

Excerpted Faculty Communications on Guns on Campus:¹

4-15-2011

I have been informed that the Tennessee legislature is poised to consider legislation that would allow people to carry handguns on the campuses of Tennessee's public colleges and universities. As you may recall, two members of the Faculty Senate here in Knoxville proposed resolutions that, among other things, (1) supported current laws and campus policies banning guns on our campuses and (2) opposed legislation permitting guns to be carried on our campuses. These resolutions focused on threats to the safety and culture of the Knoxville campuses posed by gun carrying on those campuses and passed unanimously. Since the Senate's passage of these resolutions,, I have heard from many of you and from members of our local community that you believe that maintaining the present gun ban on campus is the smart thing to do. In addition: the UT Knoxville Student Government Association passed a similar action opposing guns on campus; UT Knoxville Chancellor Jimmy G. Cheek and his cabinet and UT President Joe DiPietro and his cabinet have all expressed opposition to measures allowing guns on campus; and the UT Police has indicated that it opposes measures allowing guns on campus.

Arguments favoring guns on campus include general backing for gun-carry freedoms and the belief that the exercise of this freedom will make our campus safer. Supporters of guns on college campuses seem to be largely from outside the university community; I have only heard from one colleague who favors guns on campus.

We all are aware of incidents of campus violence and find them deplorable and distressing. To most of us, these incidents are sad facts of life and symbolize the unavoidable actions of troubled individuals, not a failure of campus safety. It is hard for many of us to imagine that the introduction of weapons that have the capacity to kill will result in safer environments for teaching, learning, and research—environments that can be stress-provoking for the faculty, staff, and students who work in the campus community. Even with excellent training in gun safety and use, the psychological aspects of situations in which guns may be employed—including in self defense—create uncertainties that are difficult to predict. A target of potential gun violence is not necessarily the best, or even a good, defense against that violence. Moreover, in a situation where one person faces off against another with a gun, it may be difficult for a law enforcement officer to determine the source of a threat to safety. Although the presence of law enforcement officers does not prevent or deter all gun violence, these officers know how to engage guns in contentious situations—they typically receive psychological and tactical training, as well as firearm instruction.

If you are among those who favor a continued ban on guns on our campuses, I ask that you consider e-mailing, calling, or writing a letter to your state senator and representative to

¹ I am setting forth below the two messages I earlier circulated to faculty on guns on campus, together with materials that other faculty members later requested that I post or consented to posting. This does not represent all of the responses that I have received to either message, both of which generated a lot of email traffic. -JMH

urge them to oppose legislation that would permit guns on campus. The information provided in this message, in the Faculty Senate resolution (<http://web.utk.edu/~senate/docs/2010-11/FSResolutionGunsonCampus11March06FINAL.pdf>), or in the materials provided by the members of the Faculty Senate who sponsored the resolutions (<http://web.utk.edu/~senate/docs/2010-11/FSGunsoncampussupport11March05-1.pdf>) may provide a basis for your interactions with these legislators. You can identify your senator and representative and find their e-mail addresses at <http://www.capitol.tn.gov/legislators/>.

I appreciate your concern about the safety of our community and those of our other state institutions of higher education. Please contact me if you have any questions or want to convey any information to me in connection with this proposed legislation.

Joan Heminway
Faculty Senate President 2010-11

4-19-2011

The Tennessee House Judiciary Committee is taking up its bill on lifting the campus gun ban later this morning. I am passing on the following from one of our colleagues who favors the presence of guns on campus so that you all can have a more balanced view of the debate than my earlier message included. Thanks are owed to Jack Parker for writing this up.

Joan Heminway
Faculty Senate President 2010-11

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Open Letter to UTK Faculty, Staff and Students,

The Tennessee state legislature is considering legislation that would decriminalize the carrying of concealed weapons on state university campuses by individuals who have Handgun Carry Permits. The UTK faculty senate, administration, campus police, and student government association have gone on record as opposing this legislative change.

