Paper #2: Guns on Campus Case Analysis

PLCY 201

Due: 10/17/19

Question*:* ***Should UMD students who legally possess a gun be allowed to carry concealed firearms on campus?***

Across the country, there is a controversial debate on whether students should be able to carry concealed firearms on college campuses. Currently, at the University of Maryland (UMD), students who have permits to legally possess a gun are not allowed to carry on campus. Concealed firearms on UMD’s campus should continue to be prohibited because it would interfere with learning, it would be an unnecessary self-defense tool, and it would pose a variety of serious safety risks to the community.

The presence of guns on UMD’s campus would create an uncomfortable environment and interfere with students’ education. If at any given time in class, students were aware that there could potentially be fellow students armed with deadly weapons around them, it could create an environment of paranoia. An atmosphere consisting of worries and anxiety is not the ideal atmosphere that should exist within a classroom. If students aren’t fully comfortable in class, their ability to focus and to learn will weaken. Especially during class discussions or debates, students may restrict what they say because of the fear that someone with opposing views may have a gun on them and could react irrationally if pushed too far. Some may argue, since the weapon is concealed, others will not be able to tell who carries and who doesn’t. They suggest that this would reduce the anxiety that other students experience when in the presence of guns. On the contrary, at the University of Houston, students have reported that it is still often noticeable if someone has a gun on their belt even if its underneath their clothes (O’Connor). Regardless, the fact that students have no idea who has a gun and who doesn’t can be even more intimidating. Also, this specifically makes it difficult for groups such as the LGBT community to feel comfortable because the thought of someone who is homophobic/transphobic/etc. possibly being armed is frightening. This would cause their community to struggle even more to speak up for themselves, considering the common hateful remarks this group receives. Another student at the University of Houston told *BuzzFeed News*, “I already feel it affecting my education” (O’Connor). A university should be a place where students feel safe and at ease, especially in a place like a classroom. UMD students should be able to focus on their education and not have to worry about the possible presence of a deadly weapon around them.

Allowing concealed carry on UMD’s campus for self-defense is not worth the previously stated effects it would have on students in the classroom. Advocates for concealed carry argue that people should have the right to carry guns in order to feel safe. While this may be true for some, for others the idea of people around them carrying weapons may make them feel more at risk. According to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution,* the schools that have implemented the right for students to carry have had little to no positive impact. For example, Downey states that in the first three months of the new law in effect allowing students to carry concealed weapons, there were no reports of a concealed firearm being used for self-defense. In addition, Downey mentions, her “research of campuses in other “campus carry” states like Utah and Texas also had no reports of anyone using a gun to stop a crime for *years*.” This shows that there really is not a pressing need for students to have guns on campus. On the other hand, some people argue that in the event they would need to use a gun, they would be able to defend themselves and those around them. The use of a gun for self-defense may sound ideal; however, this is a weapon that could easily take a human’s life. Killing or even severely injuring is not essential for protecting oneself. There are other alternatives of self-defense that those who feel uncomfortable on campus can use. Students can take precautions such as avoiding walking alone at night, being aware of one’s surroundings, or even learning self-defense skills by taking a class. In addition, if these options are still not enough, having something less life-threatening to protect oneself such as mace or a pocketknife would be a better and more realistic approach. Plus, the only incidents at College Park this year have typically been off campus, making concealed carry unnecessary on campus. UMD also offers a multitude of resources that students have access to that promote safety on campus. There are Blue Light Emergency Phones, NITE Rides, walking escorts, and campus police patrolling through the campus that all limit the chances of students being put in dangerous situations. Overall, there are many other options when it comes to feeling safe on campus that take away the need for concealed carry.

Besides the fact that there are so many other ways for students to protect themselves, guns also pose major safety risks for the carrier and those around them. Those who support guns on campus suggest that since those who carry are trained and licensed, they can be trusted to use the firearm in only self-defense situations; therefore, causing no harm to innocent people. Although these students are trained, unfortunately, accidents do still happen. For example, according to *Houston Public Media*, in 2017, “a License to Carry (LTC) holder accidentally discharged his gun in his Texas A&M dorm room.” Also, “in February pistols were found in women’s restrooms at the University of Texas on two separate occasions” (Martin). The chance of similar events occurring put everyone on campus at risk. The fact that these accidents are preventable and could be avoided all together is one of the main reasons why students at UMD should not be allowed to have concealed firearms. Another reason why concealed carry should be prohibited is that there are several grounds for confusion that would result in safety issues. For example, there are supposed to be exclusion zones on campuses where carriers must remove and check their gun with the police before entering. Some argue that this would give students who are not comfortable around guns a place to feel safe in. The problem with this is that staff are not allowed to ask whether someone can legally carry a gun or not (Downey). This means that anyone could bring a gun almost anywhere on campus without being questioned because it would be so normalized. This provides a major risk, especially for those with their guard down in exclusion zones, because it would be easier for someone with no license that had ill intentions to bring a gun into an area since the staff aren’t able to know who can carry legally. Guns on campus, especially with little regulation, would ultimately lead to more potential shootings and put UMD students’ safety at risk.

When it comes to the decision for a university to allow or prohibit concealed carry on campus, the bottom line is that the risks outweigh the benefits. Licensed UMD students should not be able to carry concealed firearms on campus because of the emotional effect and disruption of learning opportunities, the unnecessary use of guns for self-defense considering the provided safety resources, and the risks of accidents and people using guns for the wrong reasons is far too high.

Works Cited

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