ring to former secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld as "Rummy."

I look for more dignity and less personality in scientific reporting.

Roger M. Herman
(rmh@phys.psu.edu)
Pennsylvania State University
University Park

Guns on campus: Is that physics?

The report "Texas law sets off debate about guns at universities" (PHYSICS TODAY, July 2016, page 26) seemed out of place in your magazine. The subject is not scientific, and the discussion was not handled in a scientific manner.

I see the scientific process as basically an endless loop of five steps:

1. Eliminate all emotions and preconceived notions related to the topic.
2. Take as much data as possible, as randomly and nonjudgmentally as possible.
3. Analyze the data for anomalies and patterns. Test to see if they correlate with any theories.
4. Subject any findings to an open and intensive peer review.
5. Cycle through the steps again based on responses and findings, and look for data in other new directions.

For example, as a physicist, even if I am strongly religious, data showing the possibility of purely mechanical random creation should not be discarded or ignored simply because it threatens my beliefs.

The only concrete data in the article were the laws themselves, the legal reactions to those laws, and two self-inflicted gunshot wounds. All other statements were either emotional conjectures about scary things that might happen or someone's beliefs about possible events. No actual case histories were presented of concealed-carry-permit holders doing any of those scary things. To the contrary, according to the article, Utah and Idaho have seen no change in attitudes or behaviors on campus as a result of the new law.

One possible source of data about the effect of concealed carry on campus is the seemingly infinite supply of statistical studies floating around. How many were truly scientific studies with useful data? What do they say?

Another source might be a study of the individuals on campus to determine, for example, any influence their backgrounds and training might have on their current attitudes. Have they had gun training or endured gun-related trauma? Another source of data might be an examination of the requirements to obtain a concealed-carry permit. Would they inherently make someone a safer person with a gun? Another might be a study of police records to see if the good guy–bad guy issue is a real problem.

I don't claim to be on any side of the issue, except to want to believe the statements made about Utah and Idaho. Gun control is much more a political issue than a scientific one. But shouldn't we as scientists conduct a proper, nonjudgmental data analysis?

By the way, campuses have never been gun free. Many holders of concealed-carry permits ignore the signs and carry all the time, except when faced with metal detectors.

D. Allan Roberts
(a_and_l@comporium.net)
Penrose, North Carolina

The article about guns on college campuses has me puzzled. Because technical physics content is completely absent, a peer reviewer would be hard-pressed to explain how the article aligns with PHYSICS TODAY's mission statement. Further, it does not address the main issue, namely, the inherent conflict between publicly funded institutions and the exercise of individual rights. Instead, it reports mainly on the expressed fears of various individuals.

A discussion of political policy requires something other than expertise in physics and knowledge of current events. For that discussion, I recommend two written works by economist and historian Murray Rothbard. His essay "The Mantle of Science" and his book *Science, Technology, and Government*, both available online, are important for understanding the role of deductive logic as it applies to human action generally and to public funding of universities and scientific research specifically.

Christopher Barsi
Lee, New Hampshire