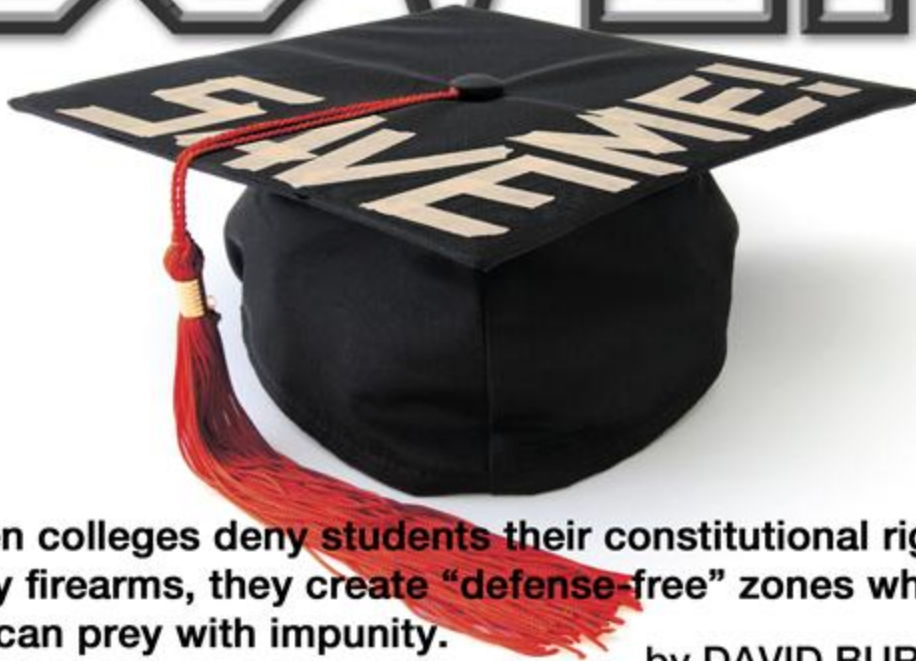


COLLEGES REVEAL THEIR PLAN TO
KEEP STUDENTS FROM BECOMING
VICTIMS OF ON-CAMPUS VIOLENCE:

DUCK & COVER



When colleges deny students their constitutional right to carry firearms, they create “defense-free” zones where evil can prey with impunity.

by DAVID BURNETT

It was nothing less than a morning of sheer terror.

If you asked any student on the quiet campus of Virginia Tech on the morning of April 16, 2007, most would have told you they felt safe. As they gathered their backpacks, pencils and textbooks and prepared to go about their day, no one imagined the sleepy town of Blacksburg, Va., would be the stage for the worst college shooting in U.S. history.

One of the students feeling particularly safe that morning was a mentally disturbed youth--he would want his name to be printed here, but we won't--whose plans differed radically from those of his classmates. Instead of textbooks and calculators, his plan involved two handguns and 400 rounds of ammunition.

Despite his psychological problems, he showed deliberate and calculated strategy in selecting his target. There's no doubt he felt safe planning and carrying out his attack, since just the previous year Virginia Tech officials "heroically" defeated a bill allowing lawful concealed carry on campus. The officials were jubilant at their victory, certain that the bill's defeat would help students "feel safe." They realized too late that feeling safe and being safe were two different things--the bill's failure guaranteed that no one was capable of resisting an armed killer.

Walking into a dormitory, the shooter began by gunning down two students. It took two hours before officials alerted students to the murders. During that interval, police arrived and began investigating, the killer mailed videotaped rants and a manifesto to NBC and Virginia Tech officials privately warned their own families and secured their own offices. What school officials didn't do, however, was warn students that their safety that morning might be in jeopardy, as required by federal law. A review by the U.S. Department of Education released in May found that Virginia Tech failed to take prompt action in warning the campus community of the possibility of danger after the bodies of the two students were found, in accordance with a mandate called the Clery Act.

More than two hours later, with police still on campus, the perpetrator entered Norris Hall and began murdering more students. One survivor later stated that the total randomness of the killing was still hard to get over; without the ability to resist, the choice of life or death rested solely in the hands of a mentally deranged killer. Eventually, realizing armed officers were approaching, he took one final life--his own.

In nine minutes he fired 174 shots, killed 32 people and wounded 15--traumatizing a whole campus and leaving an entire nation to grieve. Although the massacre was devastating, it could have been far worse: The killer missed with 73 percent of his shots, and he had more than 200 rounds remaining.

