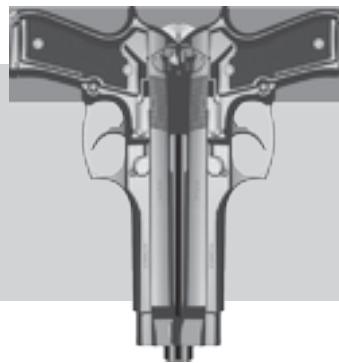
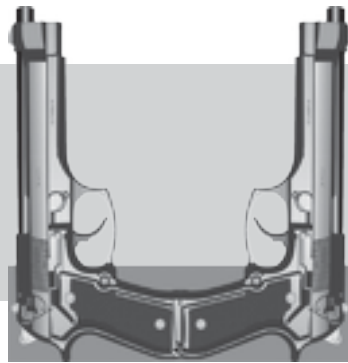


Gun Free, UT

By Mia Carter

The passing of Senate Bill 11 was a victory for the NRA and gun lobby, primarily; it only further disseminates the belief that we should live in fear, should live in fear of each other, that danger is omnipresent and that our fears legitimize the presence of guns absolutely everywhere in U.S. society. It's a perfect self-fulfilling prophecy and a calculating marketing policy: fear begets fear; fear sells guns. A violent mass-shooting incident generates more fear, and the advertisers of the "more guns will protect you and the ones you love" myth—for it is a myth—and its sincerely frightened true-believers, advocate for the further expansion of gun culture. None of the available research supports the argument that



more guns equals more safety and protection; more

guns have been proven to lead to an increase in accidents, deaths, suicides, acts of rape and domestic violence, and injury of individuals and loved ones.

Why do our national political leaders keep outlawing funding for the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) collection of statistical information about gun incidents in this country? Because facts and statistical information could be used to make policy changes, because the damage caused by the abundance of guns in our country would be made vivid, made visible in ways that resonate far, far beyond the spectacular horrors of these truly terrible and horrific mass shootings. All of the weekly, hourly, daily little gun-related tragedies would also be visible.

Professors and graduate instructors, counselors and student advisors deal with conflict regularly. Conflict over grades and comments on papers, over content in classes, over curriculum requirements and graduation eligibility; it is habitual. Teachers also sometimes have to mediate conflicts between students—and we see a lot of student depression, anxiety, personal crisis, and suicidal thinking. With Senate Bill 11, the abundant possibilities for violently ramping-up these kinds of encounters become truly terrifying.

The most tragic thing about the bill is that public colleges and universities are one of the most important institutions in our shared cultural life and one of the very few places left in the United States where people are encouraged to think critically together, to take risks, to engage productively in dialogue and debate. Challenging each other and our own cherished beliefs and values is a fundamental part of education; being exposed to a diversity of opinions and beliefs encourages growth and refined thinking. There is a kind healthy dynamism in intellectual reflection, and rational and thoughtful conflict is part of that. A gun in the room would destroy altogether that scholarly safe space of exploration, self-discovery, interchange, debate, and healthy exposure to dissenting points of view. Our rich and ever-evolving university community, and the very notion of community in this country is under attack. Our administrators and the citizens of Texas should make our elected officials address the abundant re-

search that is readily available to them and urge them to state their rationale to the citizens of Texas and the world: why **MUST** we have guns in our classroom? We are a fact-based community. Address the research and explain, please.

According to Houston Chronicle reporter Lauren McGaughy ("UT Faculty Lawyers up ahead of campus carry deadline" 11/09/15), Open Carry Texas head and state senate candidate CJ Grisham had a message for UT faculty opposed to campus carry: "Quit your jobs and walk away," he reportedly wrote on the group's Facebook page.

We are here today to say we will not quit; we will not let our serious professional and public health concerns silence us or enfold us in the delusional worldview of the more guns means more safety crowd. We are afraid, and highly distressed, but we are going to fight like hell. We will lawyer-up; we will act-out and cock-up; we will fight-on and speak-up; we will, like the mighty football players did at the University of Missouri, stand together strongly, knowing that our fight is for the common good, and for a healthy, safe, and vibrant University of Texas.

Bio: Mia Carter is an Associate Professor & University Distinguished Teaching Associate Professor in the English Department at UT-Austin.