

Legislation jeopardizes safety at local universities

Staff Editorial

At the University of Texas's South Mall, bullet holes dot the concrete railings and sidewalk near the spot where a statue of Jefferson Davis once stood. Left over from the 1966 shooting in which sniper Charles Whitman shot 43 people and killed 13 from the observation deck of the UT tower, they serve as a reminder of the impact of one man and six guns. Nearly fifty years later, they still raise the question: what can be done to prevent such shootings in the future?

The Texas legislature, located only a mile from the tower where Whitman barricaded himself during the massacre, passed a bill on May 31 allowing the concealed carry of handguns on state college campuses. Governor Greg Abbott signed the bill into law at Red's Indoor Gun Range in Pflugerville on June 13, against the wishes of officials at the University of Texas. While the bill allows for designated gun-free zones decided by the university, it is still an unnecessary act that could potentially create a hostile learning environment, contradicts the opinions of school officials and contributes to a vigilante mindset.

While people who carry guns feel safe around firearms, that is not necessarily true for the rest of the population. Often, guns invoke fear or anxiety in others. The possession of deadly weapons on campus could distract students from class or studying, and cause students to avoid class or other public areas. Regardless of whether or not the carrying of firearms prevents or causes crime, their presence can change the positive learning environment into one of fear for those who are not as comfortable with guns as the people who carry them.

The bill does contain provisions that allow the university's board and president to create rules and regulations regarding when and where guns

can be carried, essentially letting them designate gun-free zones, but these rules cannot be so strict that people are restricted from carrying concealed handguns. Without the option to opt-out, or even heavily limit concealed carry, the school officials whom opposed the bill are forced to follow it. Essentially, the school officials that have decades of experience running a university are required to follow the policies of congressmen that do not have the same credentials.

The argument for passing the bill contributes to a culture in which crime is deterred and avenged by citizens rather than trained law enforcement. Students for Concealed Carry, one of the main groups that lobbied for the bill to pass, argues that concealed carry is important to provide protection from crimes. While this is valid in extreme cases such as aggravated assault, it seems that minor arguments could easily escalate with the presence of a gun. The idea that anyone can- and should- stop crimes with a firearm normalizes the use of lethal weapons rather than peaceful tactics.

Rather than allowing guns into schools in order to prevent shootings and other crimes, bills should be passed to increase security by reducing the number of guns on campus. Because most college students are under 21 and cannot get a Concealed Carry License, the argument that shootings will be discouraged if most people carry concealed weapons is invalid. Instead of compromising a safe and positive learning environment, lawmakers should listen to the opinions of university officials and protect students by reducing the number of firearms on campus, instead of allowing more guns on campus.



Weathering the Storm

Editor reflects on internet backlash from her survey



Madi McVan Copy Editor

Hello. My name is Madi McVan, and I'm a senior, graduating a year early. In addition to working 25 hours a week and taking four AP classes, I copy edit the newspaper.

And according to an article on infowars.com, I am guilty of forcing students to turn over their parents' personal information, selling that information to the government, breaking families apart and beginning the Communist takeover of America—all because of a survey that I gave to collect statistics for a newspaper story.

To collect data about Hendrickson students and their relationships with guns, I wrote and handed out a survey to about 120 students, looking for connections between political affiliation, gun experience and gun ownership. I didn't expect there to be any opposition, considering it was given to a relatively small number of students, names were optional, and I made sure that the questions were as unbiased as possible.

But when a student sent a photo of the survey to their parent, the photo was immediately spread online, initially on social media like Facebook, and then on small news websites and a local radio show.

As soon as it was posted online, people assumed that the school handed out the survey in order to report to the government who owns guns, with the purpose of taking them away.

The most bizarre part of the situation to me was how widespread the belief is that the government is out to take away everyone's rights. Dozens of comments online compared the government (and myself) to Big Brother from 1984 and German Nazis, using children to report their parents and conspiring to turn the masses into mindless sheep.

The experience was not only bizarre, but terrifying; I was scared that somehow my name would be linked to the survey and all of the anger in the articles and comments would make their way into my daily life. I imagined an angry gun owner finding out where I work or live, and confronting me about the survey.

