

## Chapter 3. Participation and the First Amendment

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Not surprisingly, since high schools offer different types and amounts of student media activities, students themselves vary in their participation in student media activities. In some cases, the amount of activities students participate in appears to influence their opinion on certain issues. In other cases, the specific type of activity the student participates in may have the greatest influence over their opinion. This chapter explores the relationships between school media characteristics, student participation in school media, school course offerings in journalism and the First Amendment and attitudes about journalism and the First Amendment.

### School Media Index (SMI)

To begin to assess how, if at all, participation in student media activities affects knowledge, tolerance and attitudes about the media and the First Amendment, a media index was created. Each school was classified into a high, medium, low, or no-media school. A “no media” school does not offer any student media activities (21 percent). Eleven percent of the students in the study attend a no-media school. Forty-seven percent of high school students attend schools that are classified as low media, offering one media activity (51 percent of schools fall into this category). Schools that offer two or three media activities are labeled as medium media schools (18 percent). Those that offer four or more are considered high-media schools (18 percent).

Regardless of the media index level of the school, students tend to participate in media activities at virtually the same rate. For example, looking at participation in student newspapers, at low and medium media index level schools, 8 percent of students say they participate in a student newspaper and at high media index schools, 6 percent participate. Most interestingly, at schools where no formal student media activities are offered, 7 percent of students say they participate in a student newspaper. We can observe similar participation patterns across different forms of student media:

### School Media Index level

	None	Low	Medium	High
Newspaper	7%	8%	8%	6%
Magazine	3	3	4	3
Radio station	3	3	3	5
TV station	4	3	6	6
Internet	5	4	5	5
Other	5	4	5	6

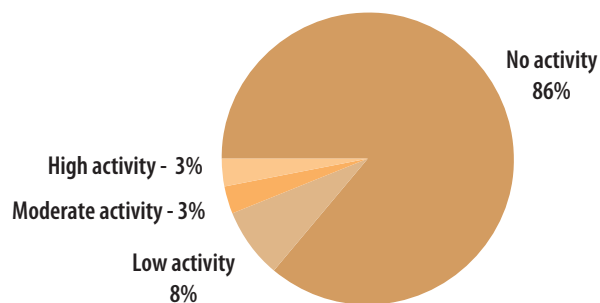
Simply offering more sanctioned media activities at the schools may not affect the level of participation by students in those activities. The quality of the student media offered may play a significant role. In addition, generating greater interest among students about journalism and media activities might have a greater impact on the level of interest and participation. Of course once the interest is generated, having the proper facilities and offering activities that are sanctioned and supported by the school would likely help sustain that interest and participation. Once students become engaged in media-related activities, to varying degrees and depending on

the amount and type of activity, their knowledge of and tolerance for the First Amendment may be influenced. There are clear differences among students when comparing those who do versus those who do not participate in a school newspaper, which will be discussed as well.

### Activity Participation Index (API)

While the School Media Index addresses what is offered by the schools, the Activity Participation Index (API) deals specifically with the amount and types of activities the students participate in. The API categorizes students based on the number of media-related activities they participate in at their school. Six activities comprise this index: newspaper, magazine, radio, television, Internet and other media activities. Three categories were created for students, depending on the level of their participation in student-run media-related activities. The majority of students (86 percent) do not participate in any media-related activities and are therefore designated as “no activity” on the index. Among the students who do participate in media-related activities, 8 percent participate in one activity (or “low activity”), 3 percent participate in two activities (“moderate activity”), and 3 percent participate in three or more activities (“high activity”).

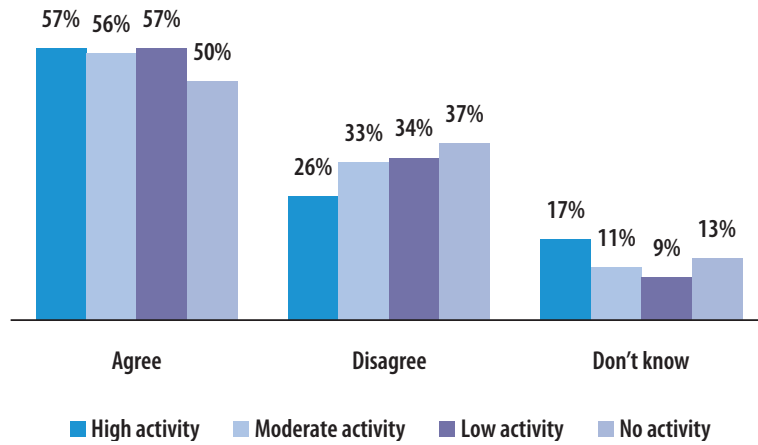
#### Activity Participation Index



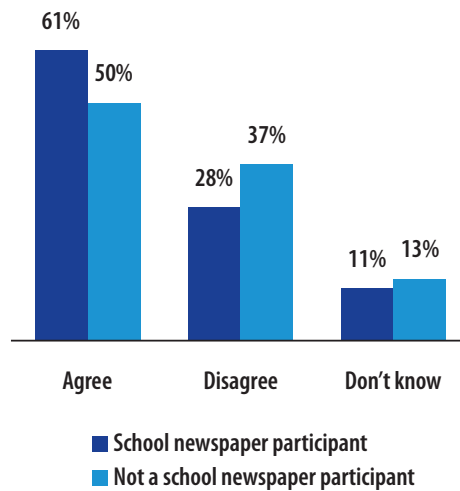
Although a comparison of these three activity level groups can provide us with some general information about the possible relationship between participation in activities and knowledge, tolerance and appreciation for the First Amendment, more specific conclusions can be drawn by looking at participation levels in each specific activity compared to the First Amendment issues that most directly correspond.

Consider the effect of participation in media activities on attitudes toward the freedom to publish. Just half (50 percent) of the *no activity* students agree that newspapers should be allowed to publish freely without government approval of a story; however, 56 to 57 percent of *low*, *moderate* and *high* activity students agree. While this range of agreement level across the API is significant, the deviation is even more pronounced when students who participate in a student newspaper (61 percent agree) are compared to those who do not participate in one (50 percent agree). Obviously students who participate in student newspapers are particularly sensitive to this issue.

**Newspapers should be able to publish without government approval of a story**

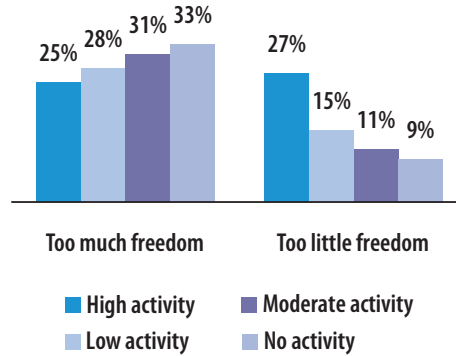


**Newspapers should be able to publish without government approval of a story**



The activity level of high school students does appear to affect their feelings about the press in America. As the activity level increases, so does the sentiment that the press in America has too little freedom to do what it wants. On the flip side, the lower the activity level of a student, the greater the sentiment that the press in America has too much freedom to do what it wants. More than a quarter (27 percent) of *high activity* students think the press has too little freedom, but smaller percentages of *moderate activity* (15 percent), *low activity* (11 percent), and *no activity* (9 percent) students feel this way. A third (33 percent) of *no activity* students think the press in America has too much freedom to do what it wants. Again, the percentage of students who feel this way decreases as their activity level increases (*low activity*-31 percent, *moderate activity*-28 percent, and *high activity*-25 percent). A significant percentage (16 to 21 percent depending on activity level) did not express an opinion either way to this question (i.e., answered “don’t know”). However, when those “don’t know” cases are removed, the trend remains the same among those students who expressed an opinion one way or the other.

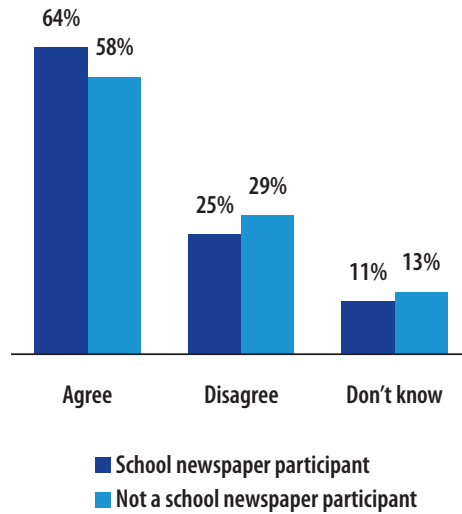
## Press in America have too much/too little freedom



The issue of whether or not students should be permitted to report controversial issues in their publications without approval from school administrators appears to hit home for many of the students surveyed. Perhaps this is why there is so little variance across media participation levels in students' attitudes on this one issue. Across media levels the majority of students agree that they should be allowed to report controversial issues without approval. Fifty-eight percent of *no activity* students, 64 percent of *low activity* students, 62 percent of *moderate activity* students and 56 percent of *high activity* students agree on this issue. Again, significant percentages of students across activity levels did not express any opinion at all on this issue (between 9 and 18 percent said they don't know). Yet among those who did express an opinion, the margin of variance is even narrower with just a three-percentage point difference between the highest and lowest percentage.

