



# Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

CAMPUS CRIME , GUNS AND GUN LAWS

## Backpacking heat -- Concealed weapons on campus

Posted by James Alan Fox, Crime and Punishment February 17, 2011 02:00 PM

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A number of questions remains unanswered stemming from the arrest earlier this month of a student at MassBay Community College in Wellesley for having a loaded semi-automatic weapon in his backpack. School authorities are assessing their security preparedness, while the court investigates possible explanations for 18-year-old Darryl Dookhran's alleged violation of weapons laws. Could Dookhran have acted out of fear for his personal safety, as his attorney has suggested? Or, might his design have been something sinister?

Whatever clarity emerges over the weeks and months ahead, the MassBay episode connects to a much larger debate over the appropriate role of firearms on campus, particularly those concealed and carried for the purpose of protection.

In a [recent post](#), I challenged recurrent proposals that would arm teachers and administrators in grades K-12 with more than just chalk. Whereas duly-sworn School Resource Officers (SROs) can and should be equipped with adequate firepower to protect the school population, teachers -- even if licensed to carry concealed weapons -- should leave their guns outside of school. Licensing requirements for citizens hardly compare to training requirements for law enforcement. Faculty are trained to educate, not execute.

The same pro-gun arguments, only louder, have been heard in response to shootings on college campuses, where much of the student population (as well as the staff) may be accomplished shooters. Ironically and unfortunately, at least in the minds of some observers at the time of the tragic Virginia Tech massacre, a bill was stalled in the Virginia General Assembly that would have permitted licensed gun owners to carry concealed weapons on the Blacksburg and other campuses in the state.

Rules governing gun possession at two-year and four-year colleges and universities are regulated by individual states. Twenty-four states strictly prohibit anyone other than sworn law enforcement personnel from carrying guns -- concealed or not -- on their campuses. At present, only one state -- Utah -- grants students with license to carry concealed weapons the absolute right to do so at any public or private post-secondary school. Other states give discretion to individual colleges with regard to the policy governing guns on campus.

Things may be changing fast, however, especially in the wake of last month's mass shooting in Tucson. Lawmakers in Arizona, as well as Tennessee, Michigan, Oklahoma, New Mexico, Florida, Nebraska, Texas and Mississippi have proposed bills to eliminate some or all of the restrictions against guns on campuses.

People can protect themselves everywhere but on campus, □ complains Daniel Crocker, Southwest Regional Director for [Students for Concealed Carry on Campus](#)(SCCC). We don't think this should be any different from anywhere else. □

A national grass-roots campaign to change state laws around the country, SCCC was actually formed in the wake of the 2007 Virginia Tech massacre. SCCC contends that the carnage at Virginia Tech would have been considerably lessened had students other than the gunman been armed and ready to retaliate.

Opponents, however, suggest that chaos would result from spontaneous shoot-outs in the lecture halls. How it would be possible for anyone to distinguish the Good guys dressed in denim and toting backpacks from the bad guy □ dressed in denim and toting a backpack? In addition, there is evidence that even trained gun owners, when suddenly immersed in a chaotic shooting scene, may not have the special skills needed to respond without making matters worse.

As part of its campaign, SCCC has promoted National Empty Holster Days, □ this year scheduled for April 4-9, during which students protest their campus gun bans by wearing empty holsters to class, symbolic of disarmament. Whether or not effective in advancing the cause, the sight of students wearing holsters, even if empty, has tended to unnerve many students and faculty.

It is difficult to predict what changes might occur in the years ahead with respect to permitting concealed weapons on college campuses. Gun enthusiasts were bolstered by the Supreme Court decision in *District of Columbia v. Heller* that struck down a long-standing handgun ban in the nation's capital and reaffirmed the sanctity of the Second Amendment. In the wake of this case, pro-gun forces have set their sights on challenging various state and local gun restrictions around the country, and already succeeded in killing Chicago's long-standing handgun ban. In the end, the debate about concealed weapons on campus may be resolved more by political posturing than by practical efficacy.