

# Michael Belding

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The First Amendment guarantees our most basic rights: free speech, freedom of religion, and the right to assemble. We, as a people, do not have to face jail time, or even death, for shouting our opinions or practicing a religion. Even though more people in today's

day and age share their thoughts anonymously on the internet, these thoughts and feelings are still enshrined in the Bill of Rights. Iowa State University, along with the Greenlee School of Journalism, recognizes the importance of this amendment, and celebrates First Amendment Day, as a part of First Amendment week, every year in April. Focusing on the free speech aspect, I sat down with Michael Belding, senior in History and Political Science and Opinion Editor for the Iowa State Daily, to talk about why Iowa State celebrates this important amendment.

I asked Belding why he thinks it's important that we celebrate this amendment, and he said that the day should be used as a way to get students to more aware

of their rights and to use them. Belding looks at this day from a historical, rather than journalistic, perspective. The constitution was written in 1787 and was immediately amended to ensure these basic rights. The founding fathers wanted to ensure everyone's right to free speech. First Amendment Day is way of getting students to be more open and public with their opinions.

Because of the First Amendment, students are given the opportunity to stand outside the library and let the world know what they are thinking. Belding thinks students today do not realize the extent of their rights of free speech. People state their opinions in coffee shops or aloud to their car radios without ever making them formally public. He encourages people to write in to the Daily expressing their opinion on pieces or to call in to radio stations when they ask for public thoughts. He wants people to realize that they can, and should, put their own thoughts and opinions out to the public. This amendment is what allows us to do so, and we should exercise this freedom whenever we can.

I asked Belding if the ultimate goal of this day was action or awareness, assuming he would say action. I thought he would have hoped that this day would spark people to call into a radio station or write a letter to the editor. I was a little surprised when he said awareness instead. He said that he would hate for this day to become just another holiday. He mentioned religious holidays, and how it seems that Christmas or Easter seem to be the one day of the year that a lot of people attend church, or do anything remotely religious, instead of making that a part of their daily lives. He didn't want this day to be the one time of the year that everyone exercises their rights, but as a day to bring awareness to them. If this day simply gets people thinking, they may be more inclined to exercise these rights on a daily basis, instead of just once a year when the day occurs.

