



A row of cars parked in a lot under a blue sky with clouds. The cars are mostly silver and white, with a red car visible on the left. The background is filled with lush green trees.

MAKING THE MOST OF **FINITE SPACES** WITH CAMPUS SERVICE VEHICLES

by David Vinson, PhD

As an undergraduate, I worked in the merchandising team of a major electronics chain. Our job was to keep a high-volume store functional and appealing. This entailed pricing and arranging every item, staying on top of inventory counts, and setting weekly ads. I learned that every inch of retail space can be measured in terms of its profit-making potential—such a basic lesson, but as a consumer I had little reason to consider, for instance, why a television (which generates little to no profit) would be merchandised alongside “grab and go” accessories like HDMI cables, wall mounts, universal remotes, batteries, and services (all of which are far more profitable).

In look and feel, our campuses are hardly mistaken for retail spaces, but such a comparison lends itself to thinking about the relationship between profitability and how spaces are utilized on campus. In this regard, we can imagine our campuses in broad spatial terms, from one end of campus to another, and likewise more narrowly, say, within the parameters of a single building or room. How space is used on campus matters—it matters to students, many of whom live on campus and spend the majority of their time on its grounds; it also matters to administrators, faculty, and staff, who certainly want a safe and beautiful campus, one that offers a wide range of services and amenities, since it is where they, too, spend so much of their time.

While the business of higher education is consumer-driven, this hardly means every inch of campus is designed solely with profit-earning potential in mind. What it does mean, however, is in addition to serving as functional and appealing spaces, our campus grounds are bound to certain physical realities. They are finite, limited to their own borders, and such is why our campuses must continue to evolve, to be

updated and refined. To embrace the challenge of providing the best campus experience possible sets in motion an outcome in which profitability is a culmination of our students' preference to remain on campus, where they not only learn and develop professional skills, but where they can also study, socialize, shop, exercise, eat, and rest.

A viable strategy for maximizing the potential of our campus spaces is to reduce on-campus parking, offering instead a variety of campus service vehicles that are comfortable and eco-friendly alternatives to the standard automobile. The reduction of on-campus parking means that such spaces can be transformed in a manner that makes our campuses even more appealing and useful.

Solving the Parking Problem at the University of Southern California

It is understandable that our students are invested in bringing their cars to campus, but this is not always practical, particularly for those who attend private universities or colleges where parking is scarce.

The lack of parking at the University of Southern California (USC), for instance, has been a common frustration for students, not least of all because 73% of the student population commutes. Located near downtown Los Angeles, campus spaces at USC are at a premium, and creating new parking necessitates the repurposing of other spaces.

USC has responded to this challenge by creating an extensive program for campus service vehicles. This has eased the congestion of on-campus parking, and it has also freed up unsightly parking lots, which can now be transformed into green spaces or sites for new classrooms, research centers, libraries, cafeterias, recreation and wellness centers, and so on.

USC provides an extensive network of free bus transportation throughout the calendar year, one that it is used by students, staff, faculty, and university guests. Multiple routes service the main campus, in addition to the North University Park neighborhood, the USC Parking Center, as well as the USC Health Sciences Campus, Marina Del Rey ISI/ICT locations, Keck USC of Alhambra, and even Union Station.

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Because the USC bus system offers so many locations for travel, it can be used not only for getting around between classes, but also for commuting to work and exploring Los Angeles. Passengers can track bus routes and estimate travel time with a designated app on their phone. The bus tracking system is an immeasurable tool because it allows users to plan their time with maