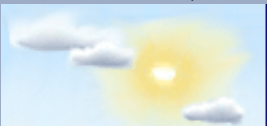


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First Amendment survey finds knowledge lacking

By George Archibald
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

More than two-thirds of college students and administrators who participated in a national survey were unable to remember that freedom of religion and the press are guaranteed by the Bill of Rights.

In surveys conducted at 339 U.S. colleges and universities, more than one-fourth of students and administrators did not list freedom of speech as an essential right protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution.

More than three-fourths did not name freedom of assembly and association or the right "to petition the government for a redress of grievances."

"If one thinks of the First Amendment as a foundational American liberty, the ignorance and misunderstanding of it by administrators at our nation's colleges and universities is frightening, and the general ignorance and misunderstanding of it by students is quite depressing," said Alan Charles Kors, president of the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education (FIRE) in Philadelphia, which commissioned the surveys.

"The shocking results demonstrate a profound and dangerous failure to comprehend the moral and legal basis for religious liberty," says a summary of the findings by the Center for

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Survey Research and Analysis at the University of Connecticut at Storrs.

The surveys were conducted from December to May and involved 1,037 students and 306 administrators at public and private colleges and universities.

The findings were compiled and analyzed over the past six months, Mr. Kors said.

The FIRE report said the surveys provide "rigorous data" that both students and administrators who govern their life on campus showed "pervasive ignorance surrounding vital issues of American liberty."

"The surveys show that students and administrators lack the most fundamental understanding — let alone appreciation — of the free exercise of religion and of the deep importance that devout individuals attach to their faith," FIRE concluded in a statement issued with the report.

According to the report:

- "Only 36 percent of administrators at private institutions and 50 percent at public institutions reported that their administration took the view that religious individuals should spread their beliefs 'by whatever legal means they choose.' "

- "Only 32 percent of all students surveyed believe that religious people should use any legal means to spread their beliefs."

- Forty-one percent of administrators and 55 percent of students said religious individuals should be careful "not to offend people while spreading their beliefs."

- "Forty-one percent of administrators believe they have the legal right to prohibit a student religious group from actively trying to convert students to its religion."

- "Forty-nine percent of administrators at private universities and 34 percent of administrators at public universities report that students at their institutions must undergo mandatory non-curricular programs [whose goal] 'is to lead them to value all sexual preferences and to recognize the relativity of these values compared to the values of their upbringing.' "

- Fewer than one-fourth of students and just 43 percent of administrators said they strongly believed religious individuals and groups holding "traditional and restrictive views about gender and sexuality" should be allowed to advance their particular viewpoints on campus.

- Forty percent of students agreed that gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender (GLBT) groups should be allowed to exclude evangelical Christians if GLBT students believe that "Christian doctrine that homosexuality is 'an abomination unto the Lord' is the source of the oppression suffered by those of minority sexual preference."

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