

Oppose concealed carry on campus

Bernie Patterson November 1, 2015

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You may recognize me as chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, a position I've proudly held for more than five years.

Perhaps less well known is that I've also served as a special agent in Military Intelligence, as a city police officer and taught criminal justice at a state university in Georgia after receiving two master's and a Ph.D. in criminology.

All those experiences lead me to share my opinion on the concealed carry bill proposed for universities and technical colleges: It will make campuses less safe.

This is not an anti-gun issue. I own two hand guns, and I've had my shotgun since I was 12 years old.



We all agree we want to make campuses as safe as possible. That is the intended purpose of the proposed legislation regarding concealed carry, too. Unfortunately, the proposed solution will not have the results intended.

The proposal is broader than allowing concealed carry in campus buildings. The repeal of portions of the administrative code would essentially allow on campus numerous dangerous weapons, well beyond those covered by the concealed carry law.

The effect this would have on students at UW-Stevens Point is unpredictable. In my experience teaching criminology, students were leery about guns in the classroom, even though they belonged to uniformed police officers attending the course. It made them feel anxious, not safer.

In my experience as a police officer, I have had to tell families about the death of a loved one. I have attended autopsies of children. I have seen the damage from domestic disturbances.

My primary concern is the safety of our students, faculty and staff. They have the right, and we have the responsibility, to do all we can to ensure they learn, work and live in a safe environment. This proposal will decrease, rather than increase safety.

In residence halls, where 3,400 of our students live in close quarters, the environment is not conducive to possessing firearms. Most likely a disaster would be accidental – goofing around or handling a gun. Young adults don't always make decisions in their best interest. Also, suicide is the second leading cause of death for college-age young adults. This proposal will make our campus less safe.

Another reason this proposal is not the solution, is people must be at least age 21 to obtain a concealed carry permit in Wisconsin, which would exclude many UW students. Also, the deterrent theory simply does not prevent mass shootings.

Wisconsin law already allows concealed carry, but private and public property owners can prohibit it on their property by posting signs at each building entrances. At UW-Stevens Point, we posted signs after each of our governance groups – faculty, staff and students – supported prohibiting concealed carry in campus buildings in 2011.

Last week, our combined faculty and staff council passed a resolution opposing this bill. Allowing firearms in university buildings “threatens the progress of education... by introducing an undercurrent of fear that limits expression,” it notes.

UW-Stevens Point Protective Services and City of Stevens Point Interim Police Chief Marty Skibba share our opposition to this proposal, as do several campus and city law enforcement agencies around the state. Prohibiting firearms, except by trained police and security officers is an important part of our university safety plan.

No evidence supports the suggestion that allowing concealed firearms on campuses increases safety. On public campuses in Colorado and Utah, where concealed carry is allowed, crime rates have not declined. In the aftermath of the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007, a review panel appointed by the state recommended banning guns on campus.

Mass shootings, on campus or off, are tragic. But adding firearms to a volatile situation is not likely to result in fewer deaths. The Harvard Injury Control Research Center assessed the literature on guns and homicide and found evidence indicating more guns mean more murders.

Please join me in urging legislators to vote against this bill to help keep our campuses safe.

Bernie Patterson is the chancellor of the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point.