

VISITOR & PARKING SERVICES OPR PROCESS RESPONSE and ACTION PLAN REPORT July 2003

Preface

Visitor & Parking Services as a unit, has by far, the largest user constituency at the University. It's total constituency includes not only the campus population of faculty, staff and students, it also includes all of the identified constituencies surveyed by the CET, as well as others. Recommendations and observations of the various constituents are at times in conflict, as the following examples from the CET Report demonstrate:

- *Only approximately 50% of faculty/staff focus group members were aware of the meeting room available in the Visitor Center. Advertising its availability would draw more people into the Visitor Center and, consequently, highlight other services offered.*
- *Work with Admissions staff to resolve the dilemma of reservation of the meeting room. When a meeting is in progress in the meeting room, campus tours cannot start there. In addition, other staff members stated confusion about reservations that were made for the room.*

Many of the viewpoints expressed also do not recognize institutional responsibilities of the unit.

The combination of visitor services with parking services may at first hand seem unusual. Without a central visitor destination, the first contact with the University is generally parking, and then in the form of an unattended parking lot. Further information and direction is then obtained from a variety of sources. This results in inconsistent and often times incorrect information being provided. The simple act of allowing visitors to leave campus without a parking ticket by providing correct parking regulation information is in itself a very positive public relations function.

The Visitor Center has been open four years. Because of the many changes in other campus unit's operations and/or procedures, Visitor & Parking Services staff does not attempt to know all details of every campus program and activity, but rather staff does ensure that correct information and referrals are made the first time, through confirming phone contacts when necessary. The OPR process has been especially helpful in identifying opportunities for visitor services to evolve with expanded and improved services for visitors and prospective students.

CET Report Response

The CET Report made a distinction between visitor services and parking services, and further offered "consistency" and "public relations" as visitor services themes. From an operational standpoint, the aforementioned themes also apply to parking services. Functionally, "policy development" and "staff training" can also serve as additional themes. The addition and differentiation of these latter themes will facilitate development of an action plan.

Many of the CET Report bullet points could be considered under more than one of the identified themes. Each point will be addressed, though not necessarily in the order sequenced in the CET Report.

Public Relations

- *Questions were raised about the duplication of services in the Visitor Center and the University Center Information Desk, especially in difficult budget times. Offices and departments are not sure where to send event information and, consequently, only one of the two venues may have the most current information.*
- *Visitor Center staff must be more aware of campus events so that the Center can serve as a comprehensive information and referral source. This may be accomplished by seeking training and information from other offices, as well as accessing websites and calendars.*
- *It is recommended that staff from the Visitor Center search out current brochures and publications from all campus offices and departments and have these available in the Center.*

The distinction between the University Center Information Desk and the Visitor Center operations has been that the Visitor Center's focus is toward prospective students through a partnership with Admissions, and to the needs of campus visitors and departmental guests. The UC Information Desk meets the needs of enrolled students and campus staff.

The lack of a centralized scheduling process has, to date, made it difficult to gain awareness of all campus events. Visitor Center staff utilize several campus web sites, and some departments provide advance notification of events. Staff are often confronted with a situation where a visitor only knows the name of the program to be attended, but not the location or the sponsoring department. Implementation of the centralized calendar, and the requirement that everyone uses it, will greatly enhance Visitor Center staff access to information.

While it is reasonable to expect Visitor & Parking Services staff to make contact and meet with other campus departments to explain the types of services available through the Visitor Center and the types of information and brochures that should be shared, placing the burden of acquiring this information upon Visitor Center staff is impractical. It is certainly possible to receive and catalogue the needed information, obtaining it from the myriad of sources on a timely basis is not.

Consistency

- *Make sure that enforcement of all regulations is done thoroughly and consistently.*
- *Review all parking regulations and consider paring down the number of differences. All "like" lots should have the same regulations and hours.*

Parking enforcement staff are instructed to thoroughly enforce each parking area for a particular violation (expired meter, permits etc.) prior to proceeding to another area. The process of parking is, however, a snapshot of a continually changing scene. Another observer will see a different picture at a different time. Hours of enforcement and regulations are consistent for "like lots." Also, variation in regulations offers users additional options.

Policy Development

Parking regulations are developed in conjunction with the Visitor & Parking Services Advisory Committee and reviewed by university administration prior to

implementation. Most of the recommendations of the CET Report relate to policies which were effected prior to 1990. The parking environment is substantially different now, and it is appropriate that a thorough review of all policies be conducted by the Advisory Committee and recommended changes reviewed by administration.

