

Taser on Quad draws viewers

BY ZOE MARTIN
Assistant Features Editor

The Taser's darts hit the silver demonstration board, making it spark and pop like a Fourth of July firecracker — 50,000 volts of holiday cheer.

Alpha Phi Sigma, one of Truman's justice systems honor fraternities, hosted a Taser use demonstration on the Quad last week as part of its recruitment events.

Senior James Young, vice president of Alpha Phi Sigma, said the group consists of students with various career interests under the umbrella of criminal justice, but many students in the major go into law enforcement. Young said more officers are being armed with Tasers at this time although their use is controversial.

"Columbia's now putting in some money to go ahead and get all their officers outfitted with Tasers," he said. "Some of the officers here in Kirksville have them, and so ... people are curious about why are we using this for security purposes instead of the other methods."

Young said Tasers are one of several less-than-lethal methods to subdue individuals for arrest, including bean-bag guns and OC spray, or pepper mace.

"All of them have their ups; all of

them have their downs," Young said. "It does fall on a continuum. There's only so much force you can use and once you hit that point, your options are pretty limited."

Young mentioned a Moberly, Mo., man who died at the end of August after being Tasered, but he said this was a rare exception to an effective law enforcement tool.

"It has its risks," he said. "That's something that officers can't control. If they're being rushed at by some-

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body who's an aggressor, their options a lot of times are either you've got the mace — which may or may not be effective because if you're facing downwind, you're not going to want to use mace — you've got the Taser and your gun. The gun's lethal, Taser's not. So it's one of the risks you have to weigh. It's classified as less-than-lethal because the majority of the time, it's not."

Adair County Sheriff Leonard Clark, who conducted the demonstration, echoed Young's sentiments and backed them up with his 28 years of experience working for the sheriff's department.

"I believe in them," Clark said. "I believe they're safe. A lot of officers prevent being physically assaulted or injured due to confrontations. ... A lot



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Sheriff Leonard Clark of the Adair County Sheriff's Department demonstrates a 15-foot range Taser gun on the Quad for an Alpha Phi Sigma recruitment event last week.

of times the individual is bigger than an officer is, and so an excellent reason for the Taser is to keep the officer safe and to take someone into custody with no injury to the officer or the individual that you're taking into custody."

Clark said eight of his 10 deputies are certified for Taser-use and that the officers carry Tasers in the jail as well as the field. He said that most of the time officers never have to use the Taser.

"We use it at the jail also because it's a very big deterrent with some inmates that are creating problems or refusing orders in their cells," he said. "You can turn the Taser light on someone and most of the time they'll comply."

During his presentation on the Quad on Sept. 23 to a group of about 30, Clark said Tasers are used because individuals are "resisting the reasonable request

of an officer" and they are a "means to take an unarmed person into custody, for their safety and mine."

Clark, who said he has twice experienced Taser shocks, explained that the Taser gun has two different cartridges, either 15- or 21-foot ranges. Both types of cartridge are roughly 2-inch by 2-inch boxes attached to two wires ending in darts. Clark said that ideally, the darts attach to areas of high muscle mass on the subject, an electric circuit is completed in the subject's body, and the officer pulls the trigger for five seconds of 50,000 volts of electric shock to immobilize the muscles.

Clark acknowledged the controversy about Taser-use but pointed out during his presentation that even pepper spray can and has been lethal for individuals with severe respiratory issues.

Senior Andy Roades, secretary of Alpha Phi Sigma, said the controversy caused by Tasers is the result of misuse, not inherent in the Taser itself.

"I think they can be overused, which, if you've ever seen the 'Don't Tase me, bro' video is a perfect example," Roades said. "I think it's better to have them as opposed to not have them because it does provide a non-lethal alternative for law enforcement. ... In a lot of cases it's the safest way to diffuse the situation for both the officers and the person who's being arrested."

Freshman Adam Wieberg agreed that Taser use is sometimes necessary. He said he and his friends attended the demonstration because they were curious.

"We thought someone was going to get Tasered, so we wanted to see what would happen," Wieberg said.

Election class educates students on issues

BY MICHELLE MARTIN
Staff Reporter

The Current Issues: 2008 Election class is educating students for the November election.

James Przybylski, professor of political science, said he has been teaching an election class at the University during every presidential race since the '80s.

"Generally we study elections, particularly focusing on the presidential election," he said. "Most students are very interested in the election happening, so we watch the Internet and read the newspapers, watch the television."

An average class consists of student debates about the issues or discussions on political current events, Przybylski said. He said a few students typically present opposing party platforms.

"I think we try to get into some of the issues that seem to be some of the most important issues of the campaign," he said. "We pick maybe a half dozen to 10 issues that we will have the Democrat and Republican sides discussing."

Another class activity involves predicting the outcome of the 2008 election, he said. He said each

student is assigned three states to analyze.

"We have the students look over their state, see how the states are doing in their polls ... and see if they can come up with their best prediction of how the state's going to go," he said.

In the past, the class has made some fairly accurate predictions of how the election will end, Przybylski said.

"Over the years, we've done pretty well," he said. "We haven't gotten it perfect, but we've had only three or four states wrong. That's not too bad."

Although the class doesn't usually sway many students' political leanings, the debates and discussions broaden students' perspectives because they are exposed to other opinions, Przybylski said.

"Many of our students are pretty much already Democrats or Republicans," he said. "You kind of know where they're going anyway, but it gives them more of an understanding of why the other side votes the way they do."

Senior Hugo Fernandez said he took the class for an elective within the political science major and to keep up with election issues.

"It's a fun class to go to, and it's just my hobby," Fernandez said. "It just keeps me pumped for the election more than anything."

Fernandez said that although the class exposes him to other students' opinions, his political stance has remained the same.

"It actually reinforced my views, if anything," he said. "We're talking about what Republicans do and what Democrats do, and I've always been a Democrat. And now that we've discussed more of the Democrat views and platforms, it helps to reinforce what I already believe."

Fernandez said the class gave him a chance to explore political issues more in-depth than the average voting citizen.

"I think that the regular voting masses definitely don't cover as much at all as what we cover in this

class and what we will cover in class," Fernandez said. "I'm able to see what others think. Even if they agree with me, we're all probably heading towards the same answer but on a different route."

Senior Theresa Perkins said that although she leans Republican, she is using the class as a way to decide which candidate to vote for. She said that in class, she has the valuable chance to talk to other students about the election.

"The class shows how [students] feel about candidates instead of just using data," she said.

The debates and discussions challenge most students by forcing them to take new perspectives, Perkins said.

"If you as an individual are paying attention to the election, most of your friends are on the same wavelength," she said. "People are forced to take the opposite side than what they think."

Perkins said whichever way the election turns out, she won't be too disheartened.

"As a political science major, I've gotten a lot of insight into how branches [of government] work and I know that either way it will take a lot to get things done," she said. "I don't think that in our system we are inherently able to change quickly."

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Theresa Perkins
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36

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