**A Radical Stance for a Radical Problem: Resistance to Campus Carry Legislation**

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In the wake of recent college shootings, everyone’s primary concern for universities is safety of our students: the future of America. The forefront of these security policies involves guns, specifically concealed handguns. Many argue it’s important to take an open-carry or concealed-carry stance towards handguns, as they promote self-defense against potential attackers, while others claim it’s better to restrict possession of handguns on campus. I contend Possession of handguns should be banned on university campuses because presence of handguns reduce overall campus safety (addressed in section 1) and reduce constitutionally protected academic freedom (addressed in section 2).

**Section 1: Safety**

Handguns reduce overall campus safety because of their use in homicides, suicides, and accidental shootings. Handguns are significantly more likely to be used for proactive harm as opposed to reactive self-defense.⁠1 Additionally, handguns increase suicide success rate by 30 fold (from 3% to 90%), likely cause accidental shootings due to the disorganized nature of college, and are the primary tool for violent crime⁠2. The⁠3 reason is simple: young adults in universities are at a unique (high-stress) situation and typically suffer from increased risks for any form of mental illness.⁠4 On top of the standard risks of college gun ownership, there is a statistical correlation between owning a handgun and dangerous activity. According to Matthew Miller et al (Harvard School of Public Health), those who get guns:

“were more likely … to drive a motor vehicle after binge drinking (27% vs 9%); to have unprotected sex when under the influence of alcohol (17% vs 10%); to vandalize prop- erty (21% vs 10%); and to get into trouble with the police (10% vs 6%).”⁠5

While the cause for these correlations are not immediately obvious, it’s not hard to believe that, when combined with a study done by Leonard Berkowitz (American social psychologist, University of Michigan, expanded the boundaries of what causes aggression in humans) which argues weapons independently increase aggression in individuals,⁠6 this aggression increases psychological incentives to engage in such risky activity. Additionally, since handguns to confer their power upon the user,⁠7 it could make the user feel more powerful regardless of situation, which psychologically reduces the perceived risk of many activities. This phenomenon combined with the society-manufactured idea of handguns as the hallmark of self defense (as some authors claim they can be used to defend against criminals – like the most common uses, defend against law enforcement – as many vigilante groups do, etc.) create an individual feeling significantly more powerful than reason, or even the police in rare circumstances. However, independent of cause, the Miller study shows a fairly firm correlation between those who own handguns and those who engage in dangerous activity. Therefore, since the impact of handguns are dependent on the user, the prevalence of bad users proves we should ban them or at least significantly restrict their use in college campuses.

While some claim this is a reason to provide stricter background checks, these checks fail to find the “bad gun owners” because they are extremely lax and subjective. For example, current “background checks” for those who are mentally ill in “the majority of states rely on the applicant's bare assertion that they do not suffer from any mental defect”.

Another⁠8 common argument in favor for handgun possession on campus for safety is self-defense. Furthermore, presence of handguns can deter criminals from attacking in the first place. Surely criminals would be forced to think twice if their life could be on the line, right? While this seems to be an intuitive argument, it is unfortunately false in practice. If trained police officers miss the target approximately 80% of the time,⁠9 how could college students who aren’t trained to deal with such dangerous situations perform better? Additionally, in instances of self-defense from the years 2007-2011 where possible (when the victim did not immediately die) 99% did not use their firearm for self defense.⁠10 Furthermore, since many shooters are suicidal (40% of shooters committed suicide in years 2000-2013), it’s likely that the threat of being shot by other people in the name of self-defense will stop them.⁠11 While handgun bans may not stop school shootings (large scale shootings are typically done with larger guns), handguns are not a deterrent for said shooters. The combination of these factors makes it unlikely that firearms promote more campus safety through self-defense.

**Section 2: Academic Freedom**

Why do we care about protection of universities from handguns uniquely? We care because colleges provide valuable education, which functions as the foundation of our adult lives. Another reason to support handgun bans in university campuses is because handguns chill important dialogue on university campuses, and therefore “Institutional Academic Freedom” defined by Shaundra Lewis (Thurgood Marshall School of Law) as being able to decide “who may teach, what may be taught, how it shall be taught, and who may be admitted to study”.⁠12 A prime example lies just 22 minutes from my school: The University of Houston recently informed its professors to “‘be careful discussing sensitive topics,’ ‘drop certain topics from your curriculum,’ ‘not ‘go there’ if you sense anger,’ and limit students’ access during off-hours” in the face of concealed campus carry effective August 1st.⁠13 Forcing professors to stay within the bounds of mundane discussions severely restricts the education students receive because it prevents access to radical ideas and new ways of perceiving the world that may be controversial. Furthermore, this atmosphere of fear prevents most, if not all, political or religious discussions because those are the areas where people are often the most passionate. Additionally, the fact that professors are told to limit students access during off-hours significantly harms the education that students will receive since students often use that for 1 on 1 clarifications or for building connections with the professor so s/he can use them for future internships, research opportunities, etc. Furthermore, the fact that some teachers have to assign grades on a curve ensures some failing students, and inevitably students angry about their grade.⁠14 Even if rage-prone students do not have handguns, psychological studies conclude that the mere presence (or perceived presence) of a weapon increases aggression (something that background checks or more training can’t adjust for), which turns otherwise fine students more aggressive than they need to be.⁠15

However, not only is academic freedom important to the proper functioning of the university, it also is protected by the First Amendment.⁠16 Logically, stopping the free dialogue of universities violates these rights to Academic Freedom because they alter the content of the curriculum, and how it is taught. After all, dialogue about conversations that make some feel uncomfortable is protected by the 1st amendment, the right to free speech. This right and its application to the University is what makes America great — our country is filled with tons of different ideas, and many of these ideas are learned, interpreted, and processed in colleges and universities. However, when dissenting ideas are intimidated out of the discussion for fear of “going there” (like the University of Houston advised professors and students to do) that defeats the point of the intellectual atmosphere for learning new things that we call higher education. Granted, the most obvious response is a defense of the second amendment, the right to bear arms. However, upon looking at the text of the constitution, the right to bear arms isn’t that right in a vacuum.

