



Free Speech Censorship Checklist

According to the Foundation for Individual Rights and Expression (FIRE), there were nearly 275 documented cases of student censorship on campus¹. In many cases, these instances of censorship stemmed from faculty, school staff, and other students. Texas Right to Life has built this checklist in order to help you work through censorship issues in the event that such a situation arises.

1. Policies & Written Rules

- ☐ Does the school have vague “speech codes” using terms like *offensive*, *harassment*, *hate speech*, *emotional harm*, or *hostile environment* without clear definitions?
- ☐ Are there “free speech zones” limiting where you can display materials or gather?
- ☐ Does your school require unusually early notice (e.g., 10–14 days) for displays, tabling, or events?

2. Club Recognition & Administrative Barriers

- ☐ Has your club faced delays or denials in recognition with explanations tied to your beliefs or mission?
- ☐ Were you informed your purpose “does not align with university values” or is “too divisive”?
- ☐ Are funding requests routinely denied or heavily scrutinized compared to other groups?

3. Unequal Enforcement Compared to Other Clubs

- ☐ Are your posters removed more often than others’ for similar content or style?
- ☐ Do other activist groups receive easier approval for events or displays?
- ☐ Is your club frequently told to “tone down,” “reword,” or “avoid upsetting students”?

4. Event Restrictions, Delays, or Cancellations

- ☐ Has the school imposed special security fees or logistical requirements not applied to similar events?
- ☐ Have administrators discouraged or blocked speakers due to anticipated controversy?
- ☐ Was your event canceled because of potential protests, disruption, or “student emotional well-being”?

5. Punitive or Chilling Responses to Expression

- ☐ Have club members been investigated, warned, or documented for peaceful displays or speech?
- ☐ Has symbolic speech (cross displays, flags, flyers) been labeled as “harassment” or “intimidation”?
- ☐ Do students hesitate to speak or table due to fear of administrative consequences?

6. Vandalism, Theft, or Disruption

- ☐ Have your displays been vandalized, destroyed, or repeatedly torn down?
- ☐ Did administrators minimize these incidents or fail to investigate?
- ☐ Are perpetrators excused by claims that your message “provoked” the vandalism?

¹ FIRE. “Students Under Fire Database,” n.d. Accessed January 2, 2026.



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How to Respond

Positive Mindset

- Make all materials clear, factual, and carefully created. Sloppy content makes censorship easier.
- Not every disagreement deserves a fight; focus on issues that truly matter to your mission.
- Student voices carry greater protection and credibility than outside voices. Advisers should support you quietly from the sidelines if they are willing to.

Know Your Rights

- Review your school's policies on free expression, clubs, displays, and events.
- Understand the legality of free speech—many administrators misunderstand or overreach.
- Document everything: emails, denials, conversations, event requests, edits you're asked to make; when possible, include video documentation..

When Censorship Happens

- Ask for a meeting with the administrator involved. Bring 2–3 student representatives; advisers observe only if involved.
- Stay respectful. Ask for specifics: *What rule is being applied? What exactly must change?*
- Offer to correct factual errors or clarify misunderstandings, but don't give up core principles.
- If a demand seems improper, ask for the decision **in writing**. This creates a clear record.

If the Problem Continues

- Issue a **public statement** summarizing: what happened, why it's censorship, and how it affects students.
- Build allyship: collaborate with other clubs, student government, alumni, and civil-rights groups.
- Engage the public sphere: social media campaigns, petitions, op-eds (if possible), peaceful demonstrations, or community events.

Remember, Texas Right to Life Is Here to Help!

- **If all else fails, TRTL has some tools that may help! If you need us, let us know!**