

## **Department of English Statement about the 2015 Texas Campus Carry Law**

The 37 faculty of the Department of English at Texas State University who were present at a faculty meeting held February 29, 2016, unanimously oppose the 2015 Texas Campus Carry Law that allows concealed handguns in university classrooms and offices, threatens the First Amendment rights of faculty and students to free speech, and severely inhibits our ability to perform our duties in a manner consistent with both our Department's goals and the university's mission statement.

Second Amendment rights do not take precedence over First Amendment rights. Courts have repeatedly upheld academic freedom and freedom of speech as essential to the purposes of the classroom, even where such speech may be controversial or potentially upsetting to students. The American Association of University Professors (AAUP) has affirmed that concealed handguns in public Texas university classrooms, laboratories, offices, and other learning environments are liable to abridge both instructor and student speech by amplifying concerns about the potential repercussions of such speech. Thus, should Texas State University allow concealed handguns in its classrooms, the institution is in danger of creating serious barriers to the free speech rights of instructors and students guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The Campus Carry Law also threatens the shared values of Texas State University as presented in our mission statement. Specifically, the law challenges the following:

- A diversity of people and ideas, a spirit of inclusiveness, a global perspective, and a sense of community as essential conditions for campus life
- The cultivation of character and the modeling of honesty, integrity, compassion, fairness, respect, and ethical behavior, both in the classroom and beyond
- Engaged teaching and learning based in dialogue, student involvement, and the free exchange of ideas
- Thoughtful reflection, collaboration, planning, and evaluation as essential for meeting the changing needs of those we serve

From our perspective, we can exercise none of these values when we must face daily the possible presence of those carrying lethal force. In particular, the potential for violence reduces the possibility of the free exchange of ideas in class discussions, where diverse points of view are offered and examined in lively debate. In the Department of English, we value such exchanges as central to our discipline because literature, language analysis and textual analysis have always encouraged readers and writers to investigate their own values and beliefs, a process that can be emotionally charged but that also fosters enlightened citizens who understand the human condition.

We are also seriously concerned about the harm the Texas Campus Carry law will cause to the institution's national and international reputation, as well as the barriers it will create to the recruitment and retention of top-tier faculty and students.

Numerous other academic institutions and associations have already voiced similar concerns, including many Texas institutions of higher education, public and private; as well as twenty-nine major American scholarly societies, including the Modern Language Association, the leading professional organization in our discipline.

Therefore, we, the faculty and staff of the English department present today, call for the repeal of SB11 and urge the Task Force and the Faculty Senate to recommend to President Trauth that Texas State University actively campaign for any bills for repeal and for banning guns in classrooms and offices, other than when carried by approved law enforcement officers, that should be filed in the next session of the Texas Legislature.

2/29/16