Guns on Campus

**Bottom Line:** In recent years, gun lobby-backed legislation that would force colleges and universities to allow guns on campus has been introduced across the country. This legislation, which would create new dangers and burden schools with significant financial costs, is opposed by university stakeholders from police chiefs to students to college presidents. Statehouses should not override the public safety judgment of our colleges and universities, especially given the risk factors common to campus life.

- **The National Rifle Association (NRA) began its push to force colleges and universities to allow guns on campus following multiple high-profile campus shootings.**
  - **The NRA Model Bill:** In 2008, after a mass shooting at Virginia Tech that killed 32 people and a mass shooting at Northern Illinois University that killed 5 people, the NRA proposed, and the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) adopted, a model bill that would force colleges to allow guns on campus.¹
  - **States Have Overwhelmingly Rejected the NRA’s Agenda:** The push to force guns onto college campuses has accelerated ever since—with bills that would force colleges to allow guns on campus introduced in 18 different states in both 2015 and 2016 and 20 states in 2017.² Despite this push states have overwhelmingly rejected these bills.

- **The vast majority of states either prohibit guns on campus or else allow colleges to decide for themselves whether to allow guns on campus.³**
  - Only 2 states force colleges to allow all concealed carry permit holders to carry guns everywhere on campus: CO, UT.⁴
  - 10 other states require colleges to allow guns on campus in some circumstances: AR, GA, ID, KS, MN, MS, OR, TN, TX, WI.⁵

- **Guns on campus would burden colleges with large new costs for security and insurance.**
  - **Kansas’ new guns on campus requirement will cost universities millions:** Three Kansas universities estimated that it will cost nearly $2 million to secure their athletic facilities after a Kansas law goes into effect that forces colleges to allow guns on campus unless they implement burdensome security measures at each building where they choose to prohibit guns.⁶
  - **Idaho’s guns on campus law is costing universities millions.** In 2014, Idaho passed legislation that forced colleges to allow people with “enhanced” permits to carry guns on campus. As a result, five state schools had to request more than $3.7 million from the state to increase security in the first year alone.⁷
  - **The cost of guns on campus in Arizona was estimated at over $13 million.** During a 2012 legislative fight, the Board of Regents estimated that allowing guns on campus would cost $13.3 million in one-time expenses and $3.1 million in annual costs.⁸ The bill was vetoed.
  - **Guns on campus legislation creates new insurance costs for colleges.** In 2011, the Houston Community College Board of Trustees estimated its insurance costs alone could rise as much as $900,000 per year if a guns on campus bill passed.⁹
States that have recently passed legislation forcing colleges to allow guns on campus are struggling to deal with the consequences.

- **Lawsuits and Faculty Retention:** In Texas, where a guns-on-campus bill passed in 2015, the implementation of guns on campus has been extremely contentious. Professors are currently suing the State and the University of Texas, prominent faculty members have left to take jobs in other states, and educators have withdrawn from consideration for jobs at Texas universities.\(^{10}\)

- **Injuries:** In Idaho, a professor with an “enhanced” carry permit unintentionally shot himself in the leg during a chemistry lab following the passage of a 2014 law that forced Idaho colleges to allow people with enhanced permits to carry guns on campus.\(^{11}\) And in 2012, a 24-year-old permitted student in Utah unintentionally shot himself while walking on campus.\(^{12}\)

- **Accidental Discharges:** In Texas, just weeks after a guns on campus law went into effect, a permit-holding student unintentionally discharged his gun in his dorm room.\(^{13}\) In Utah, another permit-holding student recently discharged his gun in a crowded cafeteria (Fortunately, the bullet hit only a light fixture and a table).\(^{14}\)

- **Student Opposition:** In Texas, there have been large student protests. Further, students at Historically Black Colleges and LGBTQ students have expressed concerns about how the law will affect their communities – noting that they regularly face intimidation and complex interactions with law enforcement on campus.\(^{15}\)

Campus stakeholders oppose guns on campus.

- **Campus Police Chiefs:** In a 2008 survey of university police chiefs, 89 percent of the chiefs agreed that the most effective and important way to deal with gun use on campus is to prevent the use of guns at all.\(^{16}\)

- **College Administrators and Faculty:** In surveys conducted in 2013 and 2012, 95% of college presidents and 94% of college faculty indicated they oppose concealed carry on campus.\(^{17}\)

- **College Students:** In a 2012 study of students, 79 percent said that they would not feel safe if concealed guns were allowed onto their campuses.\(^{18}\)

Colleges and universities, which have traditionally prohibited guns on campus, are relatively safe from gun violence—but campus life is rife with other risk factors that make the presence of guns potentially dangerous.

