

Statement on campus carry from the Department of Linguistics

Dear President Fennes,

The undersigned faculty of the Department of Linguistics strongly oppose the admitting of guns into our classrooms, our offices, our research labs, and students' dormitories. We understand that Texas Senate Bill 11 authorizes the university administration to enact regulations regarding the carrying of concealed handguns on campus. Speaker of the Texas House Joe Straus recently stated publicly that SB11 gives university presidents "a lot of authority and flexibility to design a plan" [1]. We assume that you wish to enact a policy that will do the most to protect the safety of UT's faculty, staff, students, and visitors. Allowing people to bring loaded handguns into our buildings will endanger those people and the people around them. We therefore call on the administration to exclude guns from the rooms on campus where we work and teach, and where our students live.

Our safety concerns are not restricted to the possibility of premeditated acts of violence, but also extend to negligent discharges, impulsive shootings, and coercion and intimidation by gun holders. Reciprocal agreements with other states with less stringent concealed handgun licensing requirements than those of Texas will further increase the risks associated with weapons in the hands of unprepared civilians. We submit that the presence of weapons on our campus will have a chilling effect on public debate and on the free exchange of ideas and perspectives, activities that are at the core of the university's mission.

We believe that the presence of concealed weapons on our campus will damage our efforts to maintain the reputation of the University of Texas at Austin as a vital and respected research institution, as highly qualified students and faculty turn to universities in other states. The damage to the institution in which we have invested our careers will in turn reduce our capacity to advance knowledge and serve our citizens. As a faculty we will be more effective in training the future leaders and thinkers of the State of Texas in an environment in which students and teachers feel safe. We thus ask you to create an environment in which the wishes of the overwhelming majority of students, teachers and staff are respected, in which our work and living spaces are free of loaded deadly weapons.

[1] Joe Straus, quoted in 'Straus Defends Conservative Record of House, by Morgan Smith.' The Texas Tribune, Oct. 17, 2015.

<http://www.texastribune.org/2015/10/17/straus-defends-conservative-record-house/>

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