“A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.”⁠17 Justice Stevens argues in his dissent to the *D.C. v Heller* decision that the right to bear arms applies only in the context of a well-regulated militia.⁠18 In the context of it’s initial use, the Second Amendment was written because the US needed a state militia to fight off the British government. Banning handguns for university campuses does not violate this notion of the right to bear arms since students will not be using them to form an armed insurrection against the United States government. Furthermore, even if the Second Amendment protects a private right to bear arms and the *D.C. v Heller* interpretation of the constitution is correct, that same decision has a very clear limit on what the 2nd Amendment means.

“The Second Amendment right is not unlimited. It is not a right to keep and carry any weapon whatsoever in any manner whatsoever and for whatever purpose: … The Court’s opinion should not be taken to cast doubt on longstanding prohibitions on … the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools and government buildings”⁠19 Thus, it’s best to protect the constitutional right to academic freedom, since the right to bear arms does not apply to handgun bans on college campuses.

**Section 3: Conclusion**

In a society where school shootings seem almost commonplace, the need to secure and the question of how to secure university campuses has never been more topical. By nature of their functions, handguns and universities are incompatible. While schools of learning are designed to promote differences in opinion and curiosity for difference, handguns demolish this crucial educational goal by increasing aggression in otherwise safe learning spaces. For this reason, handguns are best left out of the equation.

1 Shaundra Lewis, "Bullets and Books by Legislative Fiat: Why Academic Freedom and Public Policy Permit Higher Education Institutions to Say No to Guns," Idaho Law Review 48, no. 1 (August 1, 2011): 9, accessed February 26, 2016, http://ssrn.com/abstract=2229356.

2 Ibid.

3 Lewis, "Bullets and Books by Legislative Fiat: Why Academic Freedom and Public Policy Permit Higher Education Institutions to Say No to Guns," 9.

4 Lewis, "Bullets and Books by Legislative Fiat: Why Academic Freedom and Public Policy Permit Higher Education Institutions to Say No to Guns," 9.

5 Matthew Miller, David Hemenway, and Henry Wechsler, "Guns and Gun Threats at College," Journal of American College Health 51, no. 2 (September 2002): 59, accessed February 26, 2016, http://archive.sph.harvard.edu/cas/Documents/Gunthreats2/gunspdf.pdf.

6 Leonard Berkowitz and Anthony LePage, "Weapons as Aggression-Leading Stimuli," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 7, no. 2: 206, accessed March 19, 2016, http://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/psyifp/aeechterhoff/sommersemester2012/schluesselstudiendersozialpsychologiejens/10\_berkowitz\_lepage\_weaponsaggression\_jpsp1967.pdf.

7 Angela Stroud, "Good Guys with Guns: Hegemonic Masculinity and Concealed Handguns," *Gender and Society* 26, no. 2 (April 2012): 221, accessed March 19, 2016, DOI:10.1177/0891243211434612.

8 Lewis, "Bullets and Books by Legislative Fiat: Why Academic Freedom and Public Policy Permit Higher Education Institutions to Say No to Guns," 21.

9 Lewis, "Bullets and Books by Legislative Fiat: Why Academic Freedom and Public Policy Permit Higher Education Institutions to Say No to Guns," 9.

10 US Department of Justice, Firearm Violence, 1993-2011, by Michael Planty and Jennifer Truman (n.p.: n.p., 2013), 1, accessed February 28, 2016, http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/fv9311.pdf.

11 Federal Bureau of Investigation US Department of Justice, A Study of Active Shooter Incidents in the United States Between 2000 and 2013, by Pete Blair and Katherine Schweit (Washington D.C., MD/VA: n.p., 2013), 8, accessed February 28, 2016, https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/office-of-partner-engagement/active-shooter-incidents/a-study-of-active-shooter-incidents-in-the-u.s.-2000-2013.

12 Lewis, "Bullets and Books by Legislative Fiat: Why Academic Freedom and Public Policy Permit Higher Education Institutions to Say No to Guns," 13.

13 Jessica Chasmar, "University of Houston Faculty Told to Avoid 'Sensitive Topics' around Armed Students," The Washington Times, February 24, 2016,.

14 Lewis, "Bullets and Books by Legislative Fiat: Why Academic Freedom and Public Policy Permit Higher Education Institutions to Say No to Guns," 14.

15 Arron Quentin Umberger, Theories of Social Psychology in the Gun Control Debate (n.p.: n.p., 2013), 4-6, accessed February 28, 2016, https://www.academia.edu/4430868/Theories\_of\_Social\_Psychology\_in\_the\_Gun\_Control\_Debate.

16 Rachel Levinson and AAUP Senior Counsel, Academic Freedom and the First Amendment (2007) (n.p.: n.p., 2007), http://www.aaup.org/our-work/protecting-academic-freedom/academic-freedom-and-first-amendment-2007.

17 U.S. Const. amend. II. Accessed February 28, 2016. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/United\_States\_of\_America\_1992.

18 District of Columbia v. Heller, No. 07-290, slip op. at [Page #]. Accessed February 28, 2016. https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/07-290.ZD.html.

19 District of Columbia v. Heller, No. 07-290, slip op. at. Accessed February 28, 2016. https://www.law.cornell.edu/supct/html/07-290.ZS.html.