But at the same time, I learned so much from the way the story spread online. As a journalist, it was educational to see how easy it is to twist words and quotes in order to create something that is completely misleading, but taken by readers to be the truth. For example, instead of stating that the survey was given by journalism students, an article said it was given to journalism students. By changing one small word, the entire meaning of the article changed.

As a reader of news, I became aware of how articles that seem to be true can actually be completely false. Now,



Shane Anders Cartoonist

I fact-check the stories I read online, and pay attention to the quotes in the article—are they from a credible source? In the story about my survey, quotes were pulled from Facebook comments rather than school or district officials, but used in a way that suggested that the Facebook commenters had some sort of authority or inside knowledge.

While the survey brought about (false) bad publicity for the school, I am proud of the stories that came from the data gathered in the surveys. It's not easy being called the next Hitler, but in the end the lessons I took away from seeing my own work twisted and changed online outweighed the fear and criticism.

Desecration of mosque reveals growing anti-Islam attitudes

Staff Editorial

Three days after Islamic terrorists coordinated an attack on Paris, France, a supposedly “retaliatory” attack occurred at a the Islamic Center of Pflugerville, where vandals covered the entrance to the mosque in feces and torn pages from a Quran. The desecration was a physical manifestation of the fear of Islam that is spreading in the wake of terrorist attacks, such as those in Paris and San Bernadino.

While groups like ISIS and Al Queda carry out attacks in the name of Islam, it is important to remember that extremists do not represent the whole group; just as the KKK does not represent all Christians, and it is wrong to assume that any Christian white man is a supporter or member of the KKK, it is wrong to associate any Muslim with Islamic terrorism. Islamophobia is inherently counterproductive, as rejecting Muslims from American society just contributes to the growth of terrorist organizations rooted in Islam.

According to an NPR interview with Jihad Turk, president of the Bayan Claremont Islamic Graduate School, radicalization is often due to isolation, and a feeling of not belonging to either the Muslim or American communities. Often, radical followers of Islam are not involved in mosques, and when they face rejection from American society, they become more likely to find refuge in terrorist organizations- as was the case for

the perpetrators of the San Bernardino shooting. Self-radicalization can be avoided by welcoming Muslims into society, either by outreach programs done by mosques, or by everyday citizens working to make Muslims feel like true Americans. Mosques are not the cause of terrorism; they are the solution.

The rejection of Syrian refugees is another example of spreading Islamophobia, especially in Texas, where Governor Greg Abbott wrote a letter to President Barak Obama, stating that Texas will make every effort to block Syrian refugees from settling in the state. The decision was based entirely on fear of terrorism. By rejecting refugees, Abbott and other governors that followed suit are doing exactly what terrorists want- forcing the refugees back into their home countries, where they are forced to “join or die.” It is unreasonable to fear foreign terrorists entering the country when American citizens carry out the majority of terror attacks and mass shootings.

By allowing the actions of a few radical Islamists to define one's view of the huge Muslim community, the problem of radicalization only grows. In order to halt the growth of terrorism, Muslims should be embraced in American society, and more effort should be made to prevent cultural isolation.

Dress code revision required to accommodate comfort

♦ staff editorial

Dress code has been a hot topic issue for years. Students, faculty, the school board and this newspaper have discussed it multiple times. It's time that something is done to revise the dress code, as it is sexist and offensive to all genders and an unnecessary waste of resources.

The purpose of the dress code is to "teach grooming and hygiene, to prevent disruption, and to minimize safety hazards at school" as stated on the PfISD Dress Code poster. It also says that students shall "wear clothing that is neat, appropriate, and modest to the gender of the student." The purpose is entirely outdated and reflects views of education from when the creators of the code were in school. Since their time in high school, school dynamics have changed to become less formal. Short shorts, leggings, colored hair and piercing have become social norms, yet are still banned by the dress code.

