Happy Trails to You

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Imagine it: blistering sun beating down; boiling hot tar on a searing sidewalk. Only a mile left to go. There's the building up ahead, or is it a mirage? A bulky pack weighs down upon an aching back. Time is running out. Misery sets in while thoughts loom in the mind like, "I don't think I'm going to make it."

Now, how would someone feel about making the same agonizing journey three times a week? It doesn't hold much appeal. Then why does Southeastern Louisiana University force its students to make a similar trip? It isn't quite a mile from North Campus to South Campus, but in this Louisiana summer heat, it can feel like it. With time breathing down students necks and heavy backpacks causing pain, one begins to wonder if there is a better, faster way for students to travel across campus.

According to Barbara Jacoby, the director of the Office of Commuter Affairs at the University of Maryland at College Park, "Several major studies have identified commuters as particularly high risks for attrition" (I). The monotonous commute back and forth has students looking for an easier way. Ask any student; it's happened to all of us. Mostly it's the freshmen who don't know their way around campus when they sign up for classes. What happens is they schedule two classes, one right after the other. One class ends up being on North Campus, while the next is on South Campus. The ten minute in-between time is supposed to be enough to arrive at their destination; however, it is just not sufficient for the distance. The student is forced to run across campus with a full backpack, or drop the class because they are always walking in late for

it. The university should perform a study to see how the students view this problem (Jacoby vi). I think they would be surprised by how many students think they need a better means of transportation from North to South campus.

Realistically, it takes almost fifteen minutes to walk across the college grounds without jogging. As it is, many are forced to fast-walk going anywhere, and this is not looked upon with a friendly eye by many specialists, considering the heavy backpacks students lug around with them. Backpacks are usually carried incorrectly and for a long period of time; this causes aching in the back and is an extremely unhealthy thing to do repeatedly (Oborne 52). "One study reported that an estimated 55% of students carry backpacks that experts consider too heavy" (Foley and Beers 176). Unless Southeastern Louisiana University can find an alternative solution to making students lug heavy backpacks across campus, complaints and back pains are going to affect class attendance.

Rumors have been floating around Southeastern Louisiana University campus about a shuttle bus for quite some time. When I heard some of these rumors, I went to the Southeastern newspaper, *The Lion's Roar*, and talked with a worker there. He told me about the shuttle bus rumors he had been hearing since he was in college (S. Hudson). I think all these rumors could be put to good use if Southeastern Louisiana University would put a couple of shuttle buses in circulation. It's a great way for Southeastern Louisiana University to earn a little extra money by charging students a dollar for every ride across campus. Also, it's the perfect way for students to reach classes on time.

One shuttle could go from the street just outside of McClimans to the road next to the University Building. The other bus could do the exact opposite. This way, students coming from the North side of campus could catch the bus going to South campus and vice versa. The buses

would probably have to leave four minutes before the next round of classes start. This will give the students six minutes to gather their things from the last class and be at the shuttle stop on time. Washing the shuttle buses, arranging other courses, and even becoming bus drivers are also ways students can earn some extra money (Biemiller B2). However, shuttle buses are not the only way to get across campus speedily. It can also be done with basic things such as bikes and skateboards.

While talking about the efficiency of commuting, Barbara Jacoby notes, "Commuting-whether by walking, bicycling, driving, or public transportation consumes time, energy, and financial resources" (45). Unlike the shuttle bus solution, bikes and skateboards are relatively inexpensive and much more maneuverable. They are not subject to traffic jams, or parking, like many other modes of transportation.

All Southeastern Louisiana University needs to do is set up some sort of bike/skateboard loan-out service, and add about twenty more bike racks around campus. Students could rent a bike or skateboard for the semester. A few bike racks should be added by the freshmen parking lot so commuting freshmen could park their cars, unlock their bikes, and ride to class. Students would benefit from the exercise while conveniently making it to class on time. As far as the backpacks go, all the bikes could have baskets. Students could place their books behind them, and carry the weight the right way, instead of ruining their shoulders. This solution assumes students can afford to rent a bike or skateboard every semester they attend Southeastern Louisiana University.

There is one more solution which would allow students to bypass scheduling consecutive classes too far apart. What if students just need to know they scheduled their classes incorrectly? The easiest, most convenient way to solve this predicament is simply to alert the students while

they are adding classes they will only have ten minutes to journey from North to South campus. A message should be sent to the student's e-mail if they happen to schedule two such classes at opposite ends of the university. Then they can re-evaluate whether or not they want the trial of racing back and forth. If I had had a warning like this while I was scheduling my classes at Southeastern Louisiana University, I would have been able to prepare for the speedy commute I would be having. Instead, I had to drop the class because I was constantly going in late and out of breath from hauling my books, guitar, and myself across campus. After students add classes online, the computer should recognize whether or not they have scheduled them in this way. If they have, the computer should show it as a scheduling error. This way, it is the student's responsibility for arriving in class on time, and the university will not be held accountable for the student's decision.

Unlike the first two solutions, the last solution would be very cheap, and completely effective. Students can miss the shuttle, become stuck in traffic, forget their bike lock code, or fall off their skateboards, but they cannot blame it on Southeastern Louisiana University if they were warned about it beforehand. Students who don't know their way around campus will no longer be caught off-guard when they realize they have a half-a-mile to walk in ten minutes. Once Southeastern Louisiana University programs the software, they never have to worry about it again. Students will know what they're in for, and can change class times, or they can choose to keep the class, and find their own way to arrive on time.

I chose my topic because this is something I encounter every week at Southeastern Louisiana University. It is a real and pressing problem for many students, and one I can actually propose viable solutions for. Constantly being late for class because of having to "book it" across campus is an aggravation we can easily do without.

Works Cited

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