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UNI Faculty Senate opposes stun guns for campus police

Student government supports plan
to arm public safety officers.

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It seems the student government and faculty government at the University of Northern Iowa don't see eye-to-eye on the Taser issue.

Less than three weeks after the Northern Iowa Student Government approved a resolution in support of arming campus public safety officers with stun guns on a 29-5 vote, a straw poll at Monday's faculty senate meeting showed overwhelming opposition to allowing the M-26 Tasers on campus.

Of the 13 senators in attendance, the poll showed eight opposed the tasers, with one in favor and four abstentions.

"I'm concerned about introducing a weapon," said Senate member Katherine van Wormer. "The Taser is a weapon any way you look at it. If someone were on campus and a police officer pulled out something that looked like a gun, I can see where a person could pull out a gun, thinking it's self-defense."

Monday's poll was not a formal vote, since the issue was not on the agenda. University Provost Aaron Podolefsky explained University President Robert Koob had sent him an e-mail asking for a sense of faculty senate support or opposition.

The student government vote in favor of the Tasers came on Nov. 7. A final decision will be made by the state Board of Regents and Koob. The issue may be on the agenda for the January Regents meeting.

Dave Zarifis, director of public safety at UNI, has been giving presentations on the stun guns to campus groups, hoping to gain support for arming his officers with them.

"I'm disappointed, certainly," Zarifis said after being notified of the poll. "If we know that we're working in a job that's inherently dangerous, with unknown situations, what does it take to make this a legitimate part of our operation? Does it take someone getting hurt? I know what we face and I hope I imparted that in my presentations."

The M-26 Taser resembles a handgun. It shoots a cube-shaped cartridge up to 21 feet that temporarily disables the target. Each Taser costs about \$400 and there are 18 officers on the campus safety force.

"These are certified police officers doing law enforcement work on a college campus," Zarifis said. "For us to be able to do that job, with some measure of safety, it's imperative the officers have some protection. This is not a lethal type of weapon."