First-Year Composition
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The Dangerous Illusion of "Gun-Free Campuses"

"The world is filled with violence. Because criminals carry guns, we decent law-abiding citizens should also have guns. Otherwise they will win and the decent people will lose."

-- James Earl Jones

Decent, law-abiding citizens lost at Columbine High School, when two armed teenagers on a shooting-rampage killed twelve students and a teacher in cold blood without opposition, while injuring another 21 before committing suicide. They lost at Virginia Tech, when a lone gunman killed 32 students and wounded many others, also unopposed, before committing suicide. They lost at the University of Alabama, when a Harvard-educated biology professor unexpectedly opened fire on her colleagues, killing three and wounding three others. Because of laws and regulations designed to "protect students" and "create a safe learning environment" by creating the illusion of safety, the victims of these atrocities were completely defenseless and at the mercy of their assailants, who knew their targets would not have the means to fight back.

College campuses and K-12 school zones are among the few places in America today where our citizens(even those who possess valid concealed weapons carry permits) are not allowed to exercise their constitutionally guaranteed 2nd Amendment right to keep and bear arms for personal defense, all in the name of "safety." Yet, in the past decade, we have heard far too many tragic stories involving students who commit random acts of violence against their teachers and classmates. These incidents expose the unsettling truth about the effectiveness of so-called, "gun-free zones," which is that instead of creating "safe" environments for students, they actually create a target-rich environment for potential gunmen looking for their five minutes

of infamy. Rather than rely on the dangerously naïve hope that future incidents will be prevented by hanging up more signs proclaiming "gun-free zone," we must empower our citizens to defend themselves by closing legal loopholes that allow schools to deny our private citizens their right to bear arms. At the same time, we must strengthen gun laws to prevent people with a history of criminal behavior and/or mental instability from acquiring them.

To be clear, the only individuals who would be able to carry concealed weapons on campuses under this proposal are those students and teachers who already hold or are eligible for valid state licenses to carry them (i.e., persons over the age of 21 with no felonies or other criminal behavior on their records, who have taken state-mandated weapons-safety and training courses). These individuals are already authorized to carry their weapons to most other public places including movie theaters, malls, churches, and little league baseball games; yet, on school campuses, they must leave their weapons behind. This is a questionable double-standard. Why do we allow them means of self-defense everywhere else, but force them to be defenseless in the classroom?

Many school administrators rely on nothing but a "gut feeling" that having more guns present is not the answer. They argue that it is counter-intuitive, and perhaps it does seem that way at first glance, but in reality, there is no statistical data anywhere that suggests an increase in *legal* firearms will lead to an increase in violence. In fact, quite the contrary. Several college administrations have made the decision to go against the status quo and allow concealed carry on campus, and the results are powerful. Consider Colorado State University for example. According to a CSU Police Department crime study covering the years 1998-2008, prior to allowing concealed carry on campus in 2003, it was experiencing between 500-800 crimes per year. After the policy change, however, that number dropped steadily each year until it reached a

low of approximately 200 in 2007(Students for Concealed Carry on Campus). Next, consider Utah. Since the fall semester of 2006, state law has allowed licensed individuals to carry concealed handguns on eleven of its public campuses. In the time between then and now, "none of these schools has seen a single resulting incident of gun-violence (including threats and suicides), a single gun accident, or a single gun theft"(Students for Concealed Carry on Campus).

Still, even in light of these examples, and after the horrors at Virginia Tech(VT), administrators are reluctant to admit that their policies endanger students. Not too long before the shootings, commenting on the defeat of a bill that would have allowed students and employees the right to carry handguns on campus, VT spokesman, Larry Hincker, was happy to hear the bill defeated. "I'm sure the university community is appreciative…because this will help parents, students, faculty, and visitors feel safe on our campus"(Esposito). How about now, Larry?

Amazingly, even after that terrible incident occurred, Hincker, and many others like him, believes students should be unarmed and defenseless. A permit-carrying student at VT wrote an article for the *Roanoke Times* soon after the shooting claiming, "I felt defenseless… I never want to have my safety fully in the hands of anyone else [again], including the police" (Wiles). Hincker, discounted his statement by saying, "I can't believe he really wants to say that." (Hincker). Yes, Mr. Hincker, he did mean that because when it comes down to someone pulling a gun on you, the only defense you have is yourself. Police are powerless, since they are almost entirely a *reactive* force. Most shooting exchanges between a gunman and his victims are over long before police can arrive after a call for help and try to figure out what is going on before they act.