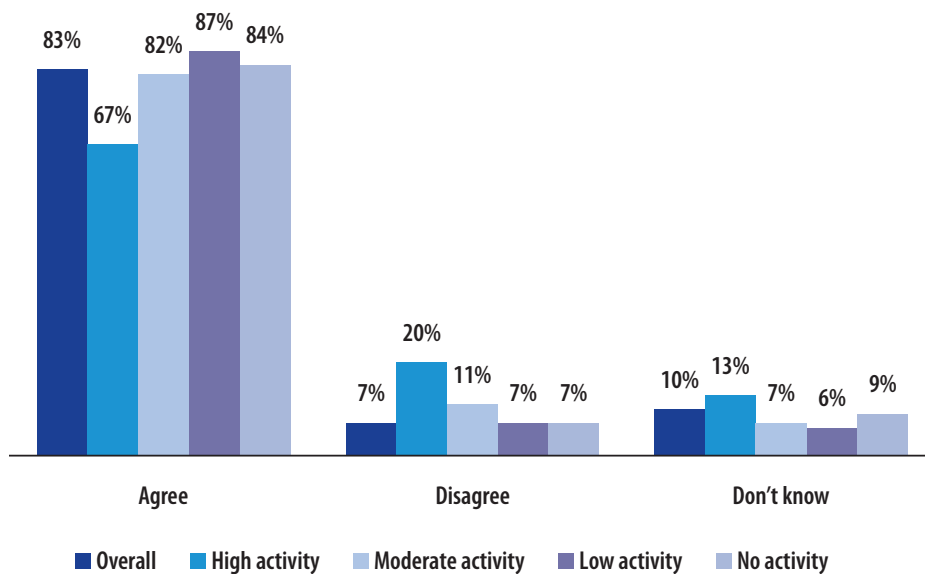
Again, even greater differences can be found when examining those students who participate in a student-run newspaper in particular. Whereas 64 percent of those who participate in a paper agree that high school students should be allowed to report controversial issues without approval of school authorities, fewer (58 percent) of those who do *not* participate in a newspaper agree with that right. Logically, those students who participate in a student-run newspaper would have stronger feelings about reporting practices in these papers. Still, all high school students remain somewhat sensitive on this issue, recognizing that even if they do not participate in the student newspapers at their schools, they would like for those papers to be able to report on controversial issues without the approval of the administration.

High school students should be allowed to report controversial issues in their papers without approval of school authorities.



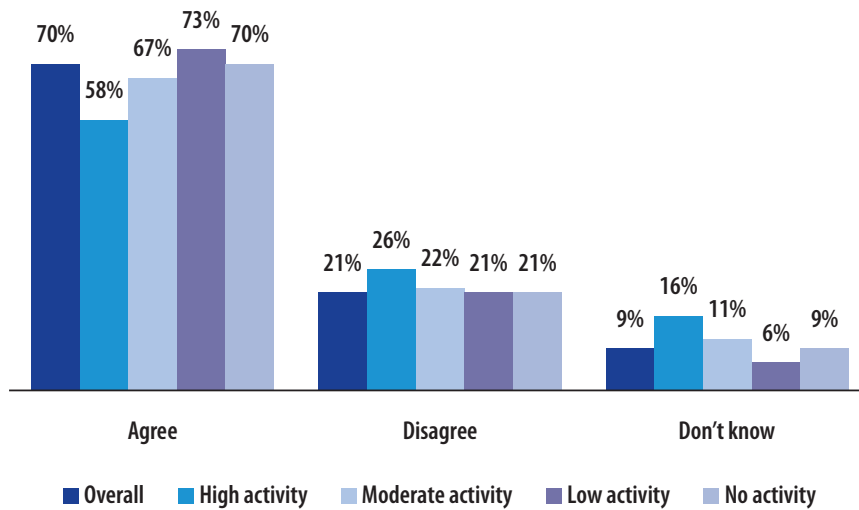
Appreciation for the freedom of the press portion of the First Amendment may be influenced positively by student participation in media-related activities. However, an altogether different result occurs with regard to issues of tolerance for more controversial exercises of freedom of speech. Whereas 84 percent of *no activity* students agree that people should be allowed to express unpopular opinions, just 67 percent of *high media* students agree. Further, while only 7 percent of all students disagree that people should be allowed to express unpopular opinions, 20 percent of *high activity* students disagree with such forms of free speech expression.

**People should be allowed to express unpopular opinions**



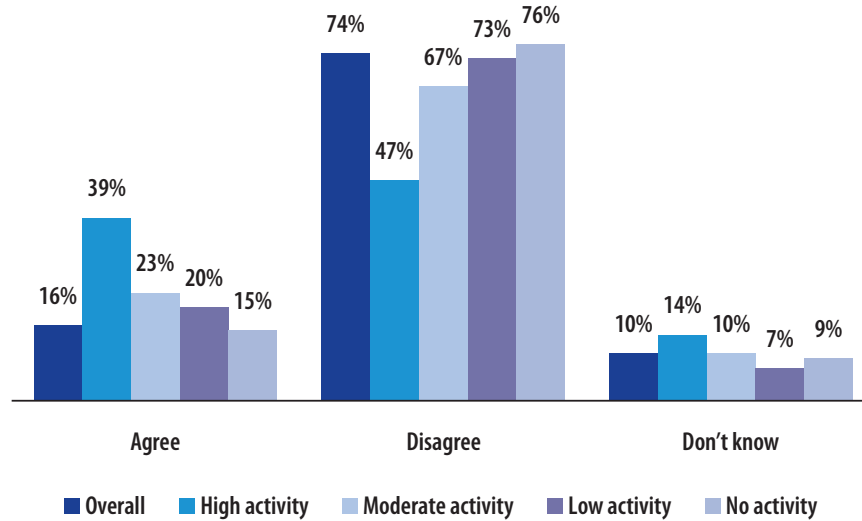
A similar pattern emerges on another free speech issue: whether or not musicians should be allowed to sing songs with lyrics that others might find offensive. While 70 percent of students overall agree that musicians should be allowed to sing such songs, a significantly smaller majority (58 percent) of *high activity* students agree. A greater percentage of *high activity* students than students at lower activity levels did not express an opinion either way on this issue (i.e., said “don’t know”). Looking at just those students who expressed an opinion, the same pattern remains, but the gap is significantly narrowed; only eight percentage points separate the *high activity* students (69 percent agree) from the *no activity* students (77 percent agree).

**Musicians should be allowed to sing songs with lyrics some my find offensive**



A quite different pattern emerges when we explore one of the most controversial free speech issues of all: whether or not one should have the right to burn the American flag as a form of protest. The students who participate in media-related activities significantly differ from the general student population on this issue. The vast majority (74 percent) of high school students overall disagree that people should be allowed to burn or deface the American flag as a political statement. However, just 47 percent of *high activity* students disagree. Furthermore, the majority of students overall (63 percent) as well as majorities of *no activity* (65 percent), *low activity* (60 percent), and *moderate activity* (54 percent) **strongly** disagree while just a third (33 percent) of *high activity* students strongly disagree. And while 4 in 10 (39 percent) of *high activity* students agree that people should be allowed to burn the flag as a political statement, just 23 percent of *moderate activity*, 20 percent of *low activity*, and 15 percent of *no activity* students agree.

## People should be allowed to burn or deface the American flag as a political statement

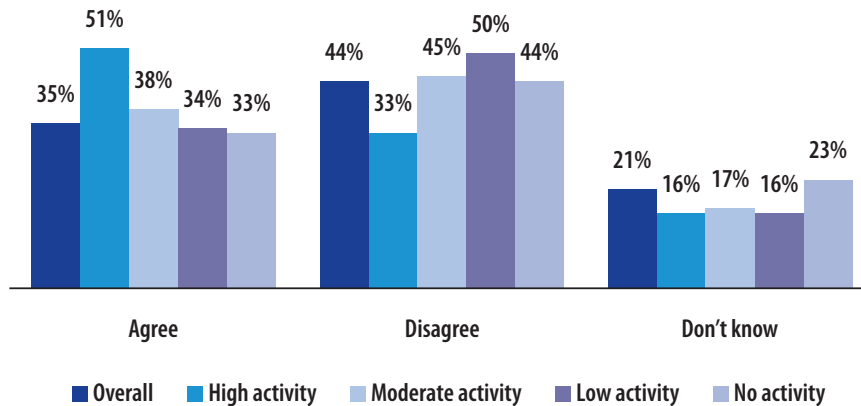


Activity Participation Index levels often influence the degree of tolerance expressed for freedom of the press and freedom of speech, but the impact is not universal. Apparently that impact depends in part on the specific issue under consideration and how that issue relates to the students. Specific freedom of press issues are impacted by API level: the more media-related activities a student participates in, the more tolerance that student has for press freedom. The impact on specific freedom of speech issues is less clear. Tolerance for the very controversial issue of flag burning as a political statement increased as API increased, but tolerance for expressing unpopular opinions and for musicians' lyrics that may be offensive to some actually decreased as API increased. Clearly students may still be forming their opinions on many of these particular First Amendment issues. What about the opinions of students on more general First Amendment issues? Do students think the First Amendment goes too far? Do they personally think about their First Amendment rights? Do they think Americans appreciate the amendment the way they ought to?

While just over a third of all high school students (35 percent) thinks the First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees, half (51 percent) of *high activity* students agree. The level of agreement decreases as activity levels decrease (38 percent-*moderate activity*, 34 percent-*low activity*, 33 percent-*no activity*). Again though, those who do not participate in any activities are less likely than those who participate in at least one activity to express an opinion one way or another. Nearly a quarter (23 percent) of the *no activity* students did not express an opinion/said don't know, whereas fewer (16–17 percent) of those who participate did not express an opinion. This trend remains and may even be more pronounced when we isolate those who expressed an opinion. Overall, it appears that many high school students are still forming their opinion on this issue.

