

Texas Baptist universities generally opt out of campus carry

June 1, 2016

DALLAS—Pistol-packing students who plan to attend—or guests who plan to visit—any Texas Baptist university in the fall need to leave their guns behind. And with the exception of one school, that applies to all faculty and staff, as well.

Eight of the nine schools affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas chose to opt out completely from Texas [Senate Bill 11](#), which allows licensed handgun owners—who must be age 21 or older—to carry concealed firearms on college campuses.

The so-called “campus carry” law, which takes effect Aug. 1, provides a limited exemption for private colleges and universities. The law prohibits public institutions of higher education from passing rules that prevent licensed gun-holders from carrying concealed weapons on school property.

[Private colleges and universities](#) in Texas have until Aug. 1 to decide whether they want to opt out of SB 11. The Texas Baptist universities joined more than two dozen other schools in opting out of the law, including Abilene Christian University, Rice University, Southern Methodist University, Texas Christian University and Trinity University.

Opt-out, authorize-in at ETBU

In mid-May, East Texas Baptist University adopted a unique “opt-out, authorize-in” policy that allows the university president to permit certain qualified full-time faculty or staff—not students—who hold a handgun

license to carry a concealed weapon on the campus, at an ETBU-sponsored event or in a university vehicle.

Faculty or staff who carry a concealed handgun must submit an application to the president's office; be interviewed by the president or a person he designates; complete a psychological evaluation by an approved clinical psychologist or psychiatrist and submit to any future examinations the president's office requests; complete bi-annual shooter qualification, showing firearms proficiency and safety for individuals; and participate annually in university-sponsored law enforcement active-shooter training for personal protection.

The ETBU president retains the right to withdraw authorization with or without cause at any time and for any reason.

"The Texas Legislature wisely decided to allow private universities to determine independently the best campus policies, based on each university's unique and particular circumstances, as well as any needs or desires expressed by an institution's faculty, staff and students," ETBU President Blair Blackburn said.

"As discussions have occurred within those three groups among the ETBU campus community, and within the administration and board of trustees at ETBU, we have collectively determined that 'opt-out, authorize-in' provides the greatest level of safety and security to our student body and the university community."

Dennis Robertson, chair of the ETBU Faculty Senate, characterized the policy as "deliberate and well thought out."

"The administration did not rush to judgment on this, but through much deliberation over the course of the year, conferring with faculty and staff along the way, they came to a reasonable accommodation."

Baylor, HSU, HPU, UMHB and Wayland prohibit guns on campus

Baylor University acted first among BGCT-affiliated universities, announcing in February its decision to opt out of SB 11. By early April, three other Texas Baptist schools—Hardin-Simmons University, Howard Payne University and the University of Mary-Hardin Baylor—also decided to claim the exemption for private colleges and universities.

In late April, the board of trustees at Wayland Baptist University unanimously voted to endorse a recommendation from President Paul Armes to opt out of SB 11 and continue its longstanding policy that prohibits individuals from carrying firearms on campus. Wayland allows students, faculty and staff to store firearms in their vehicles or—at the Plainview campus—in a designated safe.

Armes made the recommendation after the administration polled, surveyed and conducted discussion sessions with faculty, staff and students at Wayland’s Texas campuses in Plainview, Lubbock, Amarillo, Wichita Falls and San Antonio.

BUA, HBU and DBU maintain weapons-free environments

On May 23, Baptist University of the Americas announced it also would opt out of SB 11, after consultation with students, faculty, staff and senior administration.

“We believe that the best learning environment for all involved is a weapons-free environment,” according to a public statement released by BUA.

The next day, Houston Baptist University announced its board of trustees also unanimously affirmed President Robert Sloan’s recommendation to opt out of the campus carry law, retaining its policy that restricts the carrying of firearms on campus to licensed police officers.

HBU officials cited the “known and unknown aspects of the law and the possible financial impact of its implementation.”

“At this time, the prudent course of action is to wait until all of the variables have been clarified,” Sloan said. “Continuing our existing policy for the time being would seem to best serve the interests of this university.”

In one of his final acts as president at Dallas Baptist University, Gary Cook announced May 31 DBU would opt out of SB 11, maintaining its longstanding policy that prohibits carrying handguns on campus or in any university facilities.

“DBU holds firmly our charge to maintain a safe learning environment for our students,” said Cook, who continues as chancellor at DBU. “We rely on an excellent relationship with area police departments, including the Dallas, Grand Prairie and Cedar Hill police departments. The Dallas Police Department currently has a firing range and SWAT training facility across the street from our main campus.”

DBU also launched its own university police department, led by John Shaw as chief of police, he added. Shaw served many years in the Grand Prairie Police Department and helped to establish the department’s police academy.