



What Freedom of Speech Means To Me

Thirty-nine years before the Declaration of Independence Benjamin Franklin wrote, "Freedom of speech is a principal pillar of a free government; when this support is taken away, the constitution of a free society is dissolved, and tyranny is erected on its ruins." Even as a young man Franklin foresaw how crucial free speech is to protecting life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Today I am not sure every American would take Benjamin Franklin's statement at face value. Recently we have seen a push to limit free speech, largely in universities and on social media sites. Although in some circumstances it may be warranted, the priority should be "first do no harm" to the freedom of speech. I say this because many of the present restrictions are rooted in political ideology with no consideration to the pursuit of happiness.

For me that is what freedom of speech means, it is the opportunity to pursue happiness. I look at free speech as an avenue to exchange and use information to the benefit of myself, my fellow citizens, and my country. It is especially vital to higher education that this avenue remains clear. The value of a college degree is based on being employable, and restrictive speech policies will not prepare an individual to enter the job market.

The fact is many employers cite communication and problem-solving skills as must have attributes. In the real world the exchange of ideas, debate, and the ability to impartially regard different points of view are bankable assets.

You see freedom of speech is not just a right, but a dynamic life tool that gives me the opportunity to live a comprehensive existence. The FRA Americanism Essay Contest is a prime example. It allows me an audience to express my unique personal thoughts on a subject, and if it merits recognition I will be rewarded. In all considered, it is exactly because of free speech the United States is known as "the land of opportunity".