Special event parking, especially for the Horizons Series, is a hotly debated issue which has made many south campus parkers exceptionally angry.

The issue of bus parking for Horizons events has been reviewed three times, by two chancellors. The alternatives available are not better, and do not provide the safety for the pre-school and elementary school students that constitute the Horizon's event audience. Consequently, we do not anticipate any changes other than the communication plan identified in the action plan.

Staff Training

Formal training for staff, particularly in the areas of customer relations and operations for the Ticket Outlet, are appropriate. Semi-annual meetings with all staff present will also promote greater consistency of responses among staff.

Action Plan

- Complete the policy and procedure manual and present the policy revisions identified by the CET to the Visitor & Parking Advisory Committee and obtain stakeholder input if there is no representation. Policies include:
 - Cost of special event parking
 - Reserved parking for University offices
 - Athletic team use of parking as a fund raiser
 - Meter fees
 - Exception to parking fees for some events and/or groups such as Career Services
 - Voiding tickets as a warning system
 - Reserved permit parking allocation
- Develop a training program for student staff in customer relations.
- Develop a communication plan for University staff to explain the services available from the Visitor Center. Visitor & Parking Services staff will also attempt to meet annually with deans and directors to further promote these services and obtain feedback.
- Develop a communication plan for Center of the Arts and Hyer Hall staff to explain the bus parking for Horizons events, and encourage them to subscribe to the uwwparking-l list serve for event date reminders.
- Post the Visitor & Parking Services mission and goals statements prominently in the Visitor Center.

Attachments

- CET Report
- Outside Expert Review

VISITOR & PARKING SERVICES OPR PROCESS CAMPUS EVALUATION TEAM REPORT

May 2003

Campus Evaluation Team Members

Mary Beth Mackin, Office of Student Life – Chair
Amanda Adamski, RHA
Steve Anderson, WSG
Frank Bartlett, Office of Residence Life
Therese Kennedy, Recreation Sports
Leslie LaMuro, Young Auditorium
Dave Ostrowski, University Police
Lou Zahn, Continuing Education

Methodology Used

The Campus Evaluation Team for the Visitor & Parking Services OPR process met from November 2002 through April 2003. Our primary goal was to provide feedback from the campus and community on the operation and perceived effectiveness of Visitor & Parking Services. More specifically, our objective was to provide feedback related to the six stated questions in the OPR process.

Community input was sought in the following ways:

- From CET committee members who are each key stakeholders in Visitor & Parking Services operations.
- Through the examination and evaluation of many documents such as position descriptions, organization charts, budgets, resource comparison with other UW System campuses, departmental goals and progress statements, mission statement, webpage, departmental brochures, departmental procedures, and other pertinent documents.
- By conducting focus groups with several campus employee groups.
- By administering a web-based survey to all campus employees.
- By administering a paper survey to students.
- By conducting interviews with Visitor & Parking Services staff.
- By administering a paper survey to campus “visitors”, such as camp directors, Young Auditorium patrons, athletic season ticket holders, and Fitness Center members.
- Utilizing results of the assessment conduct by Dr. Sherry Williams’ communication class.

General Observations

The above efforts resulted in an abundance of feedback. Although feedback was offered in many areas, the two most common themes appear to be “consistency” and “public relations”. Given that the two functions of the office; visitor services and parking services seem somewhat distinct, we will offer our recommendations separately.

Visitor Services

Most feedback was very positive about the addition of the Visitor Center on campus. It is centrally located, very visible, is accessible, and provides a central focal point for visitors to start with their campus business. Many campus staff were unaware of services offered, however, and indicated that they would utilize such services if they knew more about them.

The Campus Evaluation Team offers feedback for Visitor Services in the following categories:

Information

- Visitor Center staff must be more aware of campus events so that the Center can serve as a comprehensive information and referral source. This may be accomplished by seeking training and information from other offices, as well as accessing websites and calendars.
- It is recommended that staff from the Visitor Center search out current brochures and publications from all campus offices and departments and have these available in the Center.
- Questions were raised about the duplication of services in the Visitor Center and the University Center Information Desk, especially in difficult budget times. Offices and departments are not sure where to send event information and, consequently, only one of the two venues may have the most current information. At the very least, it is suggested that these two staffs meet together and share in training so that the most complete information may be provided.
- Insure that all employees are well-trained in customer service, as well as current events and campus information.

Ticket Outlet

- Not many students, staff and patrons were aware of the existence of the ticket outlet at the Visitor Center (only 30% of staff in focus groups were aware of this). Much publicity needs to be released, as this is seen as a great resource.
- Feedback indicates that the ticket outlet in the Visitor Center has not worked well. Because it is not utilized often, staff members are not proficient in its use and are unable to provide tickets in a timely manner. Staff must be thoroughly trained in this procedure and all must be able to generate tickets with the speed that a drive-through operation suggests.

Public Relations/Information Sharing

- Improve information flow back and forth between other offices on campus. Campus offices are not currently aware of all services offered through the Visitor Center and are unaware that they could/should provide information about campus events to the Visitor Center.
- Only approximately 50% of faculty/staff focus group members were aware of the meeting room available in the Visitor Center. Advertising its availability would draw more people into the Visitor Center and, consequently, highlight other services offered.

Facility/Services

- Work with Admissions staff to resolve the dilemma of reservation of the meeting room. When a meeting is in progress in the meeting room, campus tours cannot start

there. In addition, other staff members stated confusion about reservations that were made for the room.

Office Environment/Management

- All members of the Office should be made aware of the current mission and goals and should be involved in the process of formulating, implementing, and assessing progress on annual goals. Staff members currently report that they are unsure and/or unclear of the office mission and objectives.
- The Operations Manual should be completed as soon as possible and made available to all staff members.
- After review by all staff, the Visitor & Parking Services mission statement should be displayed in the Visitor Center.

Parking Services

Overall, feedback about Parking Services was positive, which is very complimentary about a service that patrons are forced to pay for. Generally, constituents reported that the cost of parking is fair and that the lots are well-maintained and aesthetically pleasing. Although everyone has some experience with not being able to find the spot of their dreams, most patrons reported that parking was ample.

Based on constituent feedback, we offer recommendations in the following areas:

Consistency

By far, the biggest area of concern for Parking Services is that of consistency. From cost to policies to enforcement, there is much displeasure from parking users related to this issue. Lack of consistency confuses patrons, results in citations, provides negative PR for Parking services, and inflames members of the campus community.

- Review all parking regulations and consider paring down the number of differences. All "like" lots should have the same regulations and hours.
- Make sure that enforcement of all regulations is done thoroughly and consistently. The strong feeling is that this is not currently true, which results in patrons being angry when they are finally caught.
- Insure consistent enforcement of cars with handicap plates and tags, especially in the area behind Roseman Hall. Current non-enforcement creates a serious safety hazard.
- Do not allow service vehicles to park or drive on sidewalks, lawns, or other non-designated spots unless required for the type of work to be done.
- Consistently and effectively enforce the time limit on service vehicle stalls. These spots are currently being abused with employees parking there for hours or all day without consequence. As a result, there are no spots available for service vehicles needing them. This should be enforced across all departments with no special privileges being given to one department, office or building over another.
- Review the policy of allowing students to purchase both a commuter and resident permit.
- Review the cost of special event parking. If parking staff is required, then either all events should be charged back for this or no events should be charged back. (Commencement is currently the only event charged for parking services).
- Insure that parking regulations in the Credit Union drive are consistently enforced.
- Review the policy on reserved spots for offices. Any office or program that has use of a reserved spot should pay for it.

- Examine the current practice of allowing an athletic team to coordinate parking for football games as a fundraiser. It seems unfair that this opportunity is not available to other organizations. If the fundraiser is allowed to continue, the logistics should be examined to make sure that the team continues to direct traffic after the lot is full.
- Examine the consistency of which off-campus groups and users pay for parking. Explain why it would be fair to charge students, faculty and staff for parking, but not community members.
- Examine the concept of "staff only" lots and why they are only located at General Services and Goodhue.
- Assess the practice of "free weekend parking". It is currently felt to be inconsistently enforced and misunderstood.
- Make meter prices consistent across campus.
- Establish consistent regulations for all lots, offices and users. This information must be clear, put in writing and made available for everyone.
- Get rid of the practice of making exceptions for specific events or people, no matter what the tradition has been.
- Do not void legitimately issued tickets as a warning system.
- Review policies and procedures on an annual basis and publish them each year. Avoid making policy changes mid-year.
- Determine a definition for special event parking and be consistent with chargebacks.
- Be consistent with who pays for parking and make sure all users pay. Currently some users are forced to pay (faculty/staff/students, camp participants) and others aren't (State Ensemble participants).

