



## Crime & Punishment

James Alan Fox on criminal behavior and the justice system

CAMPUS CRIME , GUNS AND GUN LAWS

### The lesson from VA Tech's false alarm

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The Virginia Tech campus police acted responsibly when it launched this campus-wide alert after receiving a phone tip from three teenagers attending a summer program:

"Person with a gun reported near Dietrick. Stay inside. Secure doors. Emergency personnel responding. Call 911 for help."



Even though the three young witnesses to a man carrying what seemed to be a handgun covered by some type of cloth may have been mistaken, it was wise for campus authorities to err on the side of caution. Moreover, the University had been criticized and recently fined -- [unfairly so](#) -- for failing to respond sufficiently to the double homicide on the early morning of April 16, 2007, that turned out to be but the first wave of far a far worse rampage to come later that morning.

With a mandate from the [Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008](#), colleges are encouraged act promptly in the face of a credible threat to the safety and well-being of its students or employees. Of course, credibility is the in eyes of the beholder, but better safe than sorry. After several hours of follow-up

investigation with no confirmation of danger, the campus police lifted the warning. Of course, by then classes had been cancelled and folks had gone home.

The secondary lesson to take away from this episode is that the national campaign to allow concealed weapons on campus is absolutely misguided. This grassroots movement, itself, poses a threat to the safety of students and staff.

Besides the fact that college students, even if duly licensed to carry, are relatively immature, and besides the fact that the flow of alcohol at campus parties adds an additional element of risk, how many times will a nervous observer report seeing a man with a gun? If concealed weapons are permitted, how should campus authorities respond to a report of what appeared to be a handgun covered with a cloth? How many times would campuses be closed down and classes interrupted by false alarms?

And suppose some angry or deranged student does indeed decide to turn the campus into his own war zone, how do the campus police tell this "bad guy" apart from all the good guys with their concealed weapons drawn defensively? After all, they all dress in the same uniform: blue jeans and back pack.

So when it comes to the ongoing push to expand right to carry law onto college campuses, we should take the same approach as the Virginia Tech police did when faced with its latest scare. Err on the side of caution: With the exception of duly sworn law enforcement officials, keep guns off campus.