

GunFreeUT Statement on President Fennes' Campus Carry Policies - February 17, 2016

GunFreeUT is a large group of faculty, students, staff, parents, and alumni that support common-sense policies that ban the civilian carry of handguns on the University of Texas at Austin campus.

We acknowledge that President Fennes's policy adopts some provisions supported by the campus community, including banning concealed handguns in university-run student dormitory rooms, facilities hosting children, and areas with dangerous substances. It also permits occupants of individual offices to disallow guns in those spaces. But the policy does not go far enough. We strongly oppose President Fennes' decision to permit guns other areas of campus, including classrooms, shared offices, student dining areas, and lounges. We call upon the Regents of the University of Texas to use their power to amend Campus Carry policy by banning guns in all campus buildings.

Stakeholders do not want guns on campus. More than 1,700 UT-Austin professors,¹ nearly 1,800 graduate and professional students,² a majority of polled undergraduates,³ and almost 9,000 members of the community⁴ oppose guns in classrooms. The UT-Austin Faculty Council opposes guns in classrooms as do 43 campus departments and 11 academic professional societies.⁵

In our view, the first responsibility of the university president is to protect the safety and welfare of its students and employees. President Fennes's policy fails this simple test. The policy prohibits concealed carry where animals and certain chemicals are present due to concern over accidental discharge,⁶ but does not prohibit guns where students, faculty, and staff teach, learn, and work. The Campus Carry Working Group whose recommendations President Fennes adopted concluded that accidental discharge represents a major risk if guns are handled.⁷

Campus Carry Policy will make concealed handguns easily accessible for many members of the campus community. Nearly all faculty, staff, graduate students, and other employees can obtain a concealed carry permit by attending a four-hour course and with no prior or subsequent training of any kind.⁸ If that is too much red tape, Texas has reciprocity agreements with

¹ https://docs.google.com/document/d/17h29_L4zOQueHB9Z5qhI5rhYfvcI55LeGsk8dypNMvY/edit

² <http://gunfreeut.org/petitions/graduate-student-petition/>

³ <http://www.dallasnews.com/opinion/latest-columns/20151204-bethany-albertson-what-ut-students-think-of-campus-carry.ece>

⁴ <https://www.change.org/p/no-guns-in-our-classrooms-gun-free-ut>

⁵ <http://gunfreeut.org>

⁶ Policy Statements 13 and 14, <https://utexas.app.box.com/campus-carry-report>

⁷ <http://campuscarry.utexas.edu/working-group/>

⁸ <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/13/opinion/is-this-really-how-you-get-your-gun.html>

31 states, including some that issue licenses to nonresidents and have no training requirement.⁹

Campus carry advocates argue that armed citizens will better protect themselves and others, but actual research shows that claim is false. States with laxer gun laws have more violent crime,¹⁰ no armed civilian (who was not affiliated with law enforcement or the military) has ever neutralized a school shooter,¹¹ and one of the most substantial studies on the subject shows that even trained police officers achieve just an 18% hit-rate during gunfights.¹²

Failing to ban guns in classrooms and other areas not only makes our places of work and study more dangerous, but it also threatens academic freedom and free speech, compromises our educational mission, and diminishes the university's reputation. The university should be known for its distinguished faculty, the quality of its education, and the excellence of its athletes. Campus Carry damages our reputation at home and abroad. Governor Abbott and Texas lawmakers recently adopted SB 632 to fund the recruitment of world-class faculty to the university, including its new medical center, yet guns on campus have already repulsed potential recruits and talented faculty have resigned. We are certain to suffer more losses to our reputation and our donor-base.

Education and research is what we do best and we are struck by the absence of fact-based and data-driven debate on gun safety on college campuses. We call upon President Fennessey to respond to Faculty Council and GunFreeUT requests to establish an institute for the study of gun safety at UT-Austin. Such a center would make a positive contribution to the study of guns on college campuses and attract some of the best researchers on gun safety to our campus rather than repelling some of its best minds.

The longer President Fennessey and the Regents wait to implement the common sense and campus community-supported ban of concealed guns on campus, the more disruptive it will be for our educational mission. GunFreeUT will oppose the intrusion of guns into our educational spaces by legal actions guided by the best advice we can obtain. Students and faculty are also planning numerous direct actions. As faculty, we would prefer to invest all of our energy and talents into what we do best: teach Texas's young adults, produce world-class research, and fulfill the university's core mission. As students, we would prefer to focus on our studies and future careers. As staff, we would prefer to propel the university to new heights. Let us keep guns off campus and keep building the university of the 21st century for the State of Texas.

⁹ <http://www.txdps.state.tx.us/RSD/CHL/legal/reciprocity/>

¹⁰ <http://archinte.jamanetwork.com/article.aspx?articleid=1661390>

¹¹ <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2015/10/oregon-shooting-gun-laws-213222>

¹² http://www.nyc.gov/html/nypd/downloads/pdf/public_information/RAND_FirearmEvaluation.pdf p