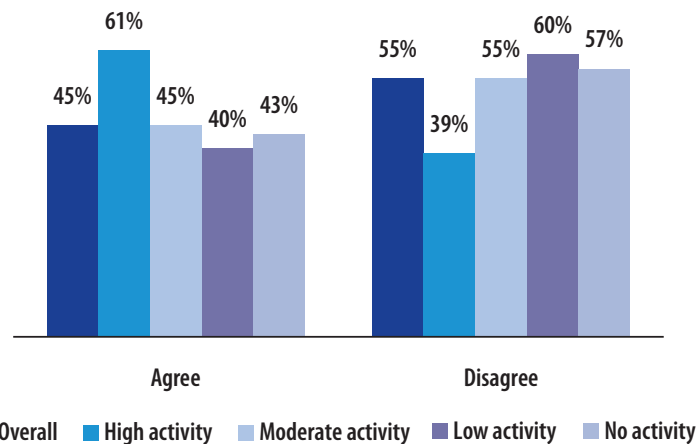
## The First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees

### Overall



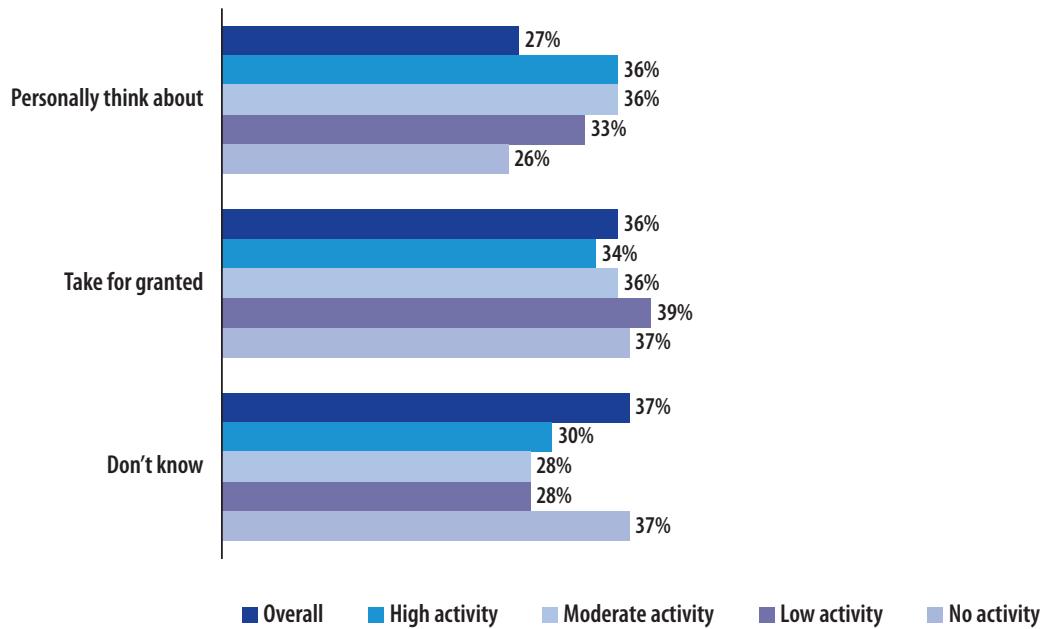
## The First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees

### Only those who expressed an opinion



Those who participate in more media-related activities are slightly more likely to agree that Americans do not appreciate First Amendment freedoms the way they ought to. However, when examining only those who expressed an opinion, students across activity participation levels feel similarly on this issue. When asked specifically if the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment are something they personally think about or something they take for granted, a greater percentage of students who participate in activities say they personally think about these rights. Again, substantial percentages (28 to 37 percent) of students did not express an opinion one way or the other on this question. When we remove those who said “don’t know” and just look at those who expressed an opinion, the trend holds, as 51 percent of *high activity* students say they personally think about the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment, whereas just 42 percent of *no activity* students say they do.

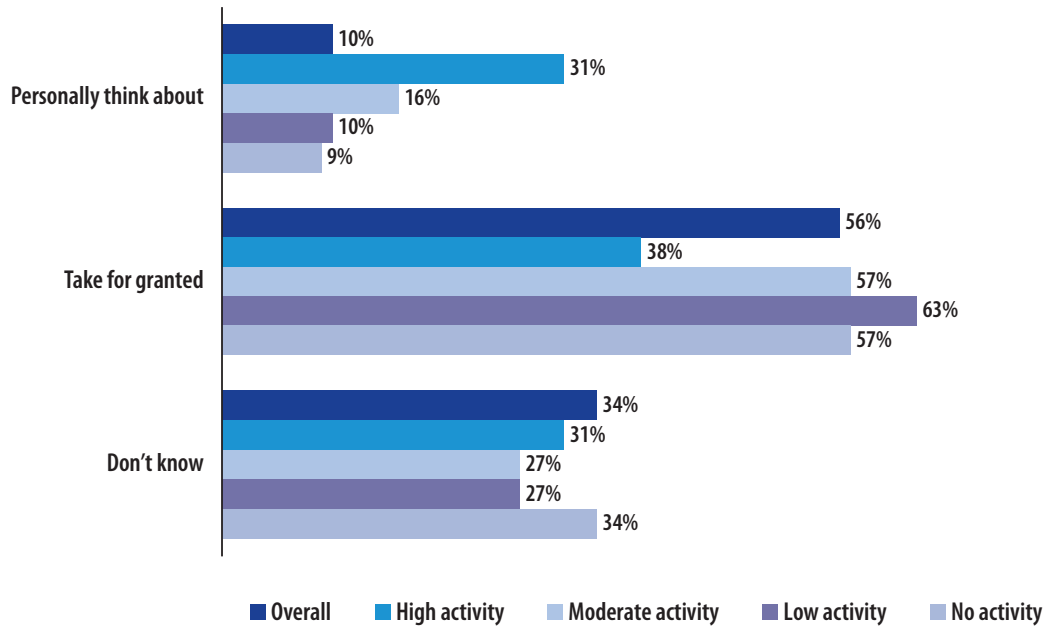
**Personally think about or take for granted rights guaranteed by the First Amendment?**



It appears therefore that students who participate in media-related activities think about their First Amendment rights far more than those who do not participate in activities. However, a lot of students do not know if they think about this issue. Those high activity students who say they personally think about these rights also think the First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees, whereas those who do not personally think about the rights do not think it goes too far. Also, those with more experience with media activities are also more apt to think most people personally think about their First Amendment rights than those with little or no experience.

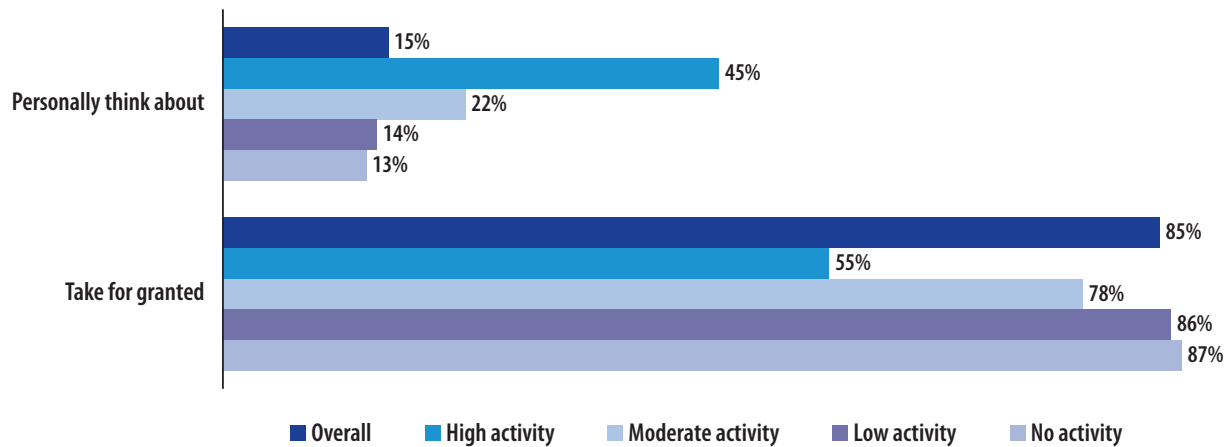
Most people in the United States personally think about or take for granted rights guaranteed by the First Amendment

**Overall**



Most people in the United States personally think about or take for granted rights guaranteed by the First Amendment

**Only those who expressed an opinion**



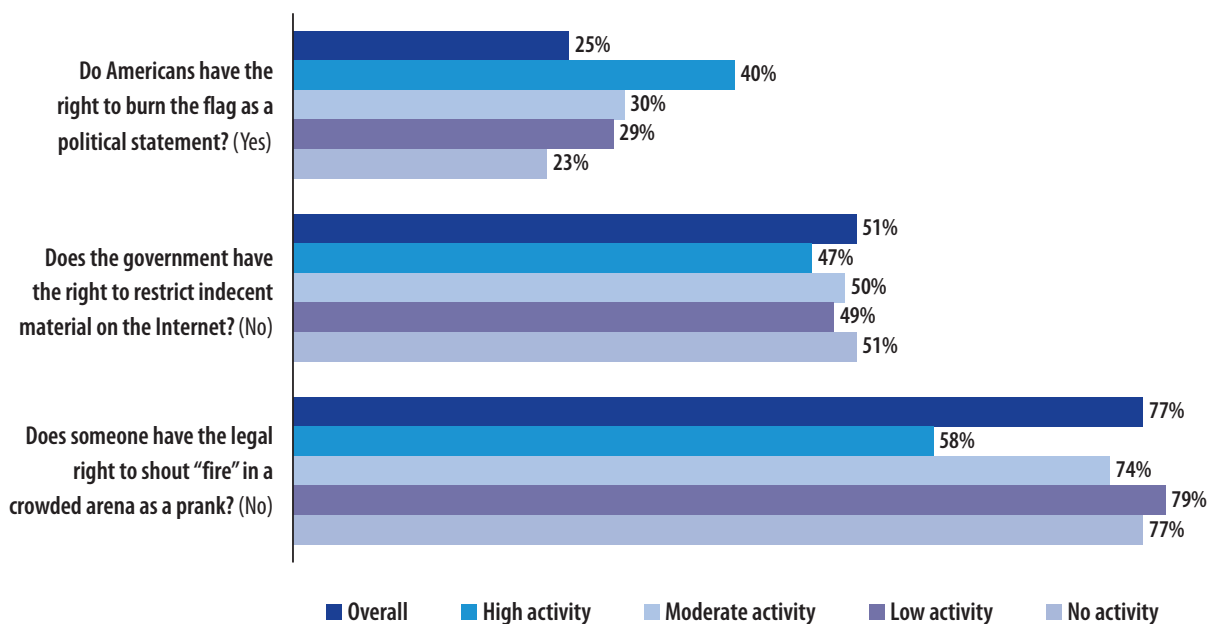
All of this points to the possibility that high activity students personally think about their First Amendment rights to a greater degree than those lower on the API. However, a higher percentage of these *high* activity students also think the First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees. *High activity* students are also more tolerant of burning the flag as a political statement than lower activity students, but are less tolerant of people expressing unpopular opinions and of musicians singing songs with lyrics that might be offensive to some.

Student API level not only has an effect on attitudes and tolerance toward the First Amendment as discussed above, but it also has an effect on knowledge and understanding of current laws. Like the effects on attitudes and tolerance, the effect on knowledge levels varies depending on the specific legal issue in question. No specific pattern emerges when we look at the effect of API on knowledge of current laws dealing with the First Amendment. For example, a greater percentage of *high activity* students (40 percent) correctly stated that under current law, Americans have the legal right to burn the American flag as a means of political protest, whereas less than a quarter (23 percent) of *no activity* students know that this is currently legal (29 percent of *low activity* and 30 percent of *moderate activity* students know it is legal). However, when it comes to understanding the legality of the government’s right to restrict indecent material on the Internet, those with less exposure to media activities register as slightly more knowledgeable. Whereas 51 percent of *no activity* students know that under current law the government does not have the right to restrict material on the Internet, a smaller percentage, 47 percent, of *high activity* students know that law.

Another law that no/low activity students express more familiarity with than higher activity students is the legality of shouting “fire” as a prank in a crowded arena. Whereas around three-quarters of no activity students (77 percent), low activity students (79 percent) and moderate activity students (74 percent) answered correctly on that issue, just 58 percent of high activity students did.

### Knowledge of current laws

#### Percent who answered correctly



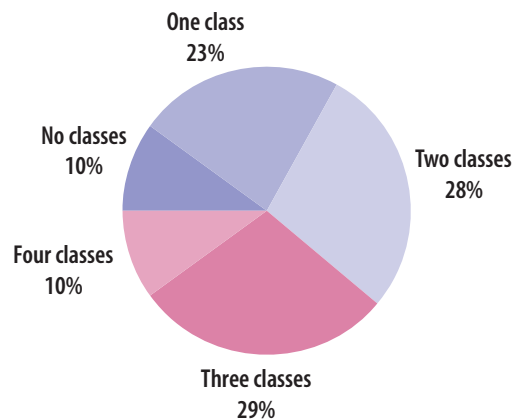
Correct answer is in parentheses after question.

## Class Participation Index (CPI)

As with participation in media-related extracurricular activities, the degree to which students have taken classes that deal with media and/or the First Amendment clearly has an effect on their attitudes, tolerance, and knowledge of related issues. Like the API, the Class Participation Index (CPI) deals specifically with participation levels of students. This index is comprised of four types of courses students may have taken: classes dealing with the First Amendment, classes addressing the role of media in society, classes dealing primarily with journalism skills, and classes requiring an assignment to read a newspaper or watch television news. As with the media-related activities in the API, one must note that not all schools offer all, a few, or, in some cases, any of these courses in the first place.

The first thing that sets the CPI apart from the API is that most students have taken at least one of these types of courses in high school. Whereas 86 percent of students were classified as *no activity* students on the API, just 10 percent of students fall into the *no classes* category on the CPI. Just under a quarter of students (23 percent) have taken one class and just over quarter have taken two (28 percent) or three (29 percent) classes. A smaller, but still significant, percentage of students (10 percent) have taken all four types of classes.

### Class Participation Index

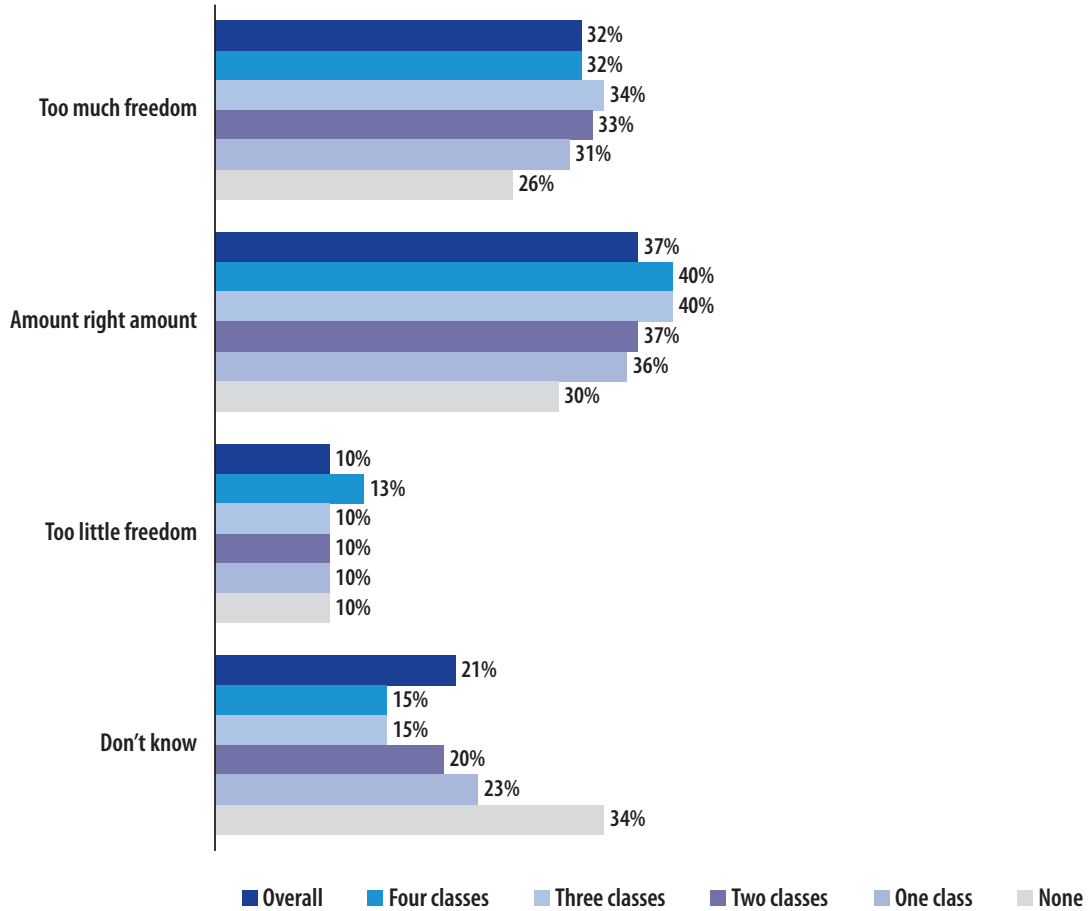


A pattern that emerges with regard to the CPI comes in the “don’t know” response category. Whereas in the API, various groups did not express an opinion on many questions, when it comes to the CPI there is an even more consistent trend. As one might well predict, across all types of questions, students who took none of the classes answer “don’t know” at a much higher rate than those who have taken classes. Just having some experience in the classroom with media and First Amendment issues correlates with the ability of students to express an opinion either way on questions dealing with these issues.

The propensity of students who have not taken any of the classes on the CPI to respond “don’t know” is apparent when assessing reactions to how much freedom the press has in America. Overall, students across the CPI feel similarly about the level of freedom the press in America has. However, those who took at least one course were more likely to express an opinion either way (34 percent of students in the *none* category said “don’t know” compared with just 15 percent of those who have taken three or four classes). Therefore, although students who did express an opinion feel similarly on this issue, the high “don’t know” percentage for those who

have not taken any of these classes demonstrates the point that those with more classroom experience dealing with these issues are more willing and/or able to express an opinion.

