



WHY OUR CAMPUSES ARE SAFER WITHOUT CONCEALED HANDGUNS

In the wake of tragic shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University, a group called Students for Concealed Carry on Campus formed to advocate for the “right” of students and faculty to carry concealed handguns at colleges and universities in the United States. This group was quickly joined by the National Rifle Association and other pro-gun organizations that had been lobbying for years to liberalize America’s concealed carry laws.

Frequently lost in the national debate that ensued was the fact that our nation’s colleges and universities are some of the safest places in our country in large part because their campuses, in almost all cases, have remained gun-free.

The overwhelming majority of the [4,314 colleges and universities in the United States](#) prohibit students and faculty from carrying concealed handguns on campus (the exceptions include public colleges and universities in Utah; Blue Ridge Community College in Weyers Cave, Virginia; and Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado). Despite high-profile shootings like the ones mentioned above, homicides at American colleges and universities remain rare events.

A 2001 [study](#) by the U.S. Department of Education found that the overall homicide rate at postsecondary education institutions was 0.07 per 100,000 of enrollment in 1999. By comparison, the criminal homicide rate in the United States was 5.7 per 100,000 persons overall in 1999, and 14.1 per 100,000 for persons ages 17 to 29. Another [study](#), conducted by the Department of Justice, found that 93% of violent crimes that victimize college students occur off campus. This research demonstrates conclusively that students on the campuses of postsecondary institutions are significantly safer than both their off-campus counterparts and the nation as a whole.

Students for Gun Free Schools (SGFS) believes these results can be attributed largely to strict policies that have kept firearms off our nation’s campuses. Our colleges and universities are safe sanctuaries for learning, and we believe they would be endangered by the presence of concealed handguns for the following reasons:

- 1) Concealed handguns would detract from a healthy learning environment;**
- 2) More guns on campus would create additional risk for students;**
- 3) Shooters would not be deterred by concealed carry permit holders;**
- 4) Concealed carry permit holders are not always “law-abiding” citizens, and**
- 5) Concealed carry permit holders are not required to have law enforcement training.**



1) CONCEALED HANDGUNS WOULD DETRACT FROM A HEALTHY LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In order to foster a healthy learning environment at America's colleges and universities, it is critical that students and faculty feel safe on campus. If concealed carry were allowed on America's campuses, there is no doubt that many students would feel uncomfortable about not knowing whether their professors and/or fellow students were carrying handguns.

Students and teachers must be able to express themselves freely in classroom environments, where discussions frequently touch on controversial topics that arouse passion. The introduction of handguns on our campuses would inhibit this dialogue by creating fear of possible retaliation. Whether it's a classroom debate, a student-teacher conversation about a grade, or an informal interaction in a dormitory; the presence of hidden handguns would restrain the open exchange of ideas that is so critical to the college experience.

Americans, in overwhelming numbers, believe that guns have no place at our colleges and universities. In one national [survey](#), 94% of Americans answered "No" when asked, "Do you think regular citizens should be allowed to bring their guns [onto] college campuses?"



2) MORE GUNS ON CAMPUS WOULD CREATE ADDITIONAL RISK FOR STUDENTS

Allowing concealed carry permit holders to bring handguns onto college campuses would raise a host of public safety concerns for institutions that have a legal duty to provide secure environments for their students, faculty and visitors. As noted in a 2007 [report](#) by the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence, there are four reasons why gun violence would be likely to increase if more guns were present on college campuses: (1) The prevalence of drugs and alcohol; (2) The risk of suicide and mental health issues; (3) The likelihood of gun thefts, and; (4) An increased risk of accidental shootings.

A 2007 [study](#) by the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University found that "[N]early half of America's 5.4 million full-time college students abuse drugs or drink alcohol on binges at least once a month." Another [study](#) found that alcohol is involved in 95% of the violent crime on campus. The combination of alcohol, drugs and guns is a dangerous mix that could lead to additional, and more lethal, violence on campus. A 2002 [study](#) by the Harvard School of Public Health compared students who have a firearm at college with those who do not have a firearm. They found that students who have a firearm at college are more likely to binge drink, drive a motor vehicle after binge drinking, use illegal drugs, vandalize property, and get into trouble with the police.

Suicide and mental health are also substantial issues on college campuses. One [study](#) found that 24% of college students had thought about attempting suicide and 5% had actually attempted to kill themselves. Firearms, of course, make many types of violence more lethal. Suicide attempts are [successful more than 90% of the time when a firearm is used](#). By comparison, such attempts are fatal only 3% of the time when a drug overdose is the method used. One [study](#) that examined college student suicide

from 1920-2004 found that, “It is the reduced use of firearms as a method of suicide that is responsible for virtually all of the benefit associated with being a student ... and that the relationship between student status and firearms may be the key to understanding why students commit suicide at a lower rate than does the general U.S. population.”

Allowing concealed handguns on campus would also increase the risk of gun theft and accidental shootings. College dorm rooms are typically small, with few places available to lock up or secure a handgun. They also experience considerable numbers of visitors who could gain unauthorized access to these firearms.

