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ISU looks at arming officers with stun guns

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Three Iowa State University student organizations said Monday that they support arming some ISU Public Safety Department officers with stun guns. But some faculty members don't like the idea.

"I was held at knifepoint in college," said Herman Quirnbach, an associate professor of economics and a member of the Ames City Council. "If I would have reached for a weapon, I'd be dead."

Quirnbach and other members of a 30-plus audience voiced their concerns about public safety's proposal to arm its state-certified officers with ADVANCED AIR TASERS, a device that stuns by electric shock.

Others, including representatives of the Government of the Student Body, the Inter-Residence Hall Association and the Graduate Student Senate, overwhelmingly spoke in favor of the plan.

"In my opinion, this is the least we should do," said Andy Tofilon, the president of ISU's student body. "We need to make sure DPS has all the tools they need to make sure this campus is safe ... we depend on them for protection and safety, so do their families."

The audience continually questioned the medical aspects of the TASER, which shoots out two barbs on a thin wire. The device administers about 50,000 volts of electricity from as far as 20 feet away. The barbs will penetrate about 2½ inches of clothing.

The weapon is fully accountable, releasing several microdots with serial numbers when fired. The dots can be traced to the weapon and the officer. Officers will be assigned a weapon individually.

The weapon also will time and date each firing in a computer chip.

Public Safety Capt. Gene Deisinger said the medical repercussions of the device are small. He said the barbs, if they penetrate the skin, can be taken out by the officer.

"It's not used in verbal (situations)," Deisinger said. "But when the person is combative or a threat to themselves or others."

ISU President Greg Geoffroy is accepting comments about arming public safety officers with TASERS until Dec. 1. He will present ISU's decision on TASERS to the Board of Regents in 2002.