Since emotional arguments may have more weight for opponents of permitting responsible adults to legally carry weapons on college campuses, let me relate that I was on the faculty at Virginia Tech for 25 years and I still have many friends and colleagues there. However, one less colleague is alive today because a deranged student shot him and 32 others dead. I don't know how many of these people might be alive today if just one of the several hundred people locked in Norris Hall had a weapon, but I do know that all of these people had a right to life and a right to defend it. This right, however, was usurped by laws designed to disarm law abiding students and faculty. The proposed legislation would formally reinstate that inalienable right of self defense to imagined ivory towers of Tennessee higher education.

The deranged student at Virginia Tech brought weapons onto campus with the express intent to commit murder. Having made this decision, I am sure he was not overly concerned about breaking the law by illegally carrying weapons on campus. For the record, the student did not hold a handgun carry permit.

It seems to me that a great many involved in higher education, who notionally profess to hold reason and scientific method as high ideals, abandon logic and reason in favor of emotion when the subject of guns arises.

For those who claim to have an open mind, I ask that you consider the following:

Only Licensed, Legally-Armed Citizens Would Carry

Current Tennessee law requires a minimum age of 21, a comprehensive FBI criminal background check, fingerprints, classroom instruction and live-fire certification to receive a Handgun Carry Permit. Consequently, legally-armed citizens already have training and experience with firearms, and have demonstrated responsibility. Holders of concealed carry permits in the U.S. are arrested for violent crimes at a rate five times lower than non-license holders (even lower than police officers in many states).

Whether or not you support concealed carry, it's already an existing right in Tennessee and most other states. Under current law, armed citizens can carry a concealed weapon into literally thousands of places throughout their state, including movie theaters, restaurants, banks, shopping malls, churches and grocery stores, and have done so responsibly for years. In view of this, prohibiting these same responsible individuals from carrying a concealed weapon on a college campus doesn't make sense.

"Gun-Free Zones" Don't Work

History is clear. Stickers on campus doors saying "no guns allowed" don't stop criminal offenders. In fact, no law will ever affect criminal behavior because criminals, by their very nature, do not follow the law. What these signs actually do is create (and advertise!) a defense-free zone, removing legal guns and forcibly disarming victims. This is exactly what makes colleges most attractive to killers who seek easy targets.

Killers don't take time to register their firearms or obtain permits for their murder weapons. Virginia Tech and a host of other college shootings demonstrate that. Responsible individuals carrying legal weapons on campus are the very ones that could make a difference in a hostile situation.

The Net Effect is Positive

Many students state they would not feel safe if concealed carry were allowed. However, concealed carry at Virginia Tech was blocked with the specific goal of "feeling safe." On April 16, 2007, it became clear that feeling safe isn't the same as being safe.

In reality, more than 70 college campuses currently allow concealed carry on campus, including all public universities in Utah and multiple college campuses in Colorado. According to crime statistics and inquiries to campus officials, there hasn't been a single reported instance of shootouts, accidents or heated confrontations resulting from concealed carry on campus.

In fact, Colorado State University's crime rate has declined steadily since allowing concealed carry. While no one can irrefutably claim this is due to concealed carry, we can at least state with certainty that allowing concealed carry does not increase risks to a campus population and may even help.

Everyone deserves protection

Opponents of concealed carry on campuses frequently point out that colleges are safer than cities and urban environments. However, crime rates on college campuses have risen in recent years, and statistics show that, nationwide, there are nine sexual assaults reported on college campuses each day. Furthermore, the low probability of becoming a victim doesn't help the 47 victims at Virginia Tech, or the 27 victims at Northern Illinois University, or any of the other countless victims of crimes on campuses.

Current policies give such victims the option of playing dead or huddling under desks.

