

## [The Hazards of Concealed Firearms on Campus](#)

Blog Post published by Shawn Leigh Alexander on Tuesday, September 13, 2016

### **The Hazards of Concealed Firearms on Campus:**

#### **A Statement by the KU Department of African and African-American Studies**

Between 2013 and 2014, at least thirty-three states introduced legislation to allow concealed firearms at their institutions of higher education. At least eight states currently have some form of concealed-carry law in effect on college and university campuses. Kansas will join these ranks in the fall of 2017, when postsecondary schools in the Regents system are set to lose their exemption from state legislation permitting concealed firearms in all public places. Needless to say, the issue has been hotly contested. In a statement released in December 2015, forty university distinguished professors at Kansas State University argued that the expanded presence of firearms on campus will increase the risk of accidental shootings, as well as exacerbate the problem of suicide among traditional college-age students. Indeed, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported that deaths from suicide in the United States have surged since 1999.

Of the Kanas Regents institutions, members of the University of Kansas (KU) community have expressed the strongest opposition to implementing this concealed-carry policy in the state's institutions of higher learning. Sixty-eight KU distinguished professors registered their opposition to the policy, while the KU Department of History released a similar statement and resolution against it. The policy is likely to make it difficult not only to recruit and retain students at a moment when enrollments already have been on a decline, but it is likely also to negatively affect the retention and hiring of faculty and staff. Further, no comprehensive policy currently exists to manage guns and gun safety on campus, while no evidence exists that the expanded presence of firearms will decrease the threat of active shooters. However, one examination of data compiled under the Clery Act - which requires colleges and universities to keep and disclose information on crimes committed on or near their campuses - suggests that incidents of sexual assault potentially could increase as a result of more guns.

Like many of our colleagues at KU, and on campuses around the nation, the faculty in the KU Department of African and African-American Studies believe that firearms are incompatible with the mission and function of higher education, and their presence among students, faculty and staff threatens academic freedom and a safe, productive learning environment. To take one recent example: At a campus forum at the University of Houston - where a similar concealed-firearm law was implemented during this past summer - the president of the faculty senate suggested that in adjusting to the new policy, classroom instructors should consider "be[ing] careful discussing sensitive topics," "drop[ping] certain topics from your curriculum," and "not 'go[ing] there' if you sense anger" from students. At the University of Texas-Austin, two senior faculty members, including a dean, resigned over concerns about concealed-carry. These examples illustrate the chilling effect, demoralization and departures that we fear will occur at KU and wherever else such laws are enforced.

As African and African-American Studies faculty, we write and teach primarily about people of

African descent, including the Islamic world, black urban communities disproportionately affected by police abuse and gun violence in the United States, and immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean. In our current national, regional and local climate of hostility toward people of color, Islamophobia, and a general fear of racial and immigrant “others,” we are especially concerned that the increased presence of guns particularly will expose minoritized groups to threat and harm in classroom and campus encounters. This concern, of course, comes in light of the fact that people of color at KU, and colleges and universities around the nation, have brought attention to harmful campus environments that already exist. Ironically, the heightened sense of fear and anxiety created by an expansion of firearms on campus may also expose students, staff and faculty of color to further threat of racial profiling and surveillance. As the police shooting of Philando Castile in Falcon Heights, Minnesota illustrated this past summer, concealed-carry laws do not offer protection to people of color even when they operate within the boundaries of the law.

Based on recent developments in our neighboring state of Texas, we have legitimate reason to also fear that an increase in firearms on campus will suppress healthy dialogue and exchanges about race, gender, class, religion, sexuality, nationality, and other categories of social difference that are essential to fostering a well-rounded, empathetic, critically thinking citizenry of lifelong learners prepared for forward-looking, democratic decision making. The KU African and African-American Studies faculty supports the continued restriction of guns at Kansas Regents schools, and we express our solidarity with other departments, academic units, and faculty, staff and students equally against allowing our campuses to become armed camps.

Posted in:

[Of the Study of Race and Culture in America](#)