**Transportation**

*Introduction*

Graduate and professional students have unique needs when considering transportation. Many graduate and professional students live further away from campus because rent is cheaper and they have to commute longer distances to campus. Graduate and professional students have a number of transportation options: walking, biking, public transit, and driving. Students can purchase various options of Cornell parking permits for up to $725.76 per year, as of academic year 2012-2013. Students receive in their first year a free OmniRide bus pass for TCAT (Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit) and in subsequent years can purchase them for $200 per year, as of academic year 2012-2013. Students, regardless of if they have purchased a pass, can ride the bus for free after 6:00pm on weekdays and all day on weekends. Additionally, if the graduate and professional students who live on campus want to park at their residence, they have to purchase a $725.76 per year parking pass.

According to research conducted by the GPSA, approximately 53% of graduate and professional students have an OmniRide pass (either through purchasing one or receiving one free by being a new student), 13% have purchased a parking pass, and 34% have not purchased either OmniRide or a parking pass[[1]](#footnote-1). While some individuals who have a free pass may not take public transit and some who do not purchase a pass may simply pay cash on transit, it is clear that public transportation is an important component to commuting by graduate and professional students.

The diversity of graduate and professional students means that the University should not assign transportation policies, prices, and programs with a broad stroke.

There are some communities of graduate and professional students who have particular transportation needs that should be considered. And, some graduate students have relationships with the university and their program that are similar to employees while other graduate and professional students are more like students in the traditional sense.

Professional students in the College of Veterinary Medicine have particular transportation challenges due to the demands of their program. In a particular year, veterinary students are required to be on call and are thus must purchase parking passes to be able to attend calls when needed. The vast majority (81%) of vet students have purchased a parking pass, likely at the rate of $725.76 per year. Additionally, graduate and professional students who live on campus and bring a car must pay the full $725.76 per year fee, even if that car is used simply for running errands and not driving to an academic building. Graduate students who work late in labs, have demanding lab schedules, or irregular lab schedules have limited public transportation options at certain times of the day and may be best served by purchasing a parking pass.

The 2007 Graduate Community Initiative called for for more flexible parking options and better hours for public transportation. Many of those recommendations have been implemented and a variety of flexible parking options now exist for graduate and professional students. Short-term parking permits can be purchased (albeit at higher rates per day), an occasional-parker program exists, OmniRide can be purchased by spouses, and the first year of OmniRide is free. These are commendable advances in flexibility, but the GPSA thinks that even more can be done to achieve the following objectives.

**Objective 1: Graduate and professional students should have reasonable, fair, and equitable parking options.**

*Rationale*: For 34% of graduate and professional students who purchase parking passes, transportation by car remains a good alternative to get to campus. Choosing to drive a car instead of take public transit may be for a number of reasons including preference, housing location, lab or research demands, or resident status on campus and graduate and professional students should have access to reasonably priced, fairly distributed, and equitable parking options. For a graduate student on a minimal stipend, $725.76 per year can be a substantial annual cost and for a graduate or professional student taking near $100,000 in loans, $725.76 for parking simply adds to the debt burden. The GPSA understands that providing parking is an expensive endeavor, we call on the university to consider the impact of that cost on graduate and professional students. And, while the GPSA also understands that taking public transportation, walking, or biking are all more environmentally-responsible alternatives to driving, we recognize the importance of driving to many graduate and professional students.

Actions:

1. Graduate and professional student residents at Maplewood, Hasbrouck, and Thurston Court should be charged a much lower fee for a “residential” type parking permit and that fee should be negotiated with input from GPSA and residents.
2. Free parking should be available throughout the day for service providers to residents at Maplewood, Hasbrouck, and Thurston Court including babysitters, social workers, tutors, prenatal visit nurses, parents, and others.
3. Professional students at the College of Veterinary Medicine should have a much lower parking pass rate given the necessity of their program requirements.
4. For graduate students who have rigorous lab schedules for a particular period of time should be given an option of a reduced parking pass.
5. RideShare should be offered with the same incentives to graduate and professional students as are offered to faculty and staff.

**Objective 2: Graduate and professional students should have access to high quality public transportation.**

*Rationale*: Because over 50% of graduate and professional students have access to an OmniRide bus pass and every graduate and professional student can ride for free after 6:00pm on weekdays, public transportation is an important transportation alternative to our community. Almost 70% of ridership in TCAT is from Cornell passes. While it is difficult to break that ridership down between undergraduate and graduate and professional students, it is clear that graduate and professional students who live farther away are one of the largest user groups for TCAT. And, since the university negotiates a contract for OmniRide passes, the university should keep in mind the needs of graduate and professional students when negotiating that contract and the prices that will have to be charged to students.

Actions:

1. A qualified graduate or professional student who is a TCAT rider should be appointed to always fill one of the three allocated positions for Cornell on the TCAT Board of Directors.
2. TCAT should actively work with the GPSA on planning routes that best serve graduate and professional students, including late-night service and service to areas with high graduate and professional resident concentration.
3. TCAT should actively work with the GPSA on identifying underserved, yet highly concentrated areas of the county with graduate and professional students.
4. TCAT should create a better and more usable trip planner.
5. Cornell should provide more resources during orientation, the new students process, and across campus on TCAT routes, including maps, route descriptions, and resources for additional information.
6. TCAT should develop or provide information for the development of a mobile transit app.

1. Data provided by University Registrar and Transportation and Mail Services. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)