Colleges can't protect students

Campus officials have introduced multiple responses to the problem of campus crime — all of which are reactionary. Campus police, text message alerts and cameras are all good ideas that demonstrate an awareness of the problem. But awareness is not the same as readiness; text messages are ineffective, police are often thinly-spread across vast campus grounds and cameras will do nothing more than capture footage for the nightly news. The fact remains that colleges are open environments with invisible boundaries and little to no secure prevention measures. They cannot guarantee protection to students or prevention of armed assaults. In all honesty, it's not fair to expect them to. It's completely impractical to expect colleges to provide airport-grade security with a secure perimeter, metal detectors, armed guards, bag inspections and pat-downs. Even if they could, few people want the nature of a college campus changed so radically.

Therefore, any institution that cannot provide for protection for its visitors must not deprive those visitors of the ability to protect themselves.

Common Arguments Made by Opponents of Concealed Carry on Campuses

Argument: Guns on campus would lead to an escalation in violent crime.

Since the fall semester of 2006, state law has allowed licensed individuals to carry concealed handguns on the campuses of the nine degree-offering public colleges (20 campuses) and one public technical college (10 campuses) in Utah. Concealed carry has been allowed at Colorado State University (Fort Collins, CO) since 2003 and at Blue Ridge Community College (Weyers Cave, VA) since 1995. After allowing concealed carry on campus for a combined total of one hundred semesters, none of these twelve schools has seen a single resulting incident of gun violence (including threats and suicides), a single gun accident, or a single gun theft. Likewise, none of the forty 'right-to-carry' states has seen a resulting increase in gun violence since legalizing concealed carry, despite the fact that licensed citizens in those states regularly carry concealed handguns in places like office buildings, movie theaters, grocery stores, shopping malls, restaurants, churches, banks, etc. Numerous studies^{1,2,3}, including studies by University of Maryland senior research scientist John Lott, University of Georgia professor David Mustard, engineering statistician William Sturdevant, and various state agencies, show that concealed handgun license holders are five times less likely than non-license holders to commit violent crimes.

Argument: Guns on campus would distract from the learning environment.

Ask anyone in a 'right to carry' state when he or she last noticed another person carrying a concealed handgun. The word 'concealed' is there for a reason. Concealed handguns would no more distract college students from learning than they currently distract moviegoers from enjoying movies or office workers from doing their jobs.

In most states with "shall issue" concealed carry laws, the rate of concealed carry is about 1%. That means that one person out of 100 is licensed to carry a concealed handgun. Therefore, statistically speaking, a packed 300-seat movie theater contains three individuals legally carrying concealed handguns, and a shopping mall crowded with 1,000 shoppers contains ten individuals legally carrying concealed handguns. Students who aren't too afraid to attend movies or go shopping and who aren't distracted from learning by the knowledge that a classmate might be illegally carrying a firearm shouldn't be distracted from learning by the knowledge that a classmate might be legally carrying a firearm.

Argument: Colleges are emotionally volatile environments. Allowing guns on campus will turn classroom debates into crime scenes.

Before shall-issue concealed carry laws were passed throughout the United States, opponents claimed that such laws would turn disputes over parking spaces and traffic accidents into shootouts. This did not prove to be the case. The same responsible adults—age twenty-one and above—now asking to be allowed to carry their concealed handguns on college campuses are already allowed to do so virtually everywhere else. They clearly do not let their emotions get the better of them in other environments; therefore, no less should be expected of them on college campuses.

Argument: In an active shooter scenario like the one that occurred at Virginia Tech, a student or faculty member with a gun would only make things worse.

What is worse than allowing an execution-style massacre to continue uncontested? How could any action with the potential to stop or slow a deranged killer intent on slaughtering victim after victim be considered 'worse' than allowing that killer to continue undeterred? Contrary to what the movies might have us believe, most real-world shootouts last less than ten seconds⁴. Even the real Gunfight at the O.K. Corral, a shootout involving nine armed participants and a number of bystanders, lasted only about thirty seconds and resulted in only three fatalities. It is unlikely that an exchange of gunfire between an armed assailant and an armed citizen would last more than a couple of seconds before one or both parties were disabled. How could a couple of seconds of exchanged gunfire possibly be worse than a ten-minute, execution-style massacre?

