



The U.S. Department of Education's
HIGHER EDUCATION CENTER
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E-FACT SHEET

Guns on Campus: A Current Debate

Almost all U.S. college campuses ban concealed weapons. But in the aftermath of the tragic shooting deaths at Virginia Tech in 2007, the debate on whether guns should be permitted at colleges and universities has intensified. Dozens of states have considered proposals to lift bans on concealed weapons at colleges and universities, but so far none have been successful. According to *The Christian Science Monitor* (Dec. 5, 2009), “despite pleas from gun rights groups and even many college students, the result of the Virginia Tech shooting has been a focus on controlling guns on campus, not allowing more students to carry.” In fact, on Dec. 4, 2009, Colorado State University, one of the few colleges in the country that allowed concealed carry guns on campus, moved closer to a ban when its Board of Governors voted 7–0 to enact a policy that will likely lead to a campus gun ban, despite a student senate vote in support of allowing weapons on campus.

What Science Tells Us

While there is no research on the effect of allowing guns at colleges and universities when it comes to shooting violence, according to [Violence Prevention: The Evidence](#) (World Health Organization, 2009) “jurisdictions with restrictive firearms legislation and lower firearms ownership tend to have lower levels of gun violence. Measures include bans, licensing schemes, minimum ages for buyers, background checks and safe storage requirements.” A 2002 study, [“Guns and Gun Threats at College”](#) (*Journal of American College Health*, Vol. 51, No. 2), found that approximately 4.3 percent of the students surveyed reported that they had a working firearm at college, and 1.6 percent had been threatened with a gun while at school. Having a firearm for protection was strongly associated with being threatened with a gun while at college. Students who reported having firearms at college disproportionately reported that they engaged in behaviors that put themselves and others at risk for injury.

Making Campuses Safer?

[Students for Concealed Carry on Campus](#) and other right-to-carry activists argue that college campuses would be safer if students and other private citizens (faculty, staff, and visitors) were allowed to carry concealed weapons in order to protect themselves. However, a growing body of evidence shows that concealed carry permit holders are a threat to public safety. A recent study of news reports by the [Violence Policy Center](#) found that, during the period May 2007 through October 2009, concealed carry permit holders killed eight law enforcement officers and 77 private citizens (including 10 shooters who killed themselves after the attack). In addition, permit holders committed at least eight mass shootings (three or more victims).

The American Association of State Colleges and Universities and more than 90 colleges and universities from 24 states have signed a resolution by the [Campaign to Keep Guns Off Campus](#) that they are opposed to legislation that would mandate that colleges and universities allow students to carry concealed weapons on campus. According to the association, 23 states currently allow public campuses or state systems to decide their own weapons policies, with nearly all choosing to be “gun-free” (*The Denver Post*, Dec. 2, 2009).



Concealed Weapons on Georgia Campuses a Possibility

The Red and Black (Dec. 7, 2009) reports that the Georgia House of Representatives is considering legislation affecting students' ability to carry a concealed weapon on campus. State Rep Tim Bearden (R-Villa Rica), has proposed a bill that would legalize the carrying of concealed weapons in all areas of the state, with the exception of courtrooms, jails, and prisons, but including college campuses.

“Gun rights are something that keeps coming up,” said Bobby Andres, president of Young Democrats, who opposes the bill. “And it’s not just on college campuses. It’s everywhere. But I remain adamantly opposed. It sounds great in theory, but logistics don’t lie. Studies have shown a household with a gun is statistically more likely to have a gun-related injury. And on a college campus, when students are super stressed during finals, it would worry me to have guns around.”

Gun Policy Education at the University of Tennessee at Martin

The University of Tennessee at Martin (UT Martin) has renewed efforts on gun control education after a student was charged with possession of an assault weapon, a handgun, and marijuana in a University Village apartment, according to *The Pacer* (Nov. 11, 2009), UT Martin’s student newspaper. Tennessee does not allow students to be in possession of concealed weapons on any of its public campuses, including all UT system schools and Tennessee Board of Regents schools.

Capt. Ray Coleman, of UT Martin’s Department of Public Safety, said that education is the key way to get out the message about weapons being banned on campuses. Talking to incoming freshmen and other students about the gun policy and the consequences of having a gun on campus is one way that the department believes it can reach students.

Accommodating Students Who Hunt in Ohio

In Ohio, rules vary from college to college, but most campuses try to work with students who have weapons for deer hunting. In Gambier, campus security officers at Kenyon College will hold guns for students off campus. In Ada, hunters at Ohio Northern University can have their weapons held at the campus security department.

But Gary J. Margolis, managing partner of Margolis, Healy & Associates and former chief of police at the University of Vermont, cautions that allowing gun storage on campus poses some risks for colleges and universities. “For example, federal law both makes it illegal for felons to possess a firearm and limits access to the National Crime Information Center’s criminal records database, including restrictions on who can do background checks. That means campus police can’t conduct a criminal records check on a person asking them to store personal guns or rifles. Conceivably, campus police could unwittingly agree to store and subsequently hand over a weapon to a convicted felon and be in violation of federal law by aiding in the commission of a federal offense,” said Margolis.



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