses suggest that **Holy Cross students leave college with more confidence in their abilities to have controversial discussions, both compared to when they started and compared to students of other 4-year Catholic colleges. However, this does not necessarily mean that students are choosing to have controversial discussions more often.** For example, these results also show that Holy Cross students are not discussing politics and religion more than when they started at Holy Cross, and neither are students from other 4-year Catholic colleges. **Concerning their attitudes toward colleges putting limitations on free speech, the most recent cohort of Holy Cross students agrees that colleges should take steps to prohibit racist/sexist speech, but should not take steps to ban extreme speakers.** These response patterns indicate that students support speech that may be viewed as harassing or discriminatory while recognizing the importance of free speech even when speakers can present controversial viewpoints.