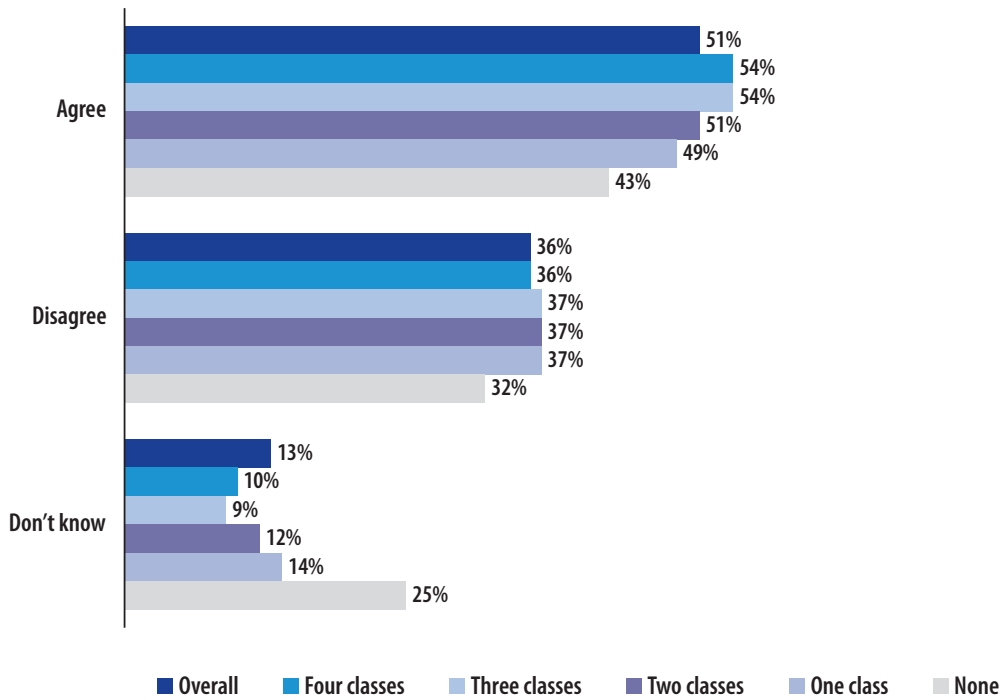
**Press in America too much/too little freedom**



Since overall the plurality of students think the press in America has about the right amount of freedom to do what it wants, it is not surprising that most think newspapers should be able to publish freely without government approval of a story. The more classes a student has taken (or, the higher the CPI level) the higher percentage that agrees newspapers should be able to publish freely without government approval of a story. While 54 percent of those who have taken either three or four classes agree, 51 percent of those who have taken two classes agree, 49 percent of those who have taken one class agree and just 43 percent of those who have not taken any classes agree. Again, a significant percentage of students who have not taken any of these courses (25 percent) did not express an opinion. When we isolate those who did express an opinion, this variance across CPI level significantly decreases.

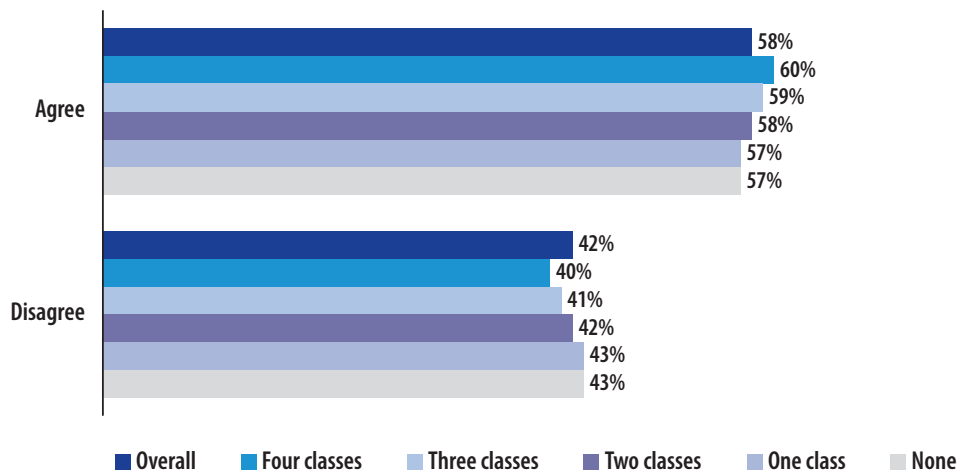
Newspapers should be able to publish freely without government approval of a story

All students



Newspapers should be able to publish freely without government approval of a story

Only students who expressed an opinion

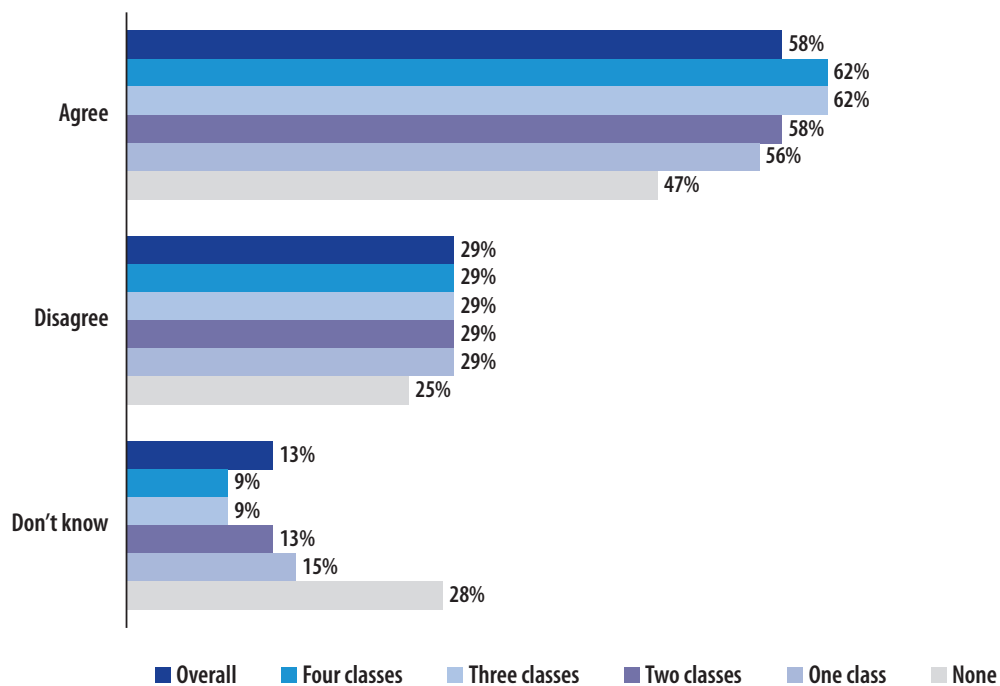


Looking specifically at students who have taken classes dealing with the First Amendment, the majority (53 percent) say newspapers should be able to publish freely, while fewer (48 percent) of those who have not taken such courses agree.

When it comes to student opinions as to whether or not high school students should be allowed to report controversial issues in their student newspapers without approval of school authorities, we see a very similar pattern. Initially, it appears as though students who have taken more classes are more likely to agree; 56 to 62 percent of those who have taken at least one course agree compared to 47 percent of those who have not taken any CPI courses. Again, however, a large percentage (27 percent) of students who have not taken any of these courses responded that they “don’t know.” When those who expressed an opinion are isolated, the range narrows from 15 percentage points separating those who have taken four classes from those who haven’t taken any, to just a three-point range.

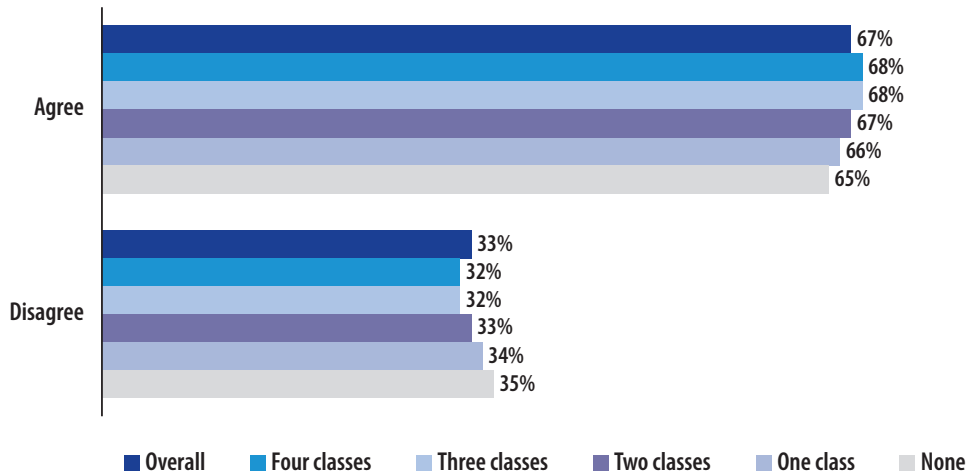
**High school students should be allowed to report on controversial issues in their student papers without approval of school authorities**

