



DEPARTMENT OF MIDDLE EASTERN STUDIES
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT AUSTIN

204 W. 21st Street F9400 • CAL 528 • Austin, Texas 78712-1045
Office: 512-471-3881 • Fax: 512-471-7834 • <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/depts/mes>

We, the faculty and staff of the Department of Middle Eastern Studies are dedicated to researching and educating about a region that is today plagued by violence, war, and extremism. Many of us have also lived in this region and thus have experienced firsthand the effects of such violence on individuals, families, and communities. In a context in which violence is a major problem, adding easier access to weapons, even with the intent of protection, makes things worse, rather than better. Having seen firsthand the effects of the presence of guns and other weapons in the region we study, we are deeply distressed that this is what is currently envisioned for the University of Texas at Austin.

More specifically, our faculty, staff, and students are fearful because on a daily basis, we teach, research and discuss topics that are by their very nature emotionally and ideologically charged. We teach about religion, including Islam, Judaism and Christianity. We also deal with conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Sunni-Shi'i sectarian relations, the civil war in Syria, the Armenian Genocide issue, human rights, gender and sexuality, religious and ethnic minorities, the Iraq and Afghan wars, violent extremism, and terrorism. Increasing the number of guns in our classes, libraries, labs, lounges, dormitories, and offices, promises either to shut down such difficult dialogues altogether, or worse, to increase the chances of them turning deadly. Preserving the ability of students, staff, and faculty members to express their opinions and collectively explore the complex nature of the contemporary and historical Middle East, requires that everyone participating in academic discourse feel safe from political or physical pressure to conform to any one line of thinking. Legally permitting weapons in campus buildings can only negatively affect academic freedom.

This law will also adversely affect UT Austin's competitiveness. Since many faculty and students both inside and outside the university have a negative view of this law, it will make it significantly more difficult to recruit and retain the best faculty and students nationally and from around the world. We are particularly concerned about the effect of the law on the recruitment and retention of minority faculty and students from the United States and from the Middle East. They would understandably feel that their safety could be compromised in settings where they may be viewed –rightly or wrongly – as representatives of the sensitive viewpoints that are the object of our study.

The Texas Legislature has imposed this law on our university community against the majority's very explicit opposition to it. For all these reasons, we strenuously object to this law and to the presence of concealed guns in campus buildings.



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