

Open Carry Closes Discussions

The foremost place that people can feel safe is their own home. The second place where you should feel safe is your school. As you grow older and progress to higher education, you start to pay attention to your surroundings and the changes in society. Some people notice this new sense of awareness and utilize it. Others take a little longer to adjust to this new change. Some people just ignore these occurrences. They repress their feelings and keep their views silent. For some people, it takes a tragedy or a horrific event to get people involved. For me, it was a loud and sudden bang that made me realize who I am and what I believe in.

The 2015 spring semester finals started with the usual last minute panic and worry. Graduate and undergraduate students rushed to their classes from their heavily fought for parking spots. The sun shone brightly on campus, almost teasing the students as they regrettably entered the building to take their exams. I was briskly walking among the haphazard students, going over my Texas Probate final review in my head. A student stepped in front of me, blocking the building entrance, handed me a pamphlet. He said,

“Spread your voice. Fight the right to have concealed weapons on campus.”

The student was a stereotypical “country boy.” He was wearing steel toed boots, a John Deere shirt, a camouflage hat, and matching camouflage pants. The pamphlet provided information encouraging students to vote for open carry on campus. He gave a lecture of how it is a legal right for us not only as US citizens, but as college students. His monologue faded from my attention as my mind became overwhelmed at the thought of stressed and overwhelmed Texas college students bringing guns to campus. I had heard a lot of heated debates about the effort to reverse the restrictions on guns. I assumed these pro carry advocates were just trying to

get attention and not considering the potential spike in violence on college campuses. I never voiced my opinion because I believed the issue wasn't worth my time or attention. I wasn't even registered to vote.

The tobacco flavored spit from the student's frothing mouth accidentally hit my face and mouth. This brought me back to reality from utter disbelief. I excused myself, muttering that I was late for my final and left him in the middle of his speech. After thoroughly washing my face in the bathroom, I entered my classroom late, but thankfully the professor was giving his speech on how well we are all going to do and trying to alleviate our stress and anxiety. I pushed the incident out of my mind, forgot about the student, and concentrated on my Probate final.

The summer semester started and I entered my Family Law class on time with no one stopping me. I sat next to my friend Katie and her 5 year old daughter Lisa. My professor welcomed us back and told us some news. Governor Abbot signed the Texas Open Carry Bill for Concealed Handgun Holders or HB910 into law in Austin. On January 1, 2016, open carry of a handgun is legal in Texas if the carrier has a license under HB910. My professor also informed us that another bill that was signed by the governor was the Campus Carry bill. My mind immediately went blank as we were told that the second new law will allow licensed concealed carry permit holders to carry on college campuses. Most of the class was silent, but a few scattered people gave out cheers and shouts of glee. This new statute would also include guns in classrooms, dormitories and other college buildings.

My professor studied our reaction, walked around his desk and leaned against it. A big and wide grin stretched across his experienced and knowledgeable face, like a kid discovering a new game to play. Instead of moving past the news and discussing today's lesson, he took a poll from the class.

“How many here think this is a good idea?”

Some hands were raised. He then asked who thought it wasn't a good idea. Several hands quickly rose into the air. The results of the poll were pretty much equal. His agile eyes scanned the students in the class that didn't raise their hands. I was one of them.

“Ok then, how many here are Legal Studies students?”

This time, all the hands went up.

“If you don't participate, you don't get the participation grade for today.”

A silent tremor went through the class. I felt my eyes widen in fear and my professor noticed. Before I could mentally wish in my head that he wouldn't choose me, he pointed his finger at me and said,

“Do you think concealed handguns should be allowed on college campuses?”

My mind was blank. I felt my throat and tongue shrivel and dry up. I couldn't speak. My fingers clenched the edges of my seat. I shook my head at him, staying silent.

“A good lawyer's bread and butter, is talking. You have to be skilled at public speaking. You must be able to speak your mind in front of a group of people or to another person.”

My fingers were starting to hurt from gripping the chair even tighter.

“You are going to be in the wrong profession if you avoid speaking.”

I closed my eyes and I placed my hands on my desk. My heart was beating so fast and loud against my chest, I thought the entire class could hear it. My professor repeated himself.

“Do you think concealed handguns should be allowed on college campuses?”

I finally opened my mouth and said no.

“Please clarify your stance.”

I took a few deep breathes and continued.

“The presence of concealed handguns will interfere with the learning environment.”

My professor kept asking me questions.

“Please explain why you believe that?”

“People go to college to find themselves. Be inspired, to question, meet people from different backgrounds and walks of life. People get anxious and nervous around guns.”

A few people mumbled and nodded their heads. Another student brought up a possible situation.

