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A third incident, a new video

A cellphone camera captures UCLA police using a Taser on a student who allegedly refused to leave the library Tuesday night.

By Amanda Covarrubias and Stuart Silverstein, Times Staff Writers
November 16, 2006

The latest in a recent spate of cellphone videos documenting questionable arrest tactics surfaced Wednesday, this one showing a UCLA police officer using a Taser to stun a student who allegedly refused to leave the campus library.

Grainy video of the Tuesday night incident at UCLA's Powell Library was broadcast Wednesday on TV news and the Internet, prompting a review of the officers' actions and outrage among students at the Westwood campus.

The footage showed the student, Mostafa Tabatabaiejad, falling to the ground and crying out in pain as officers stunned him.

According to a campus police report, the incident began when community service officers, who serve as guards at the library, began their nightly routine of checking to make sure everyone using the library after 11 p.m. is a student or otherwise authorized to be there.

For the Record: In a earlier version of this article, a quote from Mostafa Tabatabaiejad read: "Here's your Patriot Act, here's your use of power." The corrected quote reads "Here's your Patriot Act, here's your ... abuse of power."

Campus officials said the long-standing policy was adopted to ensure students' safety.

When Tabatabaiejad, 23, refused to provide his ID to the community service officer, the officer told him he would have to show it or leave the library, the report said.

After repeated requests, the officer left and returned with campus police, who asked Tabatabaiejad to leave "multiple times," according to a statement by the UCLA Police Department.

"He continued to refuse," the statement said. "As the officers attempted to escort him out, he went limp and continued to refuse to cooperate with officers or leave the building."

Witnesses disputed that account, saying that when campus police arrived, Tabatabaiejad had begun to walk toward the door with his backpack. When an officer approached him and grabbed his arm, the witnesses said, Tabatabaiejad told the officer to let go, yelling "Get off me" several times.

"Tabatabaiejad encouraged library patrons to join his resistance," police said. "The officers deemed it necessary to use the Taser."

Officers stunned Tabatabaiejad, causing him to fall to the floor.

The video shows Tabatabaiejad yelling, "Here's your Patriot Act, here's your ... abuse of power," the Daily Bruin reported, adding he used a profanity.

"It was beyond grotesque," said UCLA graduate David Remesnitsky of Los Angeles, who witnessed the incident. "By the end they took him over the stairs, lifted him up and Tasered him on his rear end. It seemed like it was inappropriately placed. The Taser was so unnecessary and they just kept doing it."

Campus police confirmed that Tabatabaiejad was stunned "multiple" times.

By then, Remesnitsky said, a crowd of 50 or 60 had gathered and were shouting at the officers to stop and demanding their names and badge numbers.

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Remesnitsky said officers told him to leave or he would be Tasered.

Tabatabainejad declined to comment. He was arrested Tuesday night and cited by campus police for resisting and obstructing a police officer and was released.

The incident was the third videotape of an arrest to surface in the last week in Los Angeles.

One video showed a Los Angeles Police Department officer dousing a handcuffed suspect in the face with pepper spray as the suspect sat in a patrol car.

That video came to light Monday, just days after the LAPD and the FBI launched investigations into another videotape showing a police officer hitting a suspect in the face several times after a foot chase in Hollywood.

UCLA Assistant Police Chief Jeff Young said Wednesday that he had viewed the video of the campus incident on the Internet and would view any other videos that were shot.

"We will gather as many samples as we can find, from different sources," Young said. "We'll use it for our own administrative investigation."

UCLA Acting Chancellor Norman Abrams said in a statement that university police are investigating the incident and the officers' actions.

"The investigation and review will be thorough, vigorous and fair," he said, adding that compliance with the ID policy is "critical for the safety and well-being of everyone."

Young said Tasers, which discharge an electric current to incapacitate a suspect, are seldom used by the campus police department.

On campus Wednesday, many students said they were surprised by news of the incident.

"UCLA is a very peaceful campus," said Chen Mei, a third-year political science student from Laguna Hills. "I study in Powell Library at night all the time. I've seen people without ID cards who are removed. But none of the time has it been this dramatic."

Karen Jou, a second-year student from Orange, said the campus police "usually are really good."

"I wouldn't have thought that would have happened here," she said. "It's really odd."

Julia Newbold, a third-year English literature major from Walnut Creek, said her impression from her limited contact with campus police was good.

"They seem like a peacekeeping force," she said. "I'm really surprised to hear they had to resort to something like that. It sounds a little too forceful to me to Taser someone."

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