



Should We Turn College Campuses Into Armed Camps?

Q. Would arming college students make campuses safer for students and faculty?

A. No. Bringing guns into the campus environment will increase the danger to students every hour of every day. College students engage in a great many high-risk behaviors – including binge drinking and drug abuse – at alarming rates. Nearly 50% of full-time college students binge drink or abuse drugs at least once a month.¹ Students are also at elevated risks for suicide, with 1,100 successful suicides and an additional 24,000 attempts every year.² Thus, in addition to significantly increasing the risk of accidental shootings,³ and suicides,⁴ allowing guns on campus will also likely lead to more gun thefts, which are a key source of guns used in crime.⁵

Q. Won't arming college students deter the kind of attack that took place at Virginia Tech or Northern Illinois University?

A. No. The perpetrators of mass shootings are nearly always suicidal, and end up taking their own lives at the end of their rampages. Armed students would likely become the first targets of any suicidal attackers, who can prepare for such an attack by maximizing their firepower. For example, a crazed gunman who recently attacked a city council outside St. Louis, Missouri, first shot and killed two armed police officers before continuing his rampage.⁶ He even used one of the officer's guns in furthering his attack.

Q. Won't lives be saved if students can shoot back?

A. No. Security professionals believe that arming students to shoot back would actually make matters worse in the extremely rare instances where mass shootings occur on campus. Even trained police officers, on average, hit their intended targets less than 20% of the time.⁷ Thus, common sense indicates that more, not fewer, people are likely to be killed if untrained students engage a shooter in crossfire. Moreover, if several people are armed during a shooting incident, security will not know which person is the aggressor. Also, with everyone armed, security will not be able to issue "lock-down" advisories or disarm a campus threat *before* the shooting starts.

¹ The National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse, *Wasting the Best and the Brightest: Substance Abuse at America's Colleges and Universities* 4 (March 2007).

² Miriam Cintron, *College Campuses Grapple with Escalating Suicide Rates*, Nearwestgazette.com (on file with Brady Center).

³ See Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence, *No Gun Left Behind: The Gun Lobby's Campaign to Push Guns Into Colleges and Schools* 9 (2007) (citing examples of accidental shootings, studies showing that guns in the home are far more likely to be used in an unintentional shooting than in self-defense, and how people frequently fail to recognize that a gun is loaded).

⁴ Matthew Miller et al., *Household Firearm Ownership and Rates of Suicide Across the 50 United States*, J. of Trauma, Apr. 2007, at 1029 (explaining that if a gun is used in a suicide attempt, more than 90% of the time it is fatal, compared to a 3% fatality rate for suicide attempts by drug overdose).

⁵ *No Gun Left Behind* at 8-9 (explaining how stolen guns supply the criminal market, and noting that school shootings in Jonesboro, Arkansas, Springfield, Oregon, and elsewhere have been committed with stolen guns).

⁶ Heather Ratcliffe, *6 dead in shooting rampage at Kirkwood City Council*, St. Louis Today, March 27, 2008.

⁷ Gregory B. Morrison, *Deadly Force Programs Among Larger U.S. Police Departments*, 9 Police Quarterly 331, 332 (2006).

Q. Can't we trust college gun owners to be safe and responsible?

A. No. In fact, two studies done by Harvard researchers have shown that college student gun owners are *less* law-abiding than the average student. They are more likely than the average student to:

- Engage in binge drinking (two-thirds engage in this behavior)
- Use cocaine or crack,
- Be arrested for a DUI,
- Vandalize property, and
- Get in trouble with police.⁸

Concealed carry licensees have committed homicides, violent felonies, and other horrific crimes.⁹ Several mass shooters, including the Virginia Tech killer, would have been issued concealed carry licenses had they sought them.¹⁰ It makes no sense to make it easier for mass shooters to bring guns on campus.

Q. Who is pushing the idea of arming college students?

A. The gun lobby¹¹ and a tiny minority of college students.¹² The vast majority of Americans – 94% according to one survey – oppose this dangerous idea,¹³ as do nearly all college administrators and campus security professionals. Only one state – Utah – prohibits college administrators from maintaining no-weapons policies on campus.¹⁴ By comparison, about two-dozen states prohibit concealed carry licensees from carrying guns on college campuses.

Q. How can we make college campuses safer?

A. Despite the horrific shootings at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois, college campuses are far safer than the communities that surround them. 93% of the violence against college students occurs off campus, where guns are widely available.¹⁵ To prevent future mass shootings, we must strengthen our gun laws to make it as hard as possible for dangerous people to get dangerous weapons.

The shooter at Virginia Tech was a prohibited purchaser whose disqualifying records were not in the Brady background check system when he bought the guns he used. Since then, Congress has enacted legislation to encourage states to put more records of those too dangerous to buy a gun for mental health reasons into that system. Congress should go farther, however, and extend the Brady background checks to private sales at gun shows to make it harder for dangerous people to arm themselves. Such actions will complement and support other safety strategies that colleges and universities have adopted in the wake of Virginia Tech.

⁸ Matthew Miller, David Hemenway & Henry Wechsler, *Guns and Gun Threats at College*, 51 J. of Am. Coll. Health 57, 62-64 (Sept. 2002); Miller, et al., *Guns at College*, 48 J. Am. College Health 7 (1999).

⁹ See, e.g., *No Gun Left Behind* at 22-26 (listing assorted crimes and misdeeds by carrying concealed weapons licensees).

¹⁰ *Id.* at 6 (explaining that, although the Virginia Tech shooter was prohibited from owning firearms, the Commonwealth of Virginia did not realize this until after the tragedy and would have issued him a concealed carry license had he applied for one); *id.* (noting many other school shooters listed in Appendix B would have been issued carrying concealed weapons licenses).

¹¹ *Id.* at iv-v & n.1 (detailing gun lobby calls for armed campuses on the afternoon of the Virginia Tech shooting). See also *id.* at 1-4 (detailing the gun lobby's campaign to force guns into schools, workplaces, and everywhere).

¹² As of March 2008, Students for Concealed Carry on Campus claimed 22,000 supporters on facebook. By comparison, there are about 17 million college students in America. Nearly all student papers that have editorialized on this topic have opposed arming students. See, e.g., <http://www.bradycampaign.org/media/clips.php?issueID=50> (collecting clips from across the nation).

¹³ David Hemenway, D. Azrael & Matthew Miller, *National Attitudes Concerning Gun Carrying in the United States*, 7 Injury Prevention 282, 283 (2001).

¹⁴ *No Gun Left Behind* at v & nn. 8-11 (citing and describing Utah law).

¹⁵ Katrina Baum & Patsy Klaus, U.S. Dep't of Justice, *Violent Victimization of College Students, 1995-2002*, at 5 (2005).