- **Campuses are Relatively Safe:** Among all violent crime against college students from 1995 through 2002, 93 percent of incidents took place off campus.\(^{19}\) With over 21 million students attending colleges and universities in 2013,\(^{20}\) only eight gun homicides occurred on campuses.\(^{21}\)

- **Heavy Alcohol and Drug use:** A Columbia University study found that half of U.S. college students binge drink or abuse illegal or prescription drugs, while nearly a quarter of college students suffer from substance abuse and dependence.\(^{22}\) Students who carried guns on campus “were more likely than students who did not do so to report drinking heavily and more frequently, driving while under the influence of alcohol, and vandalizing property.”\(^{23}\) Alcohol leads to impaired judgment about whether to shoot a gun, as well as impaired aim when firing.\(^{24}\)

- **Mental health issues and suicide:** Nearly 1 out of 10 undergraduates reported “seriously considering attempting suicide” and 1.4% had attempted suicide in the past 12 months.\(^{25}\) At
one large public university, 14% of undergraduates and 11% of graduate students screened positive for depression.26

The gun lobby claims that guns on campus is a Second Amendment issue - but the Supreme Court of the United States disagrees.

- Writing for the majority in District of Columbia v. Heller, Justice Scalia wrote that the Second Amendment right does not cast doubt on the validity of “laws forbidding the carrying of firearms in sensitive places such as schools ...”27


2 Bills were introduced in the following states in 2015: AR, CO, FL, IN, MI, MT, NC, NV, OK, OR, SC, SD, TN, TX, VA, WI, WV, WY. In 2016: AK, AL, AZ, GA, IN, KY, LA, MI, MO, MS, NH, OK, SC, TN, VA, WA, WI, WV. In 2017: AL, AR, CA, FL, GA, IA, IN, KS, KY, ME, MI, MN, MO, NC, NM, OK, SC, TN, WV, WY.

The possession, carrying, or use of any weapon, ammunition, or explosive by any person is prohibited on all University property except by authorized law enforcement officers and other persons specifically authorized by the University.


Virginia: The state Supreme Court has ruled that public schools are authorized by state law to prohibit carrying on university property in buildings and at events. The court also ruled that university regulation of firearms is not prohibited by either the state or federal constitution. DiGiacinto v. The Rector and Visitors of George Mason University, 281 Va. 127 (Va. 2011).

The state Attorney General has opined that state law also allows schools to regulate carrying generally by students and employees. 2006 Va. AG LEXIS 3.


West Virginia: W. Va. Code § 61-7-14 authorizes any entity that controls real property to prohibit carry.

Colorado: Students for Concealed Carry on Campus, LLC v. Regents of the Univ. of Colo., 2012 CO 17 (Co.).

Utah: Utah Code Ann. §§ 53-5a-102(4), 53B-3-103;

In Arkansas, Idaho and Mississippi, only people with “enhanced” carry permits may carry guns on campus.


Colleges and universities in Oregon and Wisconsin must allow guns on campus but prohibit them in university buildings.


Wisconsin: Wis. Stat. §§ 943.13(1m)(c), (bm)(2)(am), Wis. Adm. Code UWS 18.10. In Texas, university presidents may establish reasonable rules regarding the carrying of concealed handguns by permit holders, as long as the rules don’t generally prohibit permit holders from carrying concealed handguns on the campus. Texas Gov’t Code § 411.2031(d-1).

In Minnesota, colleges and universities must allow guns on campus but may prohibit students and employees from carrying on campus. Minn. Stat. § 624.714 Subd. 18.

Tennessee: In Tennessee, colleges and universities must allow full-time employees to carry guns to the campus where they work. Colleges and universities are allowed to prohibit full-time employees from carrying guns in certain specified buildings and areas on campus. 2016 S.B. 2376, codified at §§ 39-17-1309 (11) – (13).

In Georgia, public colleges must generally allow concealed guns on campus if they are carried by permit holders, but guns are not allowed to be carried in student housing (including fraternity and sorority houses), sporting events, preschool or child care facilities, at classes of certain specialized schools, in classes in which dually enrolled high school students are present, at faculty, staff, or administrative offices, or at disciplinary hearings. 2017 GA HB 280, codified at O.C.G.A. § 16-11.127.1.

Kansan: In Kansas, a 2013 law (2013 Kan. ALS 105) allows people to carry guns on public campuses, but allowed schools to opt out of those provisions for a maximum of four years. All public universities did so, but effective July 1, 2017, opting out will only be possible if the schools set up rigorous security measures. Kansas is also the only state where a permit is not required to carry a concealed handgun on campus. K.S.A. § 75-7c10(a)(11).