Argument: The job of defending campuses against violent attacks should be left to the professionals.

Nobody is suggesting that concealed handgun license holders be charged with the duty of protecting campuses. What is being suggested is that adults with concealed handgun licenses be allowed to protect themselves on college campuses, the same way they're currently allowed to protect themselves in most other unsecured locations. According to a U.S. Secret Service study⁵ into thirty-seven school shootings, 'Over half of the attacks were resolved/ended before law enforcement responded to the scene. In these cases the attacker was stopped by faculty or fellow students, decided to stop shooting on his own, or killed himself.' The study found that only three of the thirty-seven school shootings researched involved shots being fired by law enforcement officers.

Argument: How are first responders supposed to tell the difference between armed civilians and armed assailants?

This hasn't been an issue with concealed handgun license holders in other walks of life for several reasons. First and foremost, real-world shootouts are typically localized and over very quickly. It's not realistic to expect police to encounter an ongoing shootout between assailants and armed civilians. Second, police are trained to expect both armed bad guys AND armed good guys—from off-duty/undercover police officers to armed civilians—in tactical scenarios. Third, concealed handgun license holders are trained to use their firearms for self-defense. They are not trained to run through buildings looking for bad guys. Therefore, the biggest distinction between the armed assailants and the armed civilians is that the armed civilians would be hiding with the crowd, and the armed assailants would be shooting at the crowd.

References

1"Crime, Deterrence, and Right-to-Carry Concealed Handguns," John Lott and David Mustard, *Journal of Legal Studies* (v.26, no.1, pages 1-68, January 1997);

2"An Analysis of the Arrest Rate of Texas Concealed Handgun License Holders as Compared to the Arrest Rate of the Entire Texas Population," William E.

Sturdevant, September 1, 2000; Florida Department of Justice statistics, 1998; Florida Department of State, 3"Concealed Weapons/Firearms License Statistical Report," 1998; Texas Department of Public Safety and the U.S. Census Bureau, reported in *San Antonio Express-News*, September 2000; Texas Department of Corrections data, 1996-2000, compiled by the Texas State Rifle Association 4In "The Line of Fire: Violence Against Law Enforcement", U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation, National Institute of Justice, 1997 5"Safe School Initiative: An Interim Report on the Prevention of Targeted Violence in Schools," U.S. Secret Service National Threat Assessment Center in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education with support from the National Institute of Justice, Co-Directors Bryan Vossekuil, Marissa Reddy PhD, Robert Fein PhD, October 2000

The foregoing issues and arguments were extracted with minor editing from www.concealedcampus.org where additional relevant information and references to research studies may be found.

Sincerely,

Jack C. Parker
Research Professor, Civil and Environmental Engineering University of Tennessee

4-19-2011

Please consider the following text as an open letter to my colleagues on campus.

Jeff Mellor,
Professor of German

Only Licensed, Legally-Armed Citizens Would Carry

- What prevents a deranged Virginia Tech type killer from carrying a concealed weapon if licensed gun carriers are permitted on campus?

Gun-Free Zones Don't Work

- What evidence exists that gun-laden zones work better? What in the licensing procedure involving "a comprehensive FBI criminal background check, fingerprints, classroom instruction and live-fire certification" ensures the sanity and mental stability of persons licensed to carry concealed firearms?

The Net Effect is Positive

- On the more than 70 campuses where concealed weapons are permitted, there are no documented instances of shootouts. Given the low statistical probability of any such horrendous event, does the increase in the number of campuses with concealed weaponry not also increase the statistical likelihood of such an event occurring?