3) SHOOTERS WOULD NOT BE DETERRED BY CONCEALED CARRY PERMIT HOLDERS

The gun lobby frequently advances the argument that shooters target gun-free zones such as college campuses for their attacks because they are unlikely to receive initial resistance.

This ignores the fact that homicides and shootings at American colleges and universities are rare events in large part because of these institutions’ current policies regarding firearms on campus. In 2003, for example, there were 11,920 total gun homicides in the United States, but only [10 total murders on the nation’s college campuses](#).

Campus shooters are also frequently suicidal. Most of the campus shootings in America in recent years (i.e., Virginia Tech, Northern Illinois University, Louisiana Technical College, etc.) were murder-suicides. These shooters left home on the morning of their attacks knowing they were going to die by gunfire before the day was over—their goal was simply to take as many people with them as they could. It is unlikely these shooters would have been deterred by the knowledge that their fellow students (or campus faculty) might be armed. In fact, it is possible that a college campus that allows staff and faculty to carry concealed handguns might provide a more attractive target to such shooters. Lacking any fear of death, they might welcome the opportunity to provoke shootouts and crossfire among relatively untrained concealed carry permit holders in order to increase casualties.

There have also been numerous incidents in recent years where shooters have targeted what might be deemed “gun-full zones” for their attacks, including:

May 8, 2006—Michael Kennedy, 18, attacks Fairfax County Police Sully District Station in Virginia, firing more than 70 rounds and killing two officers before police are able to take him down. Kennedy is armed with five handguns and two rifles, including a semiautomatic AK-47 assault rifle, and carries more than 300 rounds of ammunition.

May 19, 2007—Jason Hamilton shoots and kills his wife at home and then attacks a sheriff’s department at Latah County Courthouse and a church in Moscow, Idaho. Hamilton kills a total of three people, including a police officer, before taking his own life. He is armed with an AK-47 assault rifle and an M1 carbine despite a long history of domestic violence, mental illness, and run-ins with the police. Local resident and University of Idaho student Pete Hussmann, 20, races to the courthouse on his bike armed with a .45 caliber handgun and is shot four times by Hamilton. “It was like a war zone,” says Hussmann. Two other law enforcement officers are wounded.

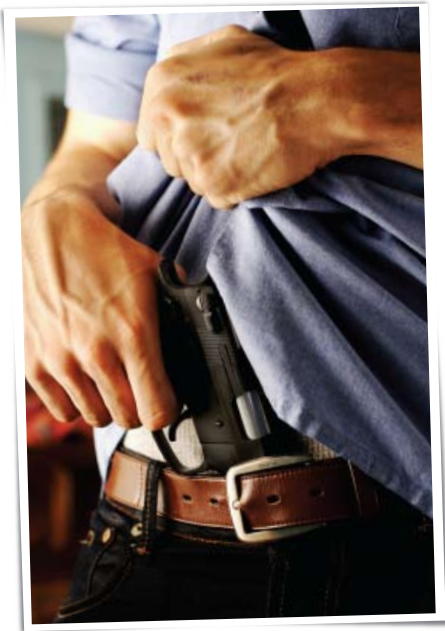
There is no evidence that suicidal shooters would be deterred from attacks on college campuses by concealed carry permit holders. To the extent that they could provoke firefights with such individuals in crowded college classrooms and create additional mayhem, they might even seek out such confrontations.

4) CONCEALED CARRY PERMIT HOLDERS ARE NOT ALWAYS “LAW-ABIDING” CITIZENS

The gun lobby frequently claims that those with permits to carry concealed handguns are “law-abiding citizens,” or even the most law-abiding citizens in their communities. This is not always true.

Two states, Alaska and Vermont, do not even require residents to obtain a permit to carry a concealed weapon. Individuals in these states can buy a handgun through an unregulated private sale (no background check required) and then carry it in public.

38 states have a “shall-issue” policy for concealed carry permits, meaning that officials may not arbitrarily deny an application to those who meet a basic set of requirements. The primary requirement for obtaining a permit in these states is to pass a background check through the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS). The purpose of the background check is to ascertain whether the applicant is prohibited under federal law from owning and purchasing firearms. Those with felony convictions are automatically prohibited. The only misdemeanor convictions that would prohibit someone from owning and purchasing firearms, however, are those related to incidents of domestic violence. Someone who obtains a concealed carry permit in a shall-issue state could have a rap sheet with other types of misdemeanor convictions, including violent offenses.



The National Instant Criminal Background Check System is also not fool-proof. A recent [study](#) found that the NICS database is “deeply flawed” and missing millions of disqualifying records. Most troubling, nine out of ten mental health records that would disqualify individuals from purchasing firearms are not currently in the database. One-fourth of felony conviction records have also not been submitted to NICS by the states.