The rules unfairly affect the clothing of girls by restricting common items like shorts, dresses and skirts, citing that they are a distraction to the male students. This blatantly prioritizes the education of male students over females, and contributes to the idea that women and girls should dress based on the opinions of men and boys. This is only made

worse when girls are pulled out of class to change or get new clothes, as they are missing valuable instruction time. In situations where female students cannot obtain a change of clothes, they are forced to wear oversized basketball shorts in what is essentially a shaming technique.

The code also assumes that male students have no self-control. The exposure of body parts such as shoulders and legs should not be considered a distraction; young men are entirely capable of focusing their attention on school, and girls should not be punished if they choose not to do so. The dress code also places male faculty members in an awkward situation, as they are essentially sexualizing their students when they call them out for dress code infractions such as exposed cleavage, tight pants or short shorts. This creates discrepancies in enforcement, as many male teachers do not enforce dress code because they do not feel it is appropriate for them to dictate what their female students should wear. Students only want less dress code so that they can dress more comfortably, not so that they can be more promiscuous.

Time and money could be saved if dress code were reduced. It is a waste of resources to send every dress code

violator to the office, where the staff there must take care of the situation. It takes students out of class and office staff away from their jobs, all to ensure that the boys are not being distracted in class. It is an endless job to make sure that nobody is wearing hats, all beards are shaved and shoulders and legs are properly covered- it's no wonder why the code is unequally enforced. For every one student who is pulled aside in the hallway for a dress code infraction, four or five more students that are out of dress code walk by. This allows for preferential treatment by faculty, as they can pick out the students that they wish to report.

If dress code were removed, the school would not descend into chaos. Colleges and universities generally have little to no dress code, and girls attend class in leggings or shorts with no repercussions. The male students still get their degrees without distraction. Students would be more comfortable in class if they were allowed to wear the clothes they want, and if someone were to show up in something like a bathing suit, it could be addressed individually without restricting the dress of the majority of the student population.

Clarification needed in district competition rule

 staff editorial

On April 9, Silver Dancers captain Ramsey Shobe and multiple dance team parents spoke at a school board meeting in protest of rules that prevented them from competing at the Vista Ridge Dance Competition when its Saturday portion was rescheduled to a Sunday due to bad weather. According to the PfISD Extra-Curricular Handbook, the Silver Dancers are subject to UIL regulations and therefore could not attend the contest because of UIL restrictions on Sunday competitions. The Silver Dancers were the only team forced to forfeit the competition, drawing attention to the discrepancies between the PfISD handbook and those in other districts.

According to the UIL Constitution, the Sunday rule preserves a day for teachers and students with no competition or practice. However, it should be altered to protect either Saturday or Sunday to allow for more flexibility. In addition, the PfISD Extra-Curricular handbook

should be amended to specify which organizations are subject to UIL rules and which are not, as the current clause causes confusion when determining which rules apply to which organizations.

The handbook defines any extra-curricular activity as “an activity sponsored by the UIL, the Board of Trustees, or an organization sanctioned by Board resolution.” This leaves too much room for interpretation, as it implies that all extra-curriculars are governed by UIL rules but does not explicitly state so. Other district handbooks, like that of Leander ISD, list the specific activities that are governed by UIL, leaving no room for interpretation as to which rules apply to which organization. If the PfISD handbook were organized in this way, there would be much less confusion for the students, faculty and community when events such as the contest postponement occur.

Regardless of whether or not the district specifies which organizations must follow the UIL Constitution, the

UIL should make accommodations for weekend events. The Sunday Competition rule is in place to save Sunday for faculty and students to be home with their families, but could better serve its purpose if it were changed to apply to either Saturday or Sunday. That way, competitions or events could be held on either Saturday or Sunday, as long as the other day is left free for students and teachers. There would be more flexibility and less scheduling issues when organizing events, and would have allowed the Silver Dancers to compete while staying within the bounds of UIL organizations.

The board has not yet responded to the appeals made by the Silver Dancers at the board meeting, but should consider changing the Extra-Curricular Handbook to specify which organizations must follow UIL rules, and the UIL should alter the Sunday competition rule to not be specific to Sunday but reserve one day out of the weekend when teachers and students cannot compete.