



Home | Local | Katherine Kersten

# Ignorance of our founding principles can endanger us all

Here we go again. A new survey reveals that only about one in four Americans can name at least two of the First Amendment's five freedoms: freedom of the press, religion, speech and assembly, as well as the right to petition government for redress of grievances. But 52 percent can name two or more members of TV's "Simpsons." More than 20 percent of Americans actually think the First Amendment gives us the right to own and raise pets!

**Katherine Kersten**, Star Tribune  
Last update: March 05, 2006 – 9:46 PM



Here we go again. A new survey reveals that only about one in four Americans can name at least two of the First Amendment's five freedoms: freedom of the press, religion, speech and assembly, as well as the right to petition government for redress of grievances. But 52 percent can name two or more members of TV's "Simpsons." More than 20 percent of Americans actually think the First Amendment gives us the right to own and raise pets!

**Katherine Kersten**

- [Has U Law School taken up a cause of shaky merit?](#)
- [Rochester pays tribute to veterans the whole year](#)
- [North of border, gay marriage spurs social revolution](#)

We shouldn't be shocked. Americans' -- especially young Americans' -- woeful ignorance of history and civics has been documented repeatedly.

The good news is that Minnesota has made progress on this front. Today, our state has decent K-12 standards in American history and government. That's thanks to a successful battle to dump the Profile of Learning, a costly over 10-year experiment in "hands-on" learning.

The Profile aimed to create "critical thinkers," not knowledgeable citizens. As a result, it was notoriously short on facts and long on "process." During the Profile's tenure, students at some schools

### Top read stories

- [Culpepper looking for a way out](#)
- [If Daunte goes, team must weigh QB alternatives](#)
- [C.J.: Kirby's ex-mistress says she has right to grieve](#)
- [2 lawyers learn the folly of making deal with convict](#)
- [Puckett memorial: Where, when to watch](#)

### Top emailed stories

- [Culpepper looking for a way out](#)
- [Air pollution alert issued for Twin Cities](#)
- [2A: Tiny Ros returns to state many will cheer](#)
- [Nancy Jo Tuttle: Help for your friend's addiction](#)
- [C.J.: Kirby's ex-mistress says she has right to grieve](#)

**URGENT!**

**Save up to 70% on Life Insurance!**

10 Year Level Term Life Insurance \$500,000 Policy (Monthly Premiums)	age	male
	40	\$21.75
	45	\$34.80
	50	\$50.90
	55	\$83.52

**Click here to get a Free Quote!**

**AccuQuote**  
Saving You Money For Life

### Shopping+Classifieds



#### Renting

Find the right rental that fits your lifestyle.

### Find products services



Sell your stuff

could satisfy history requirements by completing "performance packages" on subjects such as non-conformity in the 1960s, instead of writing papers about major figures and events in American history.

But there's bad news on another educational front, where you'd least expect it: at American colleges and universities.

The Foundation for Individual Rights (FIRE) is a Philadelphia-based organization that defends constitutional rights, including freedom of speech, due process and religious liberty, on college campuses. In 2003, FIRE commissioned twin surveys of 1,037 students and 306 administrators at more than 300 colleges nationwide, testing their knowledge of various aspects of the First Amendment.

The survey revealed a troubling cluelessness about our most fundamental freedoms.

For example, only 30 percent of students and 21 percent of administrators named freedom of religion when asked to name any First Amendment right. Only 2 percent of students and 6 percent of administrators knew that freedom of religion is the very first freedom that the First Amendment addresses. One in four students and 11 percent of administrators surveyed could not name any of the specific rights the First Amendment guarantees.

This lack of rudimentary constitutional knowledge may explain why some college administrators feel free to engage in heavy-handed -- and sometimes illegal -- regulation of campus religious activity. For example, according to FIRE President Greg Lukianoff, FIRE intervened at the University of North Carolina when administrators threatened to deny official recognition to the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship because it required its leaders to be Christians. At Penn State, FIRE stepped in when the Young Americans for Freedom were informed that its constitution and mission statement were "discriminatory" because they described rights as "God-given." (America's Declaration of Independence, by the way, says much the same thing.)

Last week, FIRE took a significant step toward guaranteeing religious freedom in our own back yard. Lukianoff reports that after months of pressure from FIRE, the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire agreed to drop its policy banning student resident assistants from leading Bible studies (or Torah or Koran studies) in their dormitories. UW System President Kevin Reilly proposed repealing the ban, though the UW Board of Regents must approve.

Ignorance about America's founding principles doesn't just produce fodder for late-night comics. It can endanger our freedoms.

Katherine Kersten • [kkersten@startribune.com](mailto:kkersten@startribune.com)

**Also find:** [Cars](#) | [Homes](#) | [Apartments](#) | [Shopping](#) | [Classifieds](#)

from [cars.com](#)

+ More T



2004 Porsche Cayenne S  
\$44,997  
Kline Volvo



2005 Nissan Murano  
\$24,996  
Lupient Infiniti



2005 Ford Freestar SEL  
\$16,995  
White Bear Lincoln  
Mercury



2003 Volkswagen GL  
\$13,477  
Luther Brookdale  
Mitsubishi



2003 Lexus ES 300 \$24,900  
Lexus of Wayzata



2001 BMW X5 3.0i  
Morries Mazda



Get the Star Tribune delivered to your home each day!

[Click here](#) to subscribe.



**Copyright 2006 Star Tribune. All rights reserved.**

[Feedback](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Member Center](#) | [Company Site](#) | [Company Directory & Contacts](#) | [Corr Jobs](#) | [Advertising Information](#) | [Newspaper Subscriptions & Service](#) | [eEdition](#) | [Classroom Newspapers](#)

425 Portland Av. S., Minneapolis, MN 55488 (612) 673-4000