“A lot of students would be more anxious of taking classes on campus.”

“All the more reason to take online classes.” Katie added. “Universities have daycare centers. I will not bring my daughter to campus anymore.”

Her daughter, Lisa, was watching a movie on her iPad through her earphones.

Thankfully, she was oblivious to the conversation around her.

A random student asked when the bill will come into effect. My professor continued.

“Concealed handguns will be allowed on this campus and all other public universities on August 1st, 2016. The public and junior community colleges will allow concealed handguns the following year.”

It took almost a minute for me to remember the significance of that day.

“That is the anniversary of the University of Texas shootings back in the 60’s.”

Another silent tremor went through the class and my teacher confirmed my revelation.

“Yes, it will be the 50th anniversary. Kind of a weird coincidence isn’t it?”

“A few people could argue that it is an ugly coincidence.” I added.

Out of nowhere, random and loud conversations and outbursts started in the classroom. A student, whom I have never met before in my life, turned around and started yelling at me. His eyes were wide and glaring, his mouth was wide and he bared his teeth as he spoke, and his finger was inches away from my face.

A loud bang reverberated through the classroom. The sound immediately silenced the chaotic and noisy classroom. We all looked at the professor picking up his textbook from the ground with a big smile on his face.

“Thank you,” he said.

I leaned forward and said,

“See? Books are better guns. You can make loud noises without the risk of killing someone.”

A few scattered chuckles resonated from the crowd and the professor gave me a look that said, “*Enough.*”

“In my 400 years as a probate lawyer and a family law lawyer...” my professor admitted to us. A few of us chuckled at his joke. “I’ve never had the need to use a firearm. I do have a gun with a license.” He looked at the class. They scanned his desk and his waist for a holster. He

smiled and raised his arms and patted himself down in front of us. “Don’t worry, it’s in a locked drawer in my office off campus.” He sat back on the edge of his desk and kept on talking.

“If it were up to me, we would spend all class talking about this and other issues, but this is a Family Law class, not a debate class. The purpose of this discussion was to get you involved and be part of current events. You got to be involved in where you live, your opinion and your voice matters. It doesn’t matter how different your opinion is, you deserve to bring it up and talk about it.”

My professor then picked up his book, told us what page to turn to and started the lecture.

Texas colleges are anxiously preparing for guns on campus in the hands of students. The new law “requires a gun owner wishing to bring a weapon indoors on campus to have a concealed handgun license, which requires individuals to be 21 years old, have no criminal background and meet certain safety requirements” (McGaughy). There are several colleges that have been opposed to the idea of campus carry since its inception. “Nowhere has the outcry against campus carry been louder than here in Austin. When state lawmakers were mulling the bill earlier this year, students, staff and professors at UT went to the Capitol in droves to testify against it” (McGaughy). Certain colleges have even prohibited guns on campus, in spite of the law. “Rice, Baylor, St. Mary’s and Southern Methodist universities, already have rules banning guns on campus” (McGaughy). The University of Texas in Austin has strongly opposed the passing of this bill. Even though fifty years are about to pass since the tragic shooting, the faculty and staff at UT stand firm against the open carry. Members of the faculty voiced their outrage over the new law. Professors have rallied, formed petitions and one “professor emeritus has

announced he will fully retire because of the law.” (McGauhy) The opposing side argues that there are fallacies about the new campus carry legislation. Allen Fletcher, a Texas State Representative from Cypress, said, “the law will have little impact because of the community of student carriers would be relatively small, due to the age of and background restrictions” (McGaughy). It doesn’t take an army or a militia to cause havoc at a school. All it takes is one person with one gun. One person walked into a church in Charleston, South Carolina and killed nine people. Every human being has the potential to do good or evil.

Albus Dumbledore, a wise and powerful character from the Harry Potter series, said “it matters not what someone is born, but what they grow to be” (Rowling 708). This controversy about guns on campus has taught me that ethics involves and affects every aspect of our lives. It has also taught me that just because a certain region of the United States has a reputation or even a stereotype of being “pro-gun” doesn’t mean that every person feels or believes that is the right way to live or function in society. Your roots are influential part of your beliefs, but they are only a part of it. You have to take into account the family you grew up with, the friends you associate yourself with, the things you have witnessed and experienced and a lot of soul searching. Your actions and reactions in life ultimately decide who you are.