The bottom line is that even if someone passes a background check and qualifies for a concealed carry permit (if their state requires one), that person is not necessarily a law-abiding citizen. They could have a substantial criminal record involving misdemeanor offenses, or a history of mental illness. It is notable that campus shooters including [Gang Lu](#), [Wayne Lo](#), [Robert Flores](#), [Biswanath Halder](#), Seung-Hui Cho, [Latina Williams](#) and Steven Kazmierczak passed background checks in acquiring the firearms used in their attacks. Some possessed a concealed carry permit in their home states; others would have qualified had they applied. Finally, individuals who are prohibited under federal law from owning or purchasing firearms can still pass a background check (and potentially qualify for a concealed carry permit) if their disqualifying records have not been transferred to NICS.

Research has demonstrated that those who obtain concealed carry permits can pose a threat to public safety:

A Violence Policy Center [study](#) found that Texas concealed handgun license holders were arrested for weapon-related offenses at a rate 81% higher than the general population of Texas aged 21 and older (offenses included 279 assaults, 671 unlawfully carrying a weapon, and 172 deadly conduct/discharge of a firearm). Between January 1, 1996 and August 31, 2001, Texas concealed handgun license holders were arrested for 5,314 crimes—including murder, rape, kidnapping and theft.

A 2007 [investigation](#) by the Florida Sun-Sentinel found that the state's permit system had granted concealed carry permits to more than 1,400 individuals who pled guilty or no contest to a felony, 216 individuals with outstanding warrants, 128 individuals with active domestic violence restraining orders, and six registered sex offenders.

5) CONCEALED CARRY PERMIT HOLDERS ARE NOT REQUIRED TO HAVE LAW ENFORCEMENT TRAINING

The 48 states in the U.S. that allow residents to carry concealed handguns do not require them to have any formal law enforcement training. The training requirement to obtain a concealed carry permit in a "shall-issue" state is typically a day class. Many shall-issue states do not even require the applicant to fire his/her handgun at a range to demonstrate proficiency or even basic competency with the weapon. An example would be Virginia, where a four-hour sit-down session in a classroom is sufficient to meet the state's training requirement.

This is in direct contrast to the intensive training required of law enforcement officers who are currently called on to safeguard our nation's colleges and universities. These officers start receiving training in how to safely handle a sidearm—and in demonstrating discretion in using lethal force—long before they ever see actual duty in their communities. This training then continues throughout their career in law enforcement. Police departments typically require their officers to qualify 1-4 times a year with their duty weapon.

Nonetheless, even trained law enforcement officers rarely hit their targets when firing at other human beings. One 2006 [study](#) examined three decades of bullet hit rates among larger U.S. police departments and found that officers hit their targets approximately 20% of the time. The New York City Police Department's Firearms Discharge report for 2006 showed similar results. That year, their officers intentionally fired a gun at a person 364 times, hitting their target only 103 times—[a success rate of 28.3%](#). Commenting on that success rate, New York City Police Commissioner Ray Kelly said, "When you factor in all of the other elements that are involved in shooting at an adversary, that's a high hit rate. The adrenaline flow, the movement of the target, the movement of the shooter, the officer, the lighting conditions, the weather ... I think it is a high rate when you consider all of the variables."

Given the record of trained law enforcement officers, how often would relatively untrained concealed carry permit holders hit their targets when opening fire on college campuses? Recent shootings on America's campuses have occurred in crowded classrooms and involved a great deal of chaos, with students panicked and running for their lives. Concealed carry permits holders discharging their weapons in such situations would be unlikely to have clear lines of fire. If multiple students drew handguns, just

identifying the actual “shooter” or target would be challenging. The potential for collateral damage is enormous, even assuming that concealed carry permit holders would make sound decisions about when to discharge their handguns.

Law enforcement officers responding to such emergencies would also face enormous difficulties. If police arrived on the scene of a campus shooting and found multiple students with handguns drawn, how would they know who their target is? This scenario was contemplated by the Virginia Tech Review Panel, which [commented](#): “If numerous people had been rushing around with handguns outside Norris Hall on the morning of April 16, [2007,] the possibility of accidental or mistaken shootings would have increased significantly. The campus police said that the probability would have been high that anyone emerging from a classroom at Norris Hall holding a gun would have been shot.”

Despite the fact that there are more than 200 million firearms in private hands in the United States and 48 states now allow some form of concealed carry, instances in which law-abiding citizens successfully shoot and kill criminals are exceedingly rare. In 2005, there were a total of 12,352 gun-related homicides in the United States. Yet, during the same year, [the FBI reported only 143 justifiable homicides involving a firearm](#). A 2000 [study](#) by the Harvard School of Public Health concluded that, “Guns are used to threaten and intimidate far more often than they are used in self defense. Most self reported self defense gun uses may well be illegal and against the interests of society.” This is no doubt partially due to the lack of formal training among those purchasing firearms and receiving permits to carry concealed handguns in the United States.

The notion that individuals with concealed carry permits are going to make prudent decisions about when to discharge their firearms on school campuses is dubious at best; as is the notion that these individuals would successfully take down active shooters while avoiding collateral damage in chaotic situations. The safest policy to limit potential violence is to prohibit students and faculty from keeping handguns on campus and allow trained law enforcement officers to provide for campus security.

