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Higher Education News

**Virginia Tech killings underscore guns-on-campus campaign**

By Associated Press

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RICHMOND Virginia

Some U.S. college students want the right to carry guns on campus, saying they should have the ability to protect themselves in the event of a shooting like the one that left 33 people dead at Virginia Tech this spring.

Andrew Dysart, a George Mason University senior, has organized a chapter of Students for Concealed Carry on Campus, which hopes to convince state legislators to overturn a Virginia law that allows universities to prohibit students, faculty and staff members with gun permits from carrying their weapons on campus.

"There's no way to know what could have happened, but the students at Tech, they really should have had a chance," Dysart said of the April 16 shootings, in which gunman Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 people and then committed suicide. "They should have had the chance to defend themselves if it came down to that."

Virginia law allows schools to decide whether to allow students with concealed-weapons permits to carry their guns on campus. One state school, Blue Ridge Community College, does so. Schools cannot prohibit non-students or other outsiders from carrying weapons onto campuses if they have legal permits.

"In a sense (students) don't have the same rights to self-defense on campus as the general public," said Dysart, who said his four years as a U.S. Marine shaped his ideas about self-defense. "It's really lopsided the way it works."

Governor Timothy M. Kaine has said individual colleges and universities should be able to decide whether to allow students to carry guns on school grounds. He also said he would wait to see whether a panel studying the Virginia Tech shootings makes any recommendations on the issue.

Across the United States, 38 states ban weapons at schools, and 16 of those specifically ban guns on college campuses, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Other states allow schools to adopt their own gun policies.

Utah is the only state that specifically allows people to carry concealed weapons at public colleges. Legislation passed in 2004 allows concealed weapons on all state property, including colleges and universities. The University of Utah which had banned concealed weapons for decades challenged the law, but the state Supreme Court upheld it in 2006.

South Carolina's legislature this year defeated a bill that would allow permit holders to carry guns onto public school campuses.

Students for Concealed Carry on Campus members at more than 60 colleges are aiming to change their state laws to allow permit holders to carry on campus.

Many colleges generally oppose, for safety reasons, allowing concealed-carry permit holders to bring guns on campus and have resisted efforts to change the law.

The International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators, which represents campus public safety officials, said the presence of students carrying concealed weapons "has the potential to dramatically increase violence on our college and university campuses."

Allowing concealed weapons brings the potential for accidental gun discharge or misuse of firearms at

parties, including those where alcohol or drugs are used, and the possibility for guns to be used to settle students' disputes, the group said in a statement.

In the Virginia General Assembly, a bill to require schools to allow permit holders to carry concealed handguns was killed in subcommittee this year, said bill sponsor Mark L. Cole. Cole said he will wait until the Virginia Tech study panel issues its findings before deciding whether to reintroduce such a measure.

"Obviously the current policy is ineffective; it certainly didn't protect anyone at Virginia Tech," Cole said.

For their part, Virginia Tech officials have not actively lobbied against attempts to modify Virginia's law, spokesman Larry Hincker said, but the university's position on weapons has not changed after the shootings.

"We don't believe that guns have any place in the classroom," Hincker said. "We've experienced far more of guns in the classroom than any university should have to endure."

On the Net:

<http://www.concealedcampus.org>

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