When Seung-Hui Cho began his attack on the campus of Virginia Tech three years ago, he knew he would have little to no opposition because the great majority of students and faculty

members are law-abiding citizens and would obey the prohibitions on personally owned concealed weapons. Armed with this comforting knowledge in addition to his Glock 19 and Walther P22 pistols, he moved freely about the campus for several hours, killing a total of thirty-two people with almost no resistance as expected. Nineteen of these victims were eligible to carry a concealed weapon. Of course, most of them would still not have anyway even if they been allowed to do so. However, it may only have taken one or two individuals to stop him.

Let us analyze the situation a gunman faces when he enters the hallways and classrooms of a school building. He knows that more likely than not he's the only person there with a gun(and thus, all of the power). He knows that it will probably take at least five to fifteen minutes for police to respond to the scene after a call for help goes out, giving him ample time to fire as many rounds as he pleases before anyone will arrive to oppose him with another gun. He also knows that his chances of causing a lot of damage in a short period of time are very good because in each classroom he will find what we Marines refer to somewhat crassly as, "the machine gunner's wet dream." This is the concentration of a high number of targets in a small but open area at close range, requiring little accuracy for numerous vital hits. In almost no time at all, a gunman could fire several magazines worth of rounds into a single classroom, firing across the room down rows of students who have nowhere to go. In one horrific moment, normally innocent classrooms because killboxes.

Now imagine how different that scenario could be if a teacher or student in the same classroom or down the hall was legally carrying a concealed weapon. He could react quickly to the sound of gunshots, and return fire against the attacker, potentially stopping him before he could move to the next group of victims, or distracting him so that others could take him down. It is vital to create that sense of uncertainty in the shooter's mind. We need him to second guess

himself and wonder what he will be facing. While the presence of legal weapons will not always completely prevent acts of random violence in schools through deterrence, they *can* do a lot to minimize the damage they cause.

Unfortunately, this particular debate has been muddled by the political agendas of both sides, including the pro-gun lobby led by the NRA which acts as though it would give every man, woman, and child in America a firearm regardless of qualifications or personal record, and the anti-gun left, which acts as though it would rather eliminate guns everywhere, no matter who owns them. This dichotomy of ideas is a fallacy in itself because it misleads and misinforms the public debate overall. The NRA is correct in supporting our citizens' rights to self-defense via the 2nd Amendment, but it is wrong in opposing laws like the Brady Act, which aims to require background checks for all firearms purchases to prevent criminals and the mentally unstable from acquiring new firearms. The left is wrong because its attempts to disarm our citizens are irresponsible and violate the 2nd Amendment. We must find a compromise and close dangerous loopholes in existing laws, although some progress has been made. In the year after the shooting at VT, Congress passed a law intended to "close the wide gaps in our nation's firearm background-check system" (Simon). However, there is still much work to do. Because of some conflicting privacy laws that need to be resolved, seventeen states still do not provide the kind of mental health records to the National Instant Background Checking System(NICS) that would have stopped Cho from purchasing firearms.

Still, no matter how much progress we make, we need to be realistic with our expectations. We will never be able to prevent every incident like these, regardless of how good our prevention programs and systems are and whether or not we allow students and faculty with permits to carry concealed weapons. The simple and sad fact of the matter is there will always be

people who are able to acquire firearms who should not have them. Furthermore, with the element of surprise, a person can get off quite a few rounds in just a few seconds before anyone can respond. Our goal in evaluating and implementing effective policies should be to minimize the damage caused by these rogue gunmen, and the only reliable way to stop a gunman on a killing spree is to kill him before he kills you. Because the majority of the individuals who plan and carry out these attacks expect to die or kill themselves after the attack, they are even more dangerous. Only firearms can fight back against firearms. I don't know about you, but I for one do not feel comfortable hiding from a madman with a gun and dodging bullets for however long it takes for the police to arrive.

Ideally no student or other person would ever carry weapons into gun-free zones just because they are told not to, but we need to be realistic, and pass laws supported by these statistics and case studies because they demonstrate what actually happens in society, rather than what should happen, or what we are afraid may happen. We can sit around all day in the musty halls of academia and discuss the ideals of how things should be, but in the end, there is always a marked difference between what people should do, and what they actually do in practice. Officials with the power to change these policies must not be satisfied with creating the mere illusion of safety. If allowed to carry them, law-abiding people will use their guns for good purposes, while the criminals will use them for evil regardless of the laws we pass to restrict them. Thus, if university administrations do not change these policies and permit our citizens to exercise their right to self-defense using concealed weapons, the criminals will win, and we may as well replace all "No Firearms Allowed" signs on campuses with signs that read, "ATTENTION TWISTED SOCIOPATHS AND CRIMINALS: GUN FREE ZONE: *All law-*

Abiding faculty, staff, and students of this institution have been disarmed for your convenience!"[1]

[1] Inspired by a sign created by the organization "Students for Concealed Carry on Campus."

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