

Ad Hoc Committee on a Civil, Safe and Open Environment
Tuesday, November 27, 2007
10:30 AM- 12:30 PM

Attendees:

Kim Tanzer
Mark Rush
Sandra Chance
Mike Seigel
Brian Aungst
Lola Bovell

Leslie Jean

Invited guests:

Chief Stump
Jamie Lewis Keith
Lt. Ettel

The meeting was called to order at 10:40 AM. Professor Tanzer suggested that the committee ask questions of Chief Stump and Lt. Ettel concerning their presentation of last week. Then, the committee will turn to a discussion of their report to the President.

In response to questions from members of the Committee, Chief Stump and Lt. Ettel provided the following information.

Chief Stump noted that the UF police department has a long history of working closely with student affairs staff, student groups such as ACCENT, and venue staff to ensure successful and safe events. She discussed the process that is underway to clarify roles of police officers, ushers, venue security personnel, and moderators at events.

The clarifications have lead to a three-tiered system in which the usher is the first contact with an event patron, UF Administration is the second contact and UFPD is the third contact in most cases. The police can usually wait to be called in to respond when others feel unable to address a situation. However, the police also have a duty to protect the UF community and exercise their expertise to respond when they perceive a safety issue or threat.

Event moderators will regulate microphone use and will receive better training. University police officers are the only people authorized and trained on how to make physical contact with people if necessary. Lt. Ettel and Chief Stump also discussed training that the police officers receive that provide them with the capability to manage physical contact when it is needed.

The O'Connell center staff receives significant security training, and have significant experience, in handling major events, large crowds and a variety of security issues. They will be brought in to assist Accent at events as necessary.

Chief Stump stated that she is not aware of any schools that have used tasers and then decided to cease using the devices. She also stated that she is not aware of any schools that decided not to utilize the devices for any reasons other than financial ones. Tasers are expensive. Chief Stump noted that law enforcement officers in the greater community use tasers. A Gainesville police officer who was in attendance noted that the Gainesville police department was acquiring 35 tasers and distributing them to officers in each part of the city. The Gainesville police department would like to outfit its whole police force with tasers but can't afford the cost at this time and has ensured that there is an officer qualified to use a taser on each shift in each area of the city.

There was a discussion on the trends in liability for universities for campus safety and employee safety.

Chief Stump also discussed the inquiries she made when she first came to UF to decide for herself whether tasers were a safe and worthwhile tool at a university. She discussed tasers with leading university law enforcement professionals around the country, the Alachua County Medical Examiner, and others with experience. She noted that the Medical Examiner is well respected and experienced and she is unaware of the ME having drawn a causal connection between taser use and the death of any suspect. She also noted that taser use has generally decreased the incidents of injury to suspects and police officers.

Mike Seigel stated that he would like to hear from a medical expert on the use of tasers and the effects on humans.

Michael Spellman was in attendance at the meeting and spoke to the committee. He stated that he is an attorney from Tallahassee who specializes in law enforcement and consults to the UFPD and other policing agencies. He noted that the courts that have heard cases and expert evidence on the safety of tasers have not found that they are unsafe. He presented the committee with the vitas of five expert witnesses who have testified for the defense in taser cases. When the committee indicated a desire for names of plaintiffs' experts as well and asked Mr. Spellman if he had encountered good plaintiff experts, Mr. Spellman said he had not. Professor Tanzer thanked Mr. Spellman for the information he provided and again indicated that the committee would seek input from experts. Mr. Spellman added his view that the university could be more exposed if it ceases using the taser and has to use more lethal force to protect people or an officer is injured.

The committee discussed its future plans. Kim Tanzer distributed a draft outline of the subjects to be covered in the committee's report to the President. She noted that further work, consultation with experts, would be necessary on tasers but thought the rest of the report could be advanced in the meantime. Due to the press of finals and other end of semester obligations, the committee reached a consensus that it should begin drafting the report at the beginning of the spring semester, will also hold another public forum after classes start in the spring, and should provide the President with a progress report based on Professor Tanzer's outline by the end of December. Professor Tanzer noted that there would be one final meeting this semester next week.

The meeting adjourned at 12:08 PM