Everyone deserves Protection

- The implication of this argument is that the presence of legal concealed weapons on the Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois campus would have protected the people tragically murdered. How could this have occurred? Two possibilities present themselves:

(a) a legally armed person would verbally confront a deranged would-be killer verbally and the deranged would-be killer would desist, initiating an "instance of shootouts, accidents or heated confrontations resulting from concealed carry on campus" that is alleged to be hitherto non-existent;

(b) a legally armed person would shoot at (and possibly miss) the deranged would-be killer, initiating an "instance of shootouts, accidents or heated confrontations resulting from concealed carry on campus" that is alleged to be hitherto non-existent.

How either scenario increases protection of potential victims is left unstated.

Colleges can't protect students

- None of the arguments advanced on behalf of an increase of concealed weapons on campus indicates how more guns on campus could protect students any better.
- The legislators voting on this measure do not permit the possession of licensed concealed firearms in their chambers, except by those state troopers present and in evidence, but seem open to considering it for college campuses, where such security personnel are lacking. A proposal to allow unlimited presence of licensed concealed firearms on campuses is the height of hypocrisy.

4-19-2011

Senator Overbey:

I want to provide my perspectives on the issue of allowing guns to be carried on college campuses – it is a public health perspective that is grounded in the evidence from peer-reviewed studies published in leading medical and public health journals. This is also a public health ethics perspective and relates to public health law – the focus of our recent Public Health Law Colloquium at the Howard Baker Center in which you participated.

HB2016 and SB0399 will authorize full-time faculty and staff at post-secondary public institutions who have a valid handgun permit to carry handguns on campus. Current Tennessee law requires a minimum age of 21 years. The concerns I have relate to the following:

- Allowing handguns on campuses increases the availability of guns to all persons, whether over or under the age of 21;
- The currently proposed legislation will increase the likelihood of similar legislation which will make it permissible for students over the age of 21 to carry handguns;
- The increased availability of handguns increases the risk of suicide.

Here is what the published evidence shows:

1. Suicide is the third leading cause of death for young people ages 18-24 years.

<http://www.cdc.gov/injury/index.html>

2. Among Americans of all ages, more than half of all suicides are gun suicides. In 2005, an average of 46 Americans per day committed suicide with a firearm, accounting for 53% of all completed suicides. Gun suicide during this period accounted for 40% more deaths than gun homicide. Miller M and Hemenway D. N Engl J Med 2008; 359:989-991.

3. Suicide among college students and others in their early twenties is most often an impulsive act: in a study on people 13-34 years of age who made near-lethal suicide attempts, for example, 24% took less than 5 minutes between the decision to kill themselves and the actual attempt, and 70% took less than 1 hour. Simon OR et al. Suicide Life Threat Behav. 2001;32(1 Suppl):49-59.

4. College students and other persons in their early twenties are at higher risk for other impulsive acts such as binge drinking and substance abuse, and college students experience high levels of emotional stress related to school work, personal relationships, and being away from home. Egan KG, Moreno MA. Comput Inform Nurs. 2011 Mar 24. [Epub ahead of print].

5. Rather than a source of protection, firearms on college campuses can have the opposite effect: having a firearm for protection is strongly associated with being threatened with a gun while at college. Students who report having firearms at college disproportionately reported that they engaged in behaviors that put themselves and others at risk for injury. Miller M, Hemenway D, Wechsler H. J Am Coll Health. 2002 Sep;51(2):57-65.

Senator Overbey, to sum this up, college students are already at increased risk for suicide; allowing guns on campus will inevitably increase availability and will only add to the risk. The ethics of public health that relate to communitarian interests, rather than individual rights, should outweigh the call for guns on campus, just as the public health interests of protecting the community's health over individual rights formed the basis of the Supreme Court's decision in *Jacobson v. Massachusetts (1905)*. I urge you to consider this public health perspective in your discussions with your colleagues in the legislature. I will be glad to talk with you further.

Thank you.

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