Socrates once said that “the unexamined life is not worth living” (Plato). This ethical issue has taught me that you can’t allow controversial matters to resolve themselves or ignore them and hope they go away. What could seem as something you only see on TV can eventually be a part of your life. Everyone has the right and the duty to debate and decide the issues that

plague the nation. As a person who was born and raised in Texas, I believe it is ethically and morally wrong to allow concealed weapons on college campuses. More value should be placed on the safety of college students and preserving the learning environment of college campuses. The presence of concealed handguns will cause a major ripple effect across Texas college campuses. Many Texas students will have that haunting, anxious feeling that any day and any moment, someone can pull a gun out and fire it. The demand for online courses will rise on Texas college campuses. Online courses are convenient and are great help for people who are stay at home parents, disabled, or students who have full time jobs. Many students prefer direct contact with professors and hands on learning. I am a strong proponent of that type of education. The newly passed legislation puts me and other students in an internal conflict. We must risk going to campus and pray nothing happens, or lose the advantages and expertise provided by on campus instructors. It is not unusual to have older students come back to college to finish, or for some, even start their college education. Older generations of students greatly struggle with our constantly evolving technology. They would have to rely on family members to access their courses or stumble with the technology themselves. The older generation of students would also have to choose risk going to campus and hope nothing bad happens, or suffer through their lack of technological experience. Overall, college enrollment will deteriorate. More professors would be more hesitant to address controversial matters. Fear and suspicion will inhibit the free thinking and imagination of the classroom. I would send my children to out of state colleges that do not implement open carry.

Most children dread going to school. Alternatively, adults go to college to find themselves. College is where you find your passion. College is the place where you meet people

and discuss new ideas. All those things are the purpose of college. The gun exists to kill or to cause harmful injury. Yes, that statement is biased. If I ask the question, “what are guns used for?” The answers I could get back are “hunting, self-defense, or as an example of my right as a citizen of the United States.” Let’s talk about when happens when a gun is fired. The bullet is fired at a high, deadly velocity. Anyone or anything that is caught in the crossfire will be hit and can potentially be killed or seriously injured. You don’t have to go to college to know that the gun has a long and bloody history. Different types and variations of guns have been used in wars, bloody conflicts and assassinations all over the world. A gun was used to kill John Lennon. A gun was used to assassinate John Fitzgerald Kennedy in Dallas. A gun was used to kill Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife which ultimately led to a world war. No matter the length, the materials it was crafted from, or the type of firearm, they are built and sold to kill. It is almost sacrilegious to bring a weapon into an environment where ideas can be argued over and be discussed freely. When ideas and beliefs are challenged, students can get emotional and lose perspective. A professor at Stephen F. Austin University describes what a gun does to people and the environment around it. “A gun brings all of that to a stop. Like a magnet, it draws the eye. It stops the learning process. It interrupts the conversation, the debate, the essential freedom of the classroom. If you've ever been in a store, a coffee shop perhaps, and a police officer walks in, holstered, you've noticed the attention drawn to the officer, the way people sit up a little stiffer. You've felt the unease that stifles the air, changing the atmosphere. Attention is paid, but to the wrong center. The guns will without a doubt change the atmosphere of universities.” (Woo) No matter the reason for a gun, for sport or protection, the end is result is always harmful intentions and death. Keep the ideas and books in the classroom, no guns allowed.

As a Legal Studies student, I do believe that the US Constitution and the Bill of Rights should be relevant in the United States and its citizens. However, I also believe that translation of the Constitution has to be agreed upon and updated to society's modern needs. In the past, the government has added amendments to fix the nation's problems. The government added amendment's centering on women's rights, minority's rights, limiting the president's power and limiting Congresses' power. The last amendment that was added to the Constitution was back in 1992. We are long overdue on adding a new amendment. The problem with guns will not go away and will always appear on the news. The same mistakes are always broadcasted on the media "it was a misfire, a person or a group was using it for lethal purposes, or just another accident." If the problem is too many gun shootings on schools, you make harder and better restrictions to keep them out. You don't invite the problem in and make it more available. The world is still in shock and mourning the victims of the terrorist attacks in Paris and just weeks ago, San Bernardino, California. The lives and safety of college students shouldn't be in jeopardy just because people still believe in an outdated amendment which is pretty vague and debated over constantly. It is heartbreaking to see senseless death on national media. Schools like Columbine, Virginia Tech, and more recently, Umpqua Community College will always be haunted and marred by their own student's blood and death. I can't even imagine the pain of seeing your alma mater, your child's college, or your workplace on the news with a headline blaring "SCHOOL SHOOTING." More students will die on Texas college campuses because of "accidental shootings and crossfire from someone trying to play the hero in the event of a campus shooter" (McGaughy). More tragedy and death will come due to irresponsible legislation. This new law does not represent my rights to a safe education. As a student, I have enjoyed the freedom of being able to discuss ideas safely with other students and being

challenged because of my inner beliefs. Everyone should have the privilege of that personal growth. That can only happen in a safe and secure environment.

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