**All students**



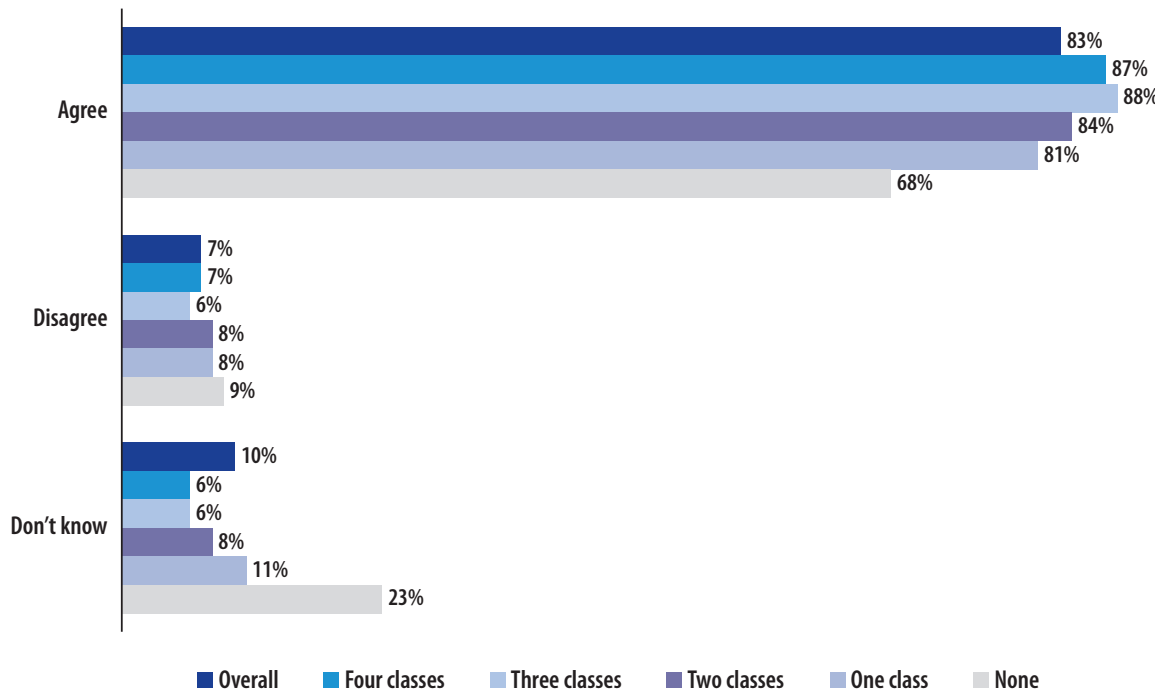
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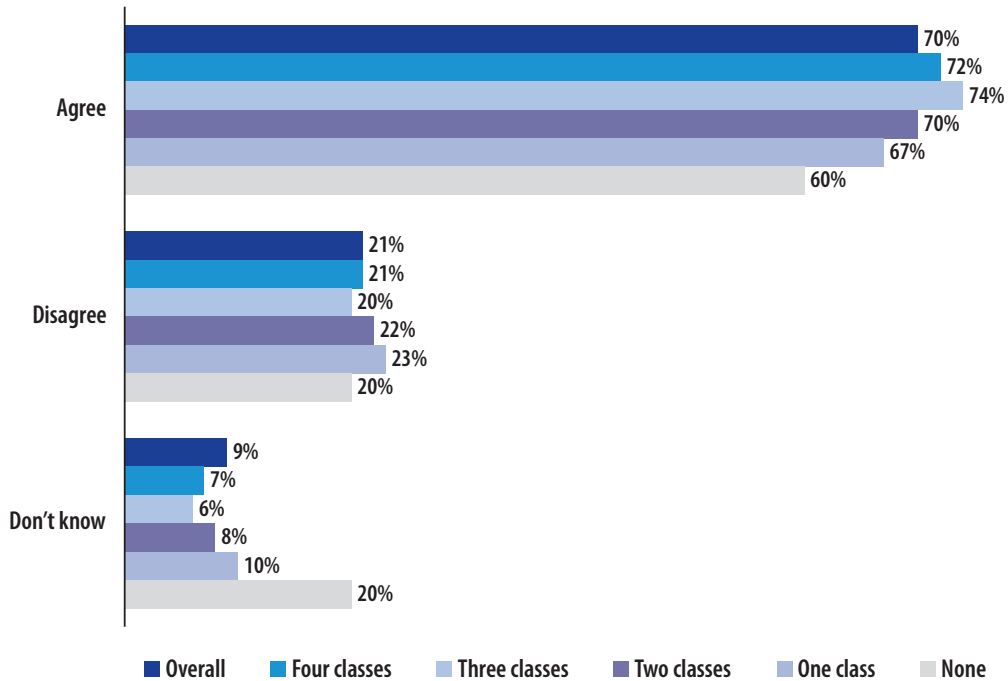
Similar to the freedom of press issues, students who have not taken any classes are also less likely to express an opinion on various questions dealing with freedom of speech. While just 6 to 11 percent of those who have taken at least one class say they do not know if people should be allowed to express unpopular opinions, nearly a quarter (23 percent) of students who have not taken any of these classes say they do not know. Still, a majority (68 percent) of students who haven't taken any classes say they agree that people should be allowed to express unpopular opinions. Stronger majorities (81 to 88 percent) of students who have taken at least one class agree, however. Again, when taking out those who didn't answer, this difference diminishes from a maximum 20-percentage point difference to a maximum 5-percentage point difference between those who have classes and those who have not taken any classes. It is important to keep in mind that the fewer classes a student has taken, the less likely they are to have answered this question in the first place.

## People should be allowed to express unpopular opinions



A nearly identical pattern emerges when we look at students' attitudes toward musicians singing songs with lyrics that some may find offensive across the CPI. Again, a much higher percentage of those who have not taken any courses (20 percent) do not express an opinion than those who have taken courses (6 to 10 percent). A greater level of tolerance for this form of expression is indicated among students who have taken more of the CPI courses. Nearly three-quarters of those who have taken three (74 percent) or four (72 percent) classes agree that musicians should be able to sing such songs. A smaller percentage of those who have taken fewer classes on the media and the First Amendment agree (70 percent among those who have taken two CPI classes, 67 percent among those who have taken just one CPI class). The smallest level of agreement with this form of expression came from students who have not taken any CPI courses at all—just 60 percent agreed with that right.

**Musicians should be allowed to sing songs with lyrics that some might find offensive.**

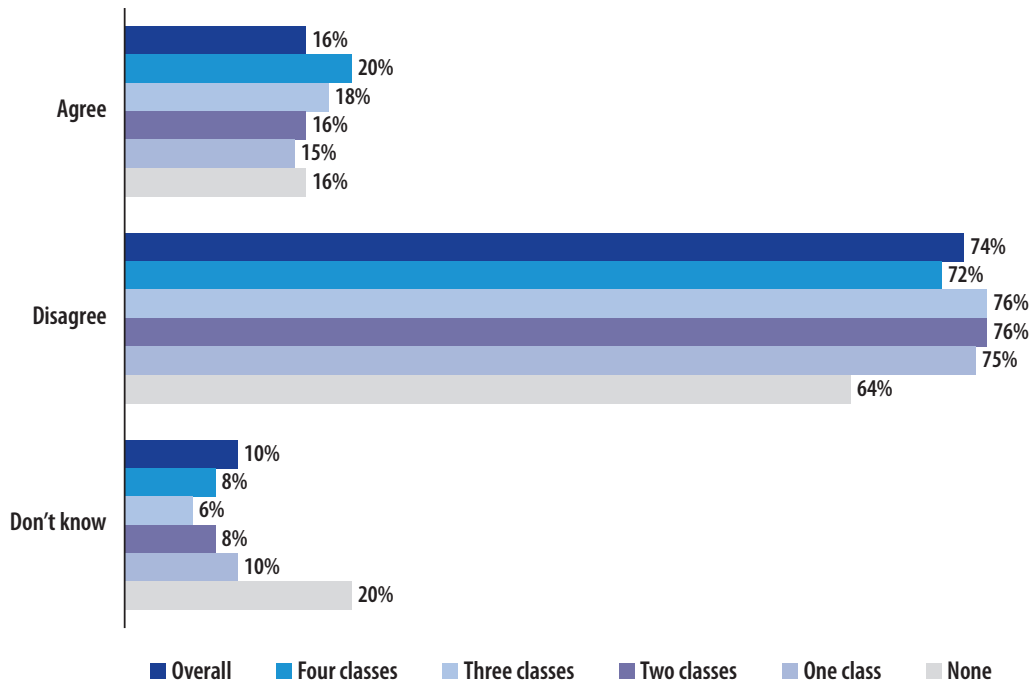


This 14-percentage point difference across levels of the CPI again narrows to a five-point variance when we look only at those who expressed an opinion. Those who have formed their opinion appear to feel similarly on this issue, regardless of how many classes on the CPI they may have taken. However, if students have not been at all exposed to any First Amendment or media issues in the classroom, the likelihood that they have actually formed an opinion is weaker.

There are also indications of a major difference between the effects of classes and the effects of activities on high school students' opinions on one issue in particular: burning the American flag as a political statement. While students who registered high on the API were more likely to agree that Americans should be allowed to burn their flag as a form of protest, that is not the case with students who register high on the CPI. A high percentage of students who have taken none of the courses on the CPI again did not express any opinion at all. However, unlike with other free speech and expression questions, the variance between high CPI and no CPI students does not change when we just look at those who expressed an opinion.