The Virginia Tech story is familiar to anyone who followed the news in 2007. Killing sprees aren't new, but it was the first time in decades that a college campus was hit, or that so many died.

What is less well known is that there have been more than a dozen other college shootings since Virginia Tech. You probably didn't hear about most of them because there wasn't enough blood to earn a cover story, but each of these attacks had one thing in common. They all occurred under the same banner: "gun-free zone."

The Final Frontier

Colleges fight hard for these "gun-free" zones, wearing them as a badge of honor. They even advertise their campuses as being defense-free.

As Right-to-Carry freedoms have expanded in recent years, such legally sanctioned victim disarmament zones have dwindled. State legislators and average Americans are realizing that gun-free zones appeal to only two groups of people: the irrational, unreasonable anti-gun crowd ... and killers.

College campuses represent one of the final frontiers in the fight for concealed carry.

In many ways, this is one of the most vital battles. It is here, under the careful tutelage of mostly left-leaning professors, that the best and brightest are challenging their worldviews and forming new ones. And it is here that students are deluded into believing that they are safer when disarmed. The future is being fashioned in these classrooms, and it doesn't bode well for America's freedoms.

But there is hope. A new generation of freedom's defenders is rising up to take a stand for its rights, and demanding an end to discrimination against law-abiding armed citizens.

The Next Generation

Students for Concealed Carry on Campus (SCCC) was formed in direct response to the Virginia Tech shootings. The group's goal? Stop pretending a piece of paper taped to the door will stop a killer.

Originally, the group started out on the social networking site Facebook. But after another psychopathic killing spree at Northern Illinois University, the group began receiving national attention. Suddenly major news agencies were investigating whether Right-to-Carry could deter killers at colleges. Group membership quickly blossomed into more than 40,000 supporters.

The organization began holding "empty holster protest" events at colleges nationwide. As a symbol of their forced defenselessness, students strapped on empty holsters while attending class. The most recent protest in April included thousands of students at more than 130 colleges.

Educational activities such as concealed carry classes, gun safety lessons or other firearms training are held at some schools. Other members sponsor debates, speaking events or free days at the range for professors.

For the first time in the history of the gun rights movement, the youth of America are stepping up to take the lead.

Gun Hatred Of The Enlightened

Colleges' responses have proven interesting. Many turn deaf ears to students lobbying for their rights. Others have shown they're no longer content to tread on just one amendment.

In Texas, some students were forbidden from wearing empty holsters on campus, until a federal judge stepped in and enforced their right to free speech.

In Michigan, some professors wanted to cancel classes, based only on their fear of empty holsters.

In Kentucky, despite a workplace protection law allowing employees to keep guns in cars without reprisal, one university fired a graduate student for having a handgun locked in his car on campus property. The car, incidentally, was parked more than a mile away while the student was busy saving lives in the university hospital emergency room.

The criticisms of allowing guns on campus fly fast and thick:

- Guns and alcohol don't mix.
- Students aren't responsible enough.
- Guns will lead to more violence.

Such criticisms come not just from the hackneyed gun-ban crowd, but from the "enlightened" university officials and campus police chiefs. Somehow, opponents of campus carry believe responsible adults with concealed carry permits are actually dormant criminals, just waiting for the law to sanction guns on campus before cutting loose with sprees of violent crime.

It's definitely not the story they tell when advertising their colleges or soliciting donations.

Legislative Victories

Despite the heavy-handed opposition of colleges and anti-gun groups (who accused SCCC of being another arm of the so-called "gun lobby"), the protests drew the attention of state legislators.

Since 2007, 22 states have considered legislation allowing lawful concealed carry on campus. While many of these bills stalled in committee, Arizona, South Carolina and Georgia passed laws at least allowing guns to be kept in parked cars on campus. (Note that most colleges ban guns in cars, daring to extend their authority even to commuting students' drives to and from the schools).

Presently, 25 states ban guns on college campuses, eight of them leave it to universities to set their rules, and some states don't address the issue at all, which sometimes creates legal gray areas.

It Works When It's Tried

As usual, the ignorant criticisms of expanding Right-to-Carry fall flat when compared to reality. Every public university in Utah has allowed concealed handguns on campus since 2006, with no misfires, accidental shootings or incidents of any kind reported. Likewise, Blue Ridge Community College in Virginia has allowed concealed carry on campus for years with zero complaints.

