

The Dean's Almanac

The Spiel* on the Bus

October 16, 2008

It feels like it's been a while since I last wrote an Almanac entry. I've been busy. What have I been doing, you may wonder? I've been going to meetings about our new late night bus service. Huskies, this is a service that is near and dear to my heart, and I have to admit I'm a little worried about its viability. Each week I read the reports provided by the good folks in Transportation Services. The numbers of passengers on these routes make it clear that the need is there for late-night transportation around campus and beyond. But the tales of vomiting, fights, pounding on the windows, pretending to jump out in front of a moving bus, and general rudeness are about the most discouraging narratives an otherwise student-friendly dean of students can read.



Lee Burdette Williams

So let me get serious here. The University will not allow its employees, specifically these drivers and monitors, to be put at risk or treated badly by students. The University will not allow its resources (i.e., buses) to be damaged by abusive students. And the University cannot, especially at this moment, afford to pay for a service that is apparently causing these first two situations to occur.

When I first arrived here in Fall, 2005, I asked, "Um...why do the shuttle buses stop running at 6 pm on Fridays and Saturdays?" I was told it was because students who rode late at night were drunk and unruly and that we would not enable their partying by transporting them to and from parties. For three years, I and a few others have suggested that UConn students are both willing and able to manage themselves and each other in a way that makes this service viable. I know, without doubt, that the jerks who are causing these problems are the minority, that most of you are respectful and appreciative and do not vomit on other people. But it is time for the majority to step up and exert some control over the minority. Don't make the drivers and monitors do what you yourselves ought to be doing as members of this fine academic community. Tell your friends to *knock it off*. Tell them these things: Don't get on the bus if you're going to get sick. Don't fight. Don't bring alcohol onto the buses. Don't harass the drivers (do you think they're getting paid enough to put with that crap?). Don't push and shove one another to get on the bus.

I have to admit that I'm a little embarrassed to be writing these things, because I know you, and I know I'm probably preaching to the choir here (and goodness knows I love preaching and I love choirs). But mark my words, folks: If we cannot get the behavior by a few idiots under control, this very valuable service to all of you will be lost. So please, please, please. Help me out here. Thanks.

And while we're on the topic of buses, I read another inaccurate op-ed piece in the Daily Campus about the shuttle service to the airport and train station. Here's the deal: these services DO NOT MAKE A PROFIT! No one's getting rich off of your \$50 fare. To everyone who has said, "Why pay \$50? I'll just ask a friend to give me a ride," I say, "Great! Please do that!" But apparently there are enough of you who either don't have friends with cars, or friends willing to do this for you, or maybe just don't have friends, that these services have been heavily used. Think the price is high? *Please*. Price the same service from a private vendor or taxi. It will be twice the cost, I guarantee. This op-ed piece said that the University should provide "off-campus transportation to all students at a reasonable price." I agree. But what is a reasonable price? You pay a transportation fee each semester that covers the extensive shuttle service available every day around campus (not including the late night runs, which are currently being covered by other funds until we see what the annual cost will be, at which point your transportation fee will likely increase to cover it). The airport and train station runs are used by a relatively small percentage of students. Should we increase the transportation fee to ALL 16,000 students to subsidize the cost of these shuttles to the three hundred or so who might use it in a semester? Or should we just charge a (well) below-market rate to those who need it?

Tired of my questions? Then abandon your dream of being an administrator. It's what we do, day in, day out: figure out how to 1) get resources, 2) spend them wisely, and 3) listen to feedback on how we're doing. We're doing our best for you, and we take seriously our stewardship of your tuition and fees. I love my job, but the next time someone starts a sentence (spoken or written) with the phrase, "Students at a world-class university deserve..." I'm going to cry. You *deserve* excellent teaching and advising and a safe campus environment. Beyond those things, everything else is icing on the cake. So call us out when we don't provide those necessary things, but as for the rest, please just know we really do try to do well by you, and always take your (respectful) suggestions very seriously.

Some odds and ends from the mailbag that have been hanging around:

A student wrote in about the disreputable behavior of some fans in the student section at Rentschler. I asked Jeff Hathaway, Director of Athletics, and Police Chief Bob Hudd how to best address those concerns, and they said students should immediately alert security. There are also phone numbers displayed on the scoreboard throughout the game that you can call to request assistance from a fan service representative.

Lindsay wrote in to say she was sad to learn that a new building will eventually be located on the site of the old Pharmacy building along Fairfield Way (across from ITE). She really likes the open space. I agree that it's nice to have that much green space, but we are severely lacking in classroom space (see note above about deserving excellent teaching, which is part environment, don't you think?). We'll still have a nice big lawn directly in front of the Union (looking toward the Benton), with ample room for Frisbee-throwing, sunbathing, protesting.

Several folks, including **Stacey** and **Jesse**, have written in about bike issues on campus. We don't have enough racks, and we don't have bike paths on the roads. Take heart, cyclists: the good people of Architecture and Engineering Services, who oversee the campus master plan, are well aware of these needs, and as new construction is done, you will see some of these issues

addressed. New buildings will have bike racks in their designs, and even before then, we'll see some new racks. As for the pedestrian/cyclist on sidewalks issue: I was just in Burlington, VT, a very bike-friendly town, and I noticed that stenciled on the sidewalks in the downtown is a consistent message: "Bikes on sidewalks should be walked." I agree. Sidewalks are for pedestrians, and cyclists should be on the road. When your route requires you to get off the road and onto a sidewalk to get to a particular place, either walk your bike or ride it slowly enough that pedestrians would not be badly injured if you hit them (or preferably not injured at all, but I know from experience that even a slow bike hurts when it rides up the back of your leg).

I understand that our roads are not the safest place for bikes, but, like many dilemmas we face, there is no easy answer for this one.

And that's it for me today. I hope your midterms went well, I hope you are making and keeping friends, I hope your clubs and organizations are thriving, I hope you have a few more weeks before you bring out the Uggs, and I hope you're enjoying the success of our dazzling Field Hockey team. Women with sticks: now there's something every campus needs more of.

See you around the neighborhood. And don't forget to vote!

**Noun:* a talk of great length