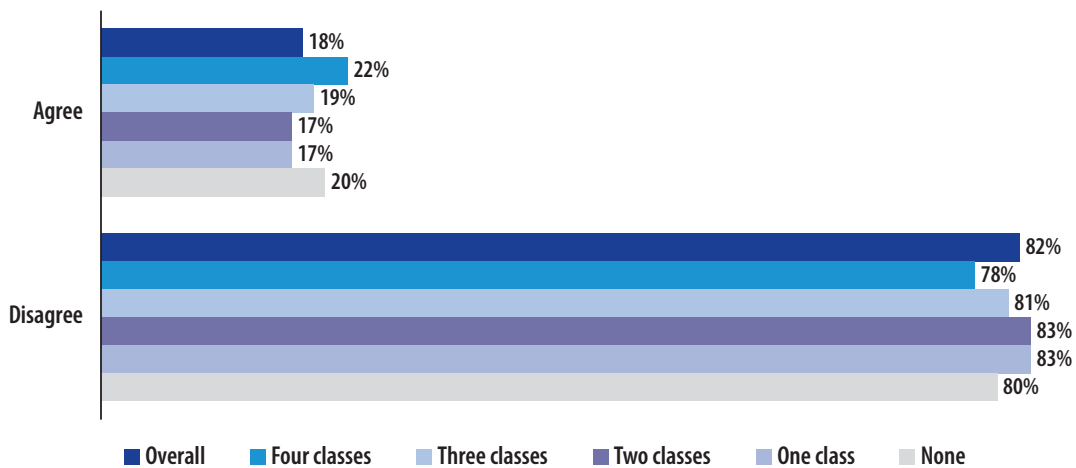
People should be allowed to burn or deface the American flag as a political statement

All students



People should be allowed to burn or deface the American flag as a political statement

Only students who expressed an opinion

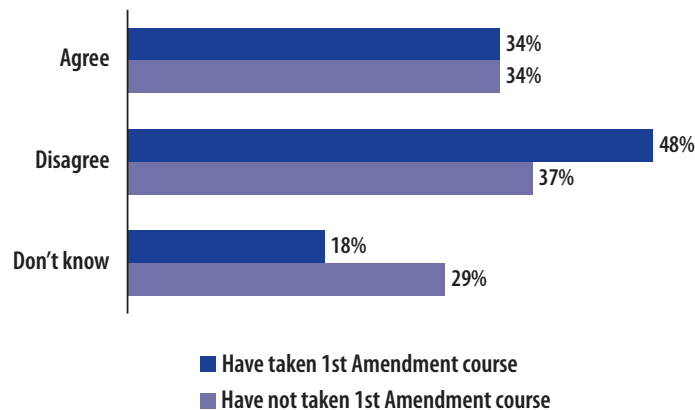


How then, if at all, does the CPI affect students' overall tolerance for the First Amendment freedoms? What about the degree to which they personally think about those freedoms? As we might expect, greater percentages of students who have taken three or four of the CPI courses disagree that the First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees. Nearly 4 in 10 (37 percent) students who haven't taken any CPI courses said they did not

know, which was more than double the percentage of students who had taken all four classes who responded that way. Because so few of the students who hadn't taken any CPI classes expressed an opinion, higher percentages of students who took three or four of the CPI courses also agree that the First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees. The trend again decreases when just those who did express an opinion are compared.

However, simply comparing students who have taken a course dealing with the First Amendment in particular with those who have not, we do see variation in opinion. Nearly half (48 percent) of those who have taken such a course do not think the First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees. Fewer, however, of the students who have not taken this type of course say the First Amendment does not go too far (37 percent).

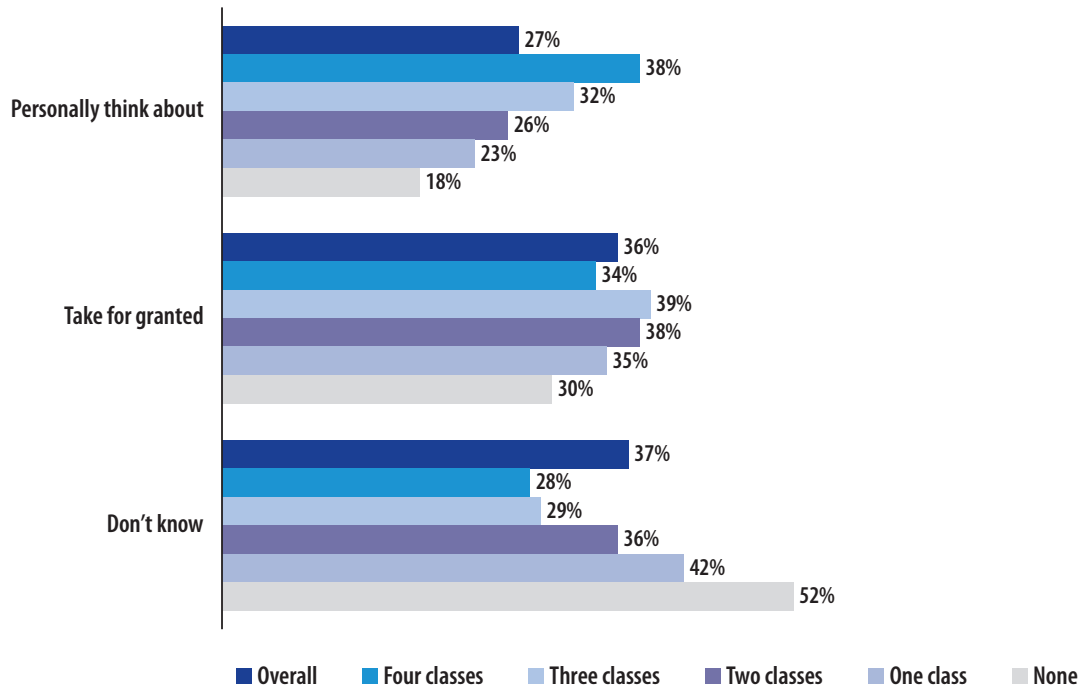
**The First Amendment goes too far in the rights it guarantees.**



Students who register higher on the CPI personally think more about the First Amendment than those who are low on the CPI; they also think Americans in general do not appreciate the First Amendment freedoms the way they ought to. To an even greater degree than we observed on other issues, students who have not taken any CPI courses generally have not formed opinions on these matters. Regarding the question of whether or not Americans appreciate First Amendment freedoms the way they should, just 60 percent expressed an opinion either way. On the more specific question of whether they personally think about the First Amendment or take it for granted, less than half (48 percent) expressed an opinion. This is significant. Unlike with other questions, the trends we observe initially hold true when we isolate only those who ventured an opinion.

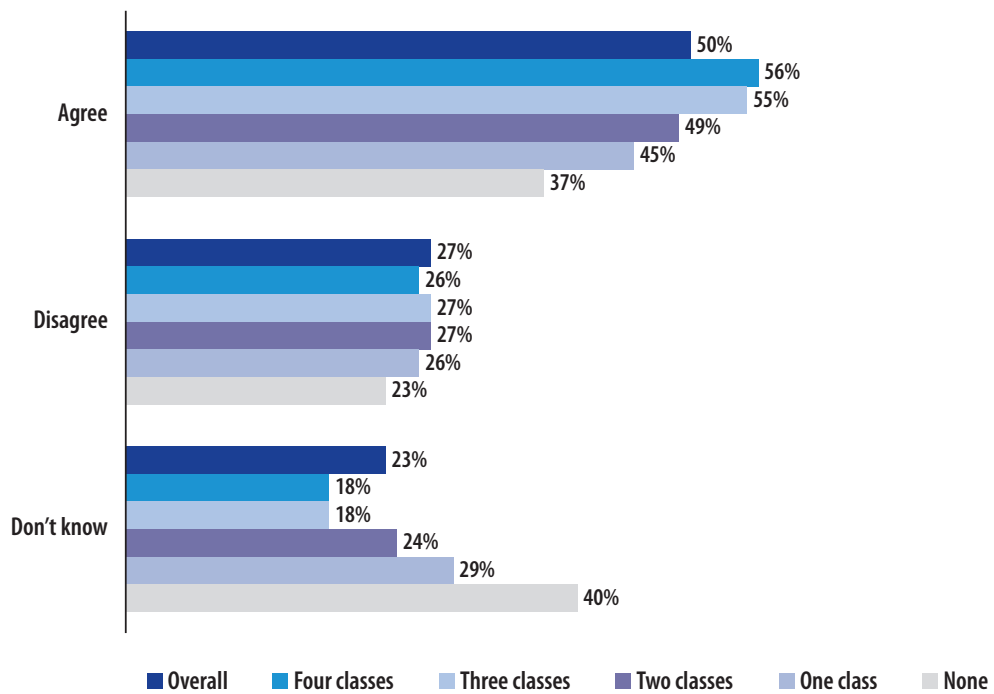
Personally think about or take for granted the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment?

All students



Americans do not appreciate First Amendment freedoms the way they ought to.

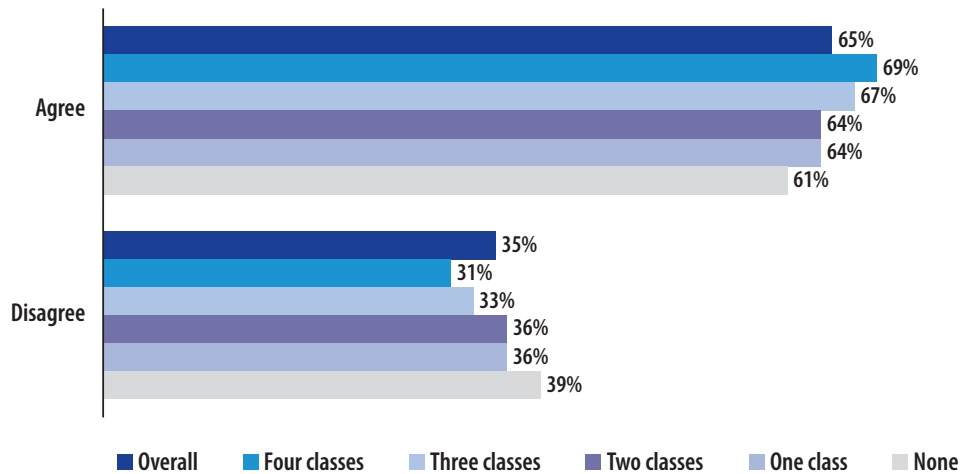
All students



Similarly, the students who register higher on the CPI are more apt to think that Americans do not appreciate the First Amendment the way they should. This pattern remains when we isolate those who expressed an opinion. Since not many students did express an opinion on this issue, the chart below shows just the students who did.