Special Event Parking

Special event parking, especially for the Horizons Series, is a hotly debated issue which has made many south campus parkers exceptionally angry.

- Consider having the busses drop patrons off and then park the busses near the Williams Center, or consider (at least occasionally) closing the lot on the north side of the CA, or rerouting the bus traffic.
- Consider landscape or circle drive construction changes that would allow for easier drop-off of passengers.
- Although other options have already been discussed, the anger remaining related to this issue makes it worth exploring again. Consider the formation of an ad hoc review committee, made up (at least partially) of employees in Hyer and the Center of the Arts who are most affected by this issue.
- As long as the current system is still in use, make sure barricades are up by 6:00 a.m. and do not penalize workers who arrive early and park in the CA lot before the lot is closed.

Public Relations/Outreach

- Make sure that parking staff is available at PREVIEW sessions (at least at the lunch hour information fair). Although parking permits may not be available at that time, the number of parking-related questions is significant. As a result, parents and students are angry that their questions cannot be answered and they often receive incorrect information from well-meaning staff members from other offices.
- Streamline parking regulations so that they are consistent and understandable, and publish them in attractive, easy to read formats. The current brochures are rated very unattractive and boring. Most users indicated a preference for having all regulations available in one publication. Also make sure that regulations are on the website.

- Evaluate campus signage and improve as necessary.
- Evaluate the current campus maps. Several users indicated a feeling that the maps are “backwards”.
- Examine the current lot numbering system, which most patrons feel is confusing.
- Post lot numbers prominently in all lots and at all entrances.
- Review and update the Visitor & Parking Services website. Make plans for an annual review.
- Post information signs in every lot with hours and regulations clearly spelled out.

Services

- Make sure that the electronic permit process is working effectively. This was certainly an area of confusion to the Campus Evaluation Team, as some staff praised the process and others reported that it was not functioning at all.
- Insure that student workers are adequately trained in all policies and procedures, ticket issuing, campus events and customer service.
- Make sure that patrons are informed about late fees related to citations.
- Evaluate the “reserved permit” process to determine if an adequate number of reserved spaces are available. Consider adding reserved spots in the south half of the library lot. Make sure that patrons on the waiting list are kept informed of their status.
- Define which office on campus is responsible for traffic issues (such as traffic control on roads and streets, posting of warning signs, directing traffic, erecting traffic signs); University Police or Visitor & Parking Services.
- Clearly provide signage indicating that vehicular traffic is prohibited in front of the bookstore (the architecture from Starin Road makes it look like a driveway). Consider installing posts here so that cars cannot get past.

Parking Lots

- Evaluate the amount of pedestrian traffic in lot 7 and research ways to make the lot safer.
- In future planning, evaluate the lack of parking available for patrons of the University Center.
- Assess the adequacy of the number of service vehicle stalls available for Hyer Hall. Perhaps some of the disabled spots, which are seldom used, could be converted to allow for additional short-term staff parking needed to conduct university business in Hyer Hall.
- Egress from the CA lot after events is a serious problem and presents safety hazards. Consider other options such as creating a service drive connecting lots on both sides of the building, as well as an additional exit from the lot.
- Consider making the penalty for parking in a service stall more severe and insure that these spots are patrolled and enforced thoroughly and consistently.

Overall Observations

In addition to the myriad of recommendations derived from the feedback received, the committee sensed an overall positive evaluation of Visitor & Parking Services. Although it is probably rare for a parking operation to receive accolades, patrons reported that parking fees seem reasonable, the lots are well-maintained and aesthetically pleasing, short-term and special event parking are readily available, and, overall, there is adequate parking space available on campus.

Patrons also spoke highly of the central location of the Visitor Center and the services offered there. This facility provides a visible entry point for visitors and offers a variety of services for campus offices.

Overall there was high praise for the management of Visitor & Parking Services. Patrons reported prompt response to concerns and felt that issues were dealt with in a fair manner. Staff members in the office express loyalty and student workers evidence a longevity rarely found in campus offices. Morale in the office seems high.

Certainly this report offers recommendations about issues that appear to be problematic. Offering such recommendations is the task of a Campus Evaluation Team and often the sheer volume of recommendations can give the appearance of an operation in need of much "overhaul". Although Visitor & Parking Services could certainly benefit from exploring some of these issues (especially in the areas of consistency and public relations), it is overall thought to be a well-run and managed operation.