

UI's guns on campus meeting draws few

Forum focuses on student safety in light of new law

Kaitlyn Krasselt/Lewiston Tribune

MOSCOW - Unease about repercussions for concealed weapons sightings was the main concern for attendees of a "guns on campus" forum Wednesday at the University of Idaho.

The forum was part of UI's Campus Safety Week and was held to discuss the policy developed by the university in response to the so-called guns on campus law passed by the Idaho Legislature earlier this year.

Kent Nelson, university general counsel, and Matt Dorschel, university executive director for public safety and security, led the discussion, which was lightly attended by only a few students and faculty members.

"What's most important to realize is that our policy for how we react to weapons sightings has not changed," Nelson said. "If it's a properly concealed weapon, you shouldn't see it at all."

The law passed by the Legislature allows former law enforcement officers or anyone 21 years or older with an enhanced concealed carry permit to carry concealed firearms on public university campuses throughout the state. The only exception to the law applies to venues that can hold 1,000 or more people at one time. On the UI campus, this means concealed weapons of any sort are prohibited in the Student Union Building, Memorial Gym and the Kibbie Dome.

Dorschel said any firearm sighting is grounds to call 911 even if a person is not purposely showing their weapon. He said firearm holders have a responsibility to conceal their weapons and they are violating the university's policy if they don't.

Despite this strict interpretation of the concealed carry law, it is unclear what the repercussions might be if a carrier can prove they have a concealed carry permit and were not intentionally showing the firearm. Aside from being asked to conceal or remove the weapon, Nelson said it's unlikely there would be any further punishment in these minor situations.

"If they don't have a permit and a concealed weapon is sighted, they would be in violation of the law not just on campus but anywhere in town, and those are the penalties that would apply," Dorschel said. "It's not any different on campus."

Both Dorschel and Nelson expressed concern during the forum about potential accidents, particularly in light of a recent incident at Idaho State University where a professor accidentally shot himself in the foot with a gun concealed in his pocket.

"A lot of the concern is not that there will be more gun violence," Dorschel said. "It's that firearms are not conducive to a learning environment and instill distrust and fear that classmates or administrators might be carrying a weapon and we don't have the right to know."

Realistically, Dorschel said there are probably not many people carrying concealed weapons on campus because most of the student population is younger than 21. But he said the university will not keep a list or any documentation of those with concealed carry permits, nor will officials make any effort to.

"Someone who wishes to do damage does not care about the law," Dorschel said.

Dorschel said the new law will require campus security to obtain some extra training, but costs will be minimal. UI has asked for \$580,300 from the state for items including to improve the campus security camera system, which could improve emergency response time and enhance the general safety of campus.

"Just as this policy doesn't change how we react to weapons sightings on campus, a new camera system would be beneficial to campus safety regardless of the weapons policy," Dorschel said.

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