**Americans do not appreciate First Amendment freedoms the way they ought to.**

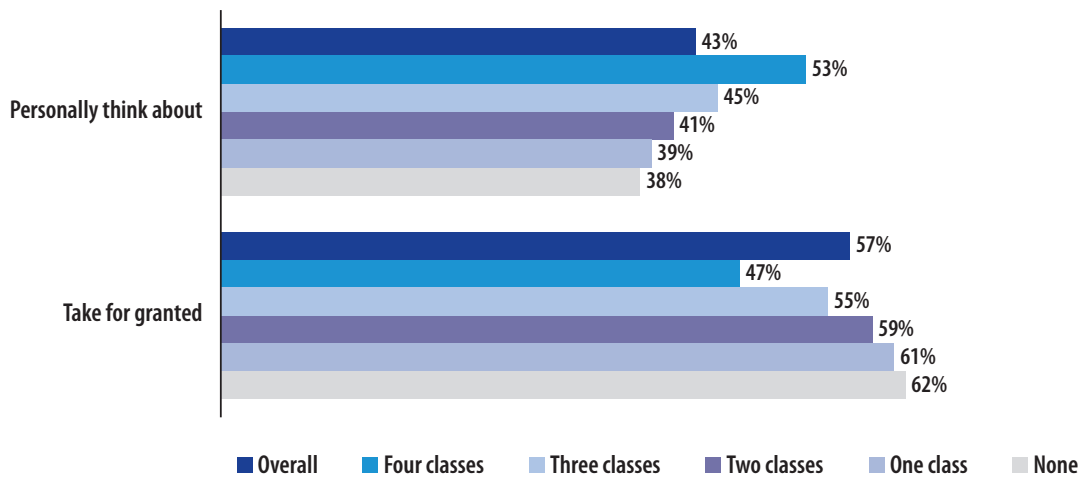
**Only those who expressed an opinion**



Among those students who expressed an opinion as to whether they personally think about the rights of the First Amendment or they take them for granted, a much higher percentage of those who have taken classes on the CPI say they personally think about these rights. Whereas just 39 percent of those who have not taken any CPI courses say they personally think about these rights, a much higher 53 percent of those who have taken all four types of CPI classes personally think about them.

**Personally think about or take for granted the First Amendment freedoms**

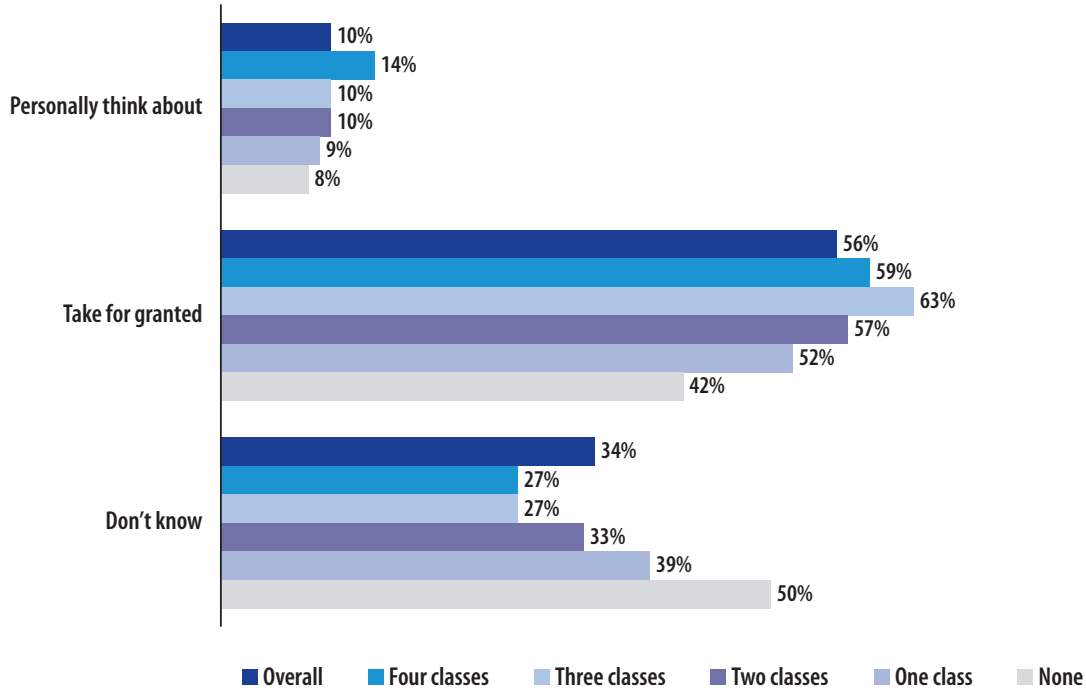
**Only those who expressed an opinion**



Across CPI levels, few students think that most people in the United States personally think about the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment. Again, one finds an extremely high percentage of students who have not taken any such classes answering “don’t know” to this question. Just half (50 percent) of those students surveyed expressed an opinion. A slightly higher percentage of students who have taken more classes believe people personally think about these rights. Once again though, when isolating those who expressed an opinion, the pattern changes a bit.

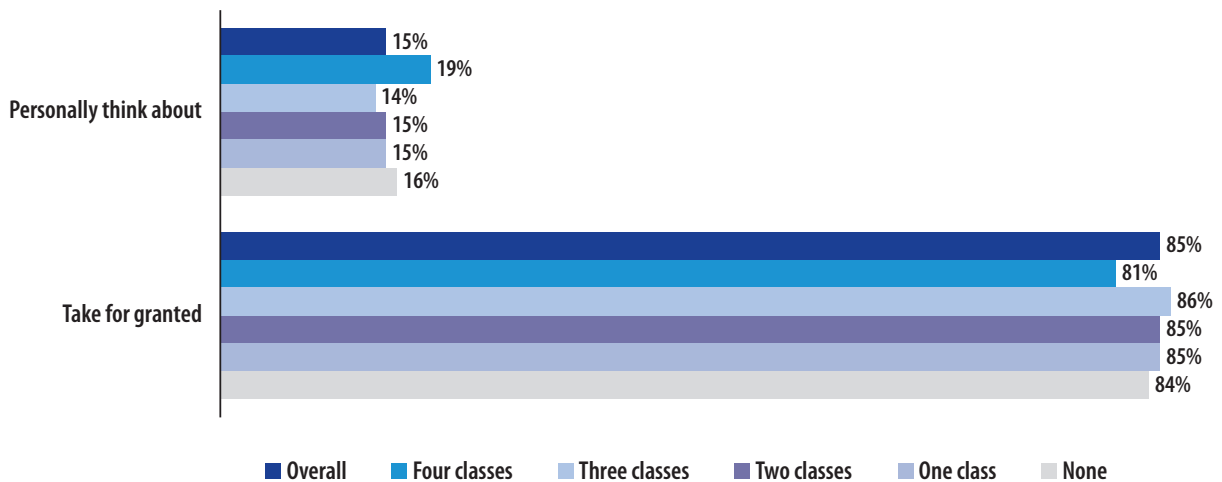
**Most people in the United States—do they personally think about or take for granted the First Amendment freedoms?**

**All students**



**Most people in the United States—do they personally think about or take for granted the First Amendment freedoms?**

**Only students who expressed an opinion**



The effect of CPI on tolerance and attitudes varies significantly. When it comes to knowledge of current laws, in most cases, those who have taken First Amendment or media classes are more knowledgeable than those who have not. In some cases the margin of difference is slight and in one striking instance a greater percentage of those who have not taken any classes know the law better than those who have taken classes. Specifically, students who took fewer classes answered correctly at a higher rate the question as to whether the government has the right to restrict indecent material on the Internet. (It does not.) While 60 percent of students who have not taken any CPI classes correctly stated that the government does not have the right to restrict indecent material on the Internet, fewer of those who have taken CPI types of classes answered that correctly.

**Does the government have the right to restrict indecent material on the Internet?**

**Percent who answered correctly (i.e., said “no”)**



The legality of shouting “fire” as a prank in a crowded place was another area when higher CPI level did not seem to influence knowledge in any significant way. The majority of students across the board (75 to 78 percent) correctly determined that under current law a person does not have the right to shout “fire” as a prank. Roughly three-quarters of students across CPI levels know the correct answer and about a quarter did not.

**Does someone have the right to shout “fire” in a crowded arena as a prank?**

**Percent who answered correctly (i.e., said “no”)**



Still, there were other questions about the state of current laws where it appeared that taking more CPI type classes increased knowledge. One such question dealt with the legality of burning the American flag as a form of political protest. Overall most students felt that this is something that Americans should not be allowed to do. The strong personal feelings exhibited by students on this issue may well have impacted their answers on the question of legality. The majority of students across the CPI incorrectly stated that Americans do not have the right to burn the flag as a means of political protest. However, larger percentages of those who have taken CPI types of classes answered the question correctly. Not surprisingly, students who have taken courses that specifically dealt with the First Amendment in particular answered that question correctly (27 percent) at a significantly higher rate than those who did not take this type of course (21 percent). But as a general matter, no group of students could be characterized as well informed on this controversial issue.

**Do Americans have the right to burn the flag as a means of political protest?**

**Percent who answered correctly (i.e., said “yes”)**

