# CARRY EQUALS NO CAMPUS

## By Yon Hui Bell, SAC

The young man in the back row asked me about Campus Carry on the first day of class. He did wait for an opportune and appropriate time – that lull when we educators stand in front of students and ask if there are any questions – he didn't just blurt out the question. And he assured all of us that he only carried a gun to protect us.

The next day I received an email from a student explaining he would be absent and would I please let him know what he missed. For the next day or two I carried around an anxious suspicion that the student who had announced he was carrying a gun to protect me had just emailed to inform me that he would now begin a subtle siege on our fragile teacher-student relationship. The open war on teachers – their professionalism, their worth – now included gun toting students.

A college education, for many, is meant to provide intellectual stimulation and growth, much of which is facilitated through human interaction. Campus Carry fundamentally affects that interaction. The free exchange of ideas is distorted by reticence and suspicion. Educators worry that students will take grades and performance evaluations too personally. Students worry that their comments and opinions will be understood too harshly. The arena of participation and classroom discussion, which has always been fraught with social anxiety, has now become even more silent.

This silence is what I fear most about the new law. However, I cannot blame Campus Carry for this silence. Campus Carry is but another ludicrous law passed by a ludicrous government responding selfishly and ineffectually to a social problem it doesn't want to solve.

At the core of the gun debate is the fact that we are all afraid of active shooters, whether they be international terrorists, domestic ones, or personally known ones. We are all afraid of being victim to someone's gun-toting violence. This fear isn't unfounded, especially considering statistics and that the United States continues to be the largest weapons manufacturing country in the world. If a factory makes cake, its workers eat cake (albeit discounted or damaged). If a country makes weapons, its citizens eat weapons. Most politicians do not want to discuss that fact. They'd rather we discuss who can and cannot obtain weapons and where we can and cannot carry our damn weapons.

I will not be scared or silent. I do not want my students to be scared or to think silence is the best public response. I will not avoid "sensitive" topics as educators concerned about Campus Carry are being told to do. What's the point of education if it isn't to discuss these topics? I will ask my students the age-old questions. What is the meaning of life? How great is a country if it has the highest rate of gun violence and the largest prison population in the world? What is happiness? Is it owning the latest iPhone and having all-you-can-eat access to the internet? What is equality? Is economic segregation the same as racial segregation? Will more guns really make a society safer? Though I can't completely escape the factory, I will not be a silent cog nor will I just churn out unquestioning silent cogs.

Education should help us develop our ability to respectfully communicate diverse and disparate opinions. I tell my students that this is the gift of language – to be able to express ourselves, to share ourselves, to agree and disagree, and, ultimately, to learn from one another. Each of us inhabits a personal reality, but we also share a social reality. Language allows us to bridge these two realities, which must be bridged because they are so intimately intertwined. You cannot be safe in one if you are not safe in the other. Silence, whether in the classroom, in government hallways and offices, or in social organizations, does not make us safe. We must continue to speak up and rise up until the multitude of our voices overpowers those ludicrous ones currently in power.

And I was wrong. The email was from a different student.