Guns became permissible on some campuses in Michigan in 2009 when law enforcement officials refused to enforce Michigan State University's non-binding ban on weapons. The school changed its policy to reflect state law, which prohibits concealed carry only in dorms, stadiums and classrooms.

But perhaps the greatest illustration of the difference between victim disarmament and victim empowerment--and its effect on crime--is found in Colorado.

Two schools stand in stark contrast on the issue. After Colorado became a shall-issue Right-to-Carry state in 2003, Colorado State University (CSU) chose to comply with the law and allow concealed carry on campus. Though certainly there are other factors at play, the school's crime rate has steadily declined ever since, dropping from 800 crimes in 2002 to 200 in 2008. Sexual offenses alone dropped from 47 in 2002 to only two in 2008. James Alderden, the county sheriff and a gun rights supporter, reports absolutely no problems from permit-holders.

Meanwhile, the University of Colorado (CU), which banned guns, has experienced a dramatic increase in crime. In contrast to CSU's 61 percent drop in the last five years, CU crime is up 37 percent.

Shockingly, citing "risks" of allowing guns on campus, CSU moved to ban concealed carry on campus in the spring of 2010--despite hundreds of students petitioning against the ban, and a near-unanimous vote from student government. Sheriff Alderden vehemently opposed the unconstitutional ban, declaring his jail off-limits to anyone arresting lawfully armed students, and vowing to testify in defense of anyone prosecuted for being armed.

Just before press time, under pressure from SCCC, CSU announced it would rescind its planned prohibition on concealed carry, leaving students there better able to defend themselves against criminals. More than a dozen other community colleges in Colorado subsequently changed their policies to allow concealed carry on campus.

Too Dangerous?

Clearly the data show that concealed carry works as a deterrent on a college campus. Yet even some gun owners think back to their college days, picture their sons or daughters on a campus full of students and question the wisdom of allowing concealed weapons on campus. Despite the knowledge that anyone carrying a firearm would already have to meet several stringent requirements to possess a permit, some pro-gun parents even question if such a proposal is too dangerous.

The better question to ponder is, isn't it too dangerous not to allow concealed carry? Gun-free zones only serve to protect killers by ensuring they will face no resistance.

College campuses may be safer than the average city, but that doesn't mean they're safe. Statistics show there are nine sexual assaults per day on campuses nationwide. Imagine your loved one, perhaps a son or daughter, sitting in a classroom targeted by a killer. Or picture your daughter, niece or granddaughter walking home from the library late at night and being ambushed by a serial rapist. Colleges must be held accountable for forcing these victims to be disarmed and helpless as a condition of admittance.

Colleges often argue that "kids" aren't responsible enough to carry a gun--a senseless argument since most state laws don't authorize concealed carry until the age of 21. These "kids" can drive a car at 16 and get married, get a mortgage and join the military at 18. There's something backward when the same "kids" who defend our nation with M16s are somehow too dangerous to carry .38s for self-defense on college campuses.

The fact that taxpayer-funded colleges can force Right-to-Carry permit holders to surrender their Second Amendment rights upon crossing the invisible (and unsecured) borders of their campuses should anger every sensible American.

Consider The Alternatives

Police took nine minutes to reach the Virginia Tech killer. Northern Illinois University police took two minutes to confront the attacker at their school. And at the University of Alabama (Huntsville), where a Harvard-trained professor is accused of shooting six of her colleagues, the campus police station was literally next door to the site of the murder. Nevertheless, police could not prevent these crimes.

When a college doesn't secure its borders and the students' only alternatives for responding to attacks include huddling together (presenting the best possible target for a murderer), dialing 9-1-1 and playing dead, something is indeed wrong and has to change.

These students need--and deserve--your help. Braving the wrath of the academic class, they are boldly insisting that colleges get serious about safety and stop pretending signs and rules will protect them. With minimal funding and maximum efforts, student activists have brought the issue to national exposure, called out the vulnerability and inaction of colleges, and successfully prompted legislation to be heard in nearly half the states in the union.

This battle isn't just for student rights--it's for the rights of every single American. Our future is being shaped in these classrooms. We must continue the fight to ensure that future is bright, safe and free.

DAVID BURNETT is the director of public relations for Students for Concealed Carry on Campus. For more information, visit www.concealedcampus.org.