

Statement on Arming UNI Public Safety Officers
by
United Faculty – AAUP

United Faculty – AAUP and the University Faculty Senate sponsored a Public Forum on arming UNI Public Safety Officers on Monday, August 27, 2007. Many United Faculty – AAUP members were present at this Forum and one served as a Panelist. This Forum embodied the very essence of academic freedom and freedom of expression held so dear by United Faculty – AAUP and the University Faculty Senate. Everyone who attended had ample opportunity to express his or her thoughts on this important issue.

The issue of arming UNI Public Safety Officers represents a classical trade-off between two highly undesirable and potentially deadly situations. As many at the Forum pointed out, arming UNI Public Safety Officers gives the officers more tools (firearms) with which to do their job. But, as many others observed, arming UNI Public Safety Officers subjects innocent members of the UNI campus community to the potential of the accidental as well as deliberate discharge of firearms. Many other arguments that support both sides of this issue abound.

The arguments advanced in support of arming include (1) UNI Officers are already trained and certified to carry firearms, (2) extremely dangerous situations involving firearms in the wrong hands could happen on campus, (3) in these types of situations, a strong initial response is desirable, (4) disengagement with an offender is unrealistic, (5) UNI Officers will not respond unarmed to an incident involving a firearm; they can call the Cedar Falls Police Department for assistance, (6) unarmed UNI Officers are unable to protect themselves from offenders with firearms.

The arguments advanced in support of maintaining our current and long-standing policy of providing Iowans a gun-free campus include (1) none of the reasons to arm UNI Officers are sufficiently compelling, (2) there are other, more effective ways to improve safety on campus, (3) arming UNI Officers is a poor substitute for sound policies and procedures for dealing with dangerous or potentially dangerous people on campus, (4) arming increases the risks of “suicide by cop,” (5) abuse of police power, real or perceived, especially against minorities, becomes more intense, (6) guns on campus, even in the hands of Public Safety Officers, will inhibit the expression of spirited free-speech and revelry, (7) some innocent bystanders could be injured or killed by the accidental or even deliberate discharge of the firearm of a UNI Officer, and (8) UNI Officers do not need to carry firearms, because they are already well equipped with radios, mace, batons, and tasers. As long as UNI Officers contain rather than confront potentially armed suspects, they have no need to carry firearm everywhere on campus. Moreover, UNI Officers can be issued firearms in dangerous situations with the prior permission of the University President.

Everyone agreed that arming UNI Officers would not make UNI a safer campus. Many agreed that arming UNI Officers would enable them to better protect themselves against bad people, real or perceived. No one wants a Virginia Tech type of tragedy to occur at UNI. No one wants innocent bystanders harmed by the firearms of UNI Officers. Everyone on each side of this issue has the best of intentions. But, good intentions do not always lead to good results or sound policy.

Several, highly relevant points rise to prominence. First, UNI has a long tradition of unarmed campus security personnel. UNI Public Safety Officers do not carry firearms

for some very good reasons. The crime rate at UNI is very low, as is the crime rate in Cedar Falls. Cedar Falls Police are available to provide a very quick (five minutes) strong response in the event firearms are involved in an incident on campus. Although no one suggests that unarmed UNI Officers run away when encountering an armed suspect, containment of the situation until Cedar Falls police officers arrive, or until the University President authorizes responding UNI Officers to carry firearms, is far more reasonable given the low probability of an incident on campus involving bad people with firearms. There are better ways to manage the risks of bad people with firearms on campus.

The fact that UNI Officers do not carry firearms has not prevented very well qualified individuals to serve as unarmed keepers of the peace. Of course, some who desire a career in law enforcement where he or she carries a firearm might not want to work as an unarmed UNI Officer. But, there are plenty of others who are willing. If the UNI Officers truly felt that they are unnecessarily risking their lives by working unarmed, they would not work at UNI for very long, especially if they are fully certified to carry a firearm. The likelihood of a situation on campus involving a firearm is so low that UNI Public Safety has no problem filling its ranks with unarmed officers. This includes the current Director of Public Safety, who gave up a law enforcement position where he could carry a firearm to work at UNI, where he could not carry a firearm.

The fact that UNI Officers are trained and certified to carry firearms does not in and of itself justify their carrying of firearms. This training maybe necessary, but it is definitely not sufficient to justify arming UNI Officers. Far too many innocent people have been injured and even killed by police officers with the same training and

certifications that UNI Officers have. UNI Officers need much more training in how to avoid using a firearm or even threatening to use force. The types of circumstances that UNI Officers encounter on campus typically do not warrant nor justify the use of deadly force, and UNI Officers have been able to perform their duties and contribute to the maintenance of a comparatively peaceful campus environment for years and years without the use of firearms. The fact that these officers are trained and certified to carry firearms is not a sufficiently compelling reason for them to carry firearms on the job. Indeed, many men and women, including faculty and staff members, are well trained and certified to carry firearms. But, none of them express or desire to carry firearms for any reason, even to better protect themselves and others as they perform their assigned tasks.

Additionally, UNI Officers currently routinely patrol the public street around campus looking for speeders. The only rational reason for these patrols is to reduce the likelihood that a student/faculty/staff will be injured by a speeding vehicle while crossing these streets. Yet, the fact that these officers face unknown dangers when stopping a speeding vehicle off-campus should not be used to justify carrying firearms on campus. Moreover, the fact that UNI Officers now stop and ticket speeding vehicles off-campus demonstrates that the likelihood of a member of the campus community being injured by a speeding vehicle just off-campus is greater than the likelihood that a member of the campus community might be injured in a violent incident on campus. If the likelihood of someone being injured on campus in a violent incident were greater, then UNI Officers would not be patrolling the streets around campus looking for speeding vehicles. Indeed, the assignment of UNI Officers to patrolling off-campus streets is very strong evidence that these same officers should not carry firearms to protect people on campus. If the

likelihood of a violent incident on campus were high enough to warrant arming UNI Officers, then UNI Officers would not be patrolling off-campus street looking for speeding vehicles. Instead, they would be assigned to patrolling campus in an effort to prevent or quickly respond to violent incidences on campus. The UNI campus is so safe, that the Public Safety Officers have time to patrol off-campus streets for speeding vehicles. The fact that UNI Officers are patrolling off-campus streets cannot be used to justify carrying firearms, because they do not have to patrol off-campus to keep the campus safe.

In short, there is insufficient compelling reason to arm UNI Public Safety Officers at this time. Instead, the University should focus on the development and implementation of policies and procedures for minimizing the likelihood of violence on campus and for responding in a reasonable and appropriate manner to incidences of violence on campus, including even better or enhanced relations with the Cedar Falls Police Department. Right now, this University has no system in place for rapidly notifying the campus community that a violent incident is developing so that innocent parties can take appropriate measures to protect themselves. Right now, this University has no system in place for recognizing potentially dangerous members of the campus community or how to deal with these potentially dangerous people. Moreover, the campus should adopt and publish a firm no firearms on campus policy.

Consequently, after careful thought and due consideration, United Faculty – AAUP strongly recommends that UNI Public Safety Officers NOT be allowed to carry firearms at this time. Frankly, too many members of the faculty bargaining unit will feel less safe, if UNI Officers are permitted to carry firearms. United Faculty – AAUP does

recommend that the University initiate at once a process for developing policies, procedures, and practices that will improve the genuine, not just perceived, safety of everyone on campus and provide the procedures and practices necessary to prevent and contain violent incidents on campus. Additionally, United Faculty – AAUP recommends that the UNI Public Safety Department work with the City of Cedar Falls Police Department to develop a means of rapid, coordinated, and appropriate response to incidents on campus that involve firearms.

Approved by the UNI United Faculty – AAUP Central Committee, August 31, 2007