

Evidence says guns on campus will make students less safe

Daniel L. Kaplan, My View 8:09 a.m. EST December 30, 2015



(Photo: Michele Edmunds)

The following is submitted collectively by the Florida State University College of Medicine Faculty Council Executive Committee, on behalf of the faculty at Florida State University College of Medicine:

We, the faculty of the Florida State University College of Medicine, stand with our president and Faculty Senate against the proposal to allow students and others to have concealed handguns, or openly carry handguns, on campus. The faculty supported this position in an open vote, 80 percent against allowing guns on campus.

We do not believe there is scientific or empirical evidence that having students carry guns on campus will reduce the threat of a shooter on campus. In fact, we believe that having students have guns on campus will likely increase the risk of the much more common accidental shooting or shooter using a gun in an argument or under the influence of alcohol or drugs. Researchers have also shown that where there are more guns present, there are more accidental gun deaths.

Suicide is the leading cause of death among college students, and access to lethal means is a strong predictor of suicide completion. Up to seven in 1,000 college students die by suicide every year. One in 10 college students have made a plan for suicide. Putting easy access guns in the hands of college students will likely have an increase in completed suicides.

The rate of problematic alcohol use on college campuses is widespread, which is directly tied to assaults, injuries and suicide. About 50 percent of college students binge drink. Again, increased access to guns on campus is likely to increase alcohol-related violent acts, injuries and deaths.

Additionally, the U.S. Department of Education has placed the overall homicide rate on college campuses at .07 per 100,000 persons. In comparison, the homicide rate in the United States for persons aged 17 to 29 is 14.1 per 100,000 persons, a rate 200 times that in the college population. College campuses are already the safest place for a young person to be. We should keep it so.

Finally, even staunch supporters of expanding access to handguns believe that guns should be kept out of the hands of those with mental illness. Unfortunately, the highest rate of mental illness of any age group is the college-age group: 18 to 25 years of age. Mental illness often starts in college aged persons with no history of problems, and limited ability of health care providers to predict when it will develop. These laws would open the door to perhaps the highest risk group in society.

We urge our legislators to make this decision on the available evidence, and not be swayed by the gun advocates and the NRA. We also strongly urge additional research funding at the state and national level in order to get scientific evidence of the best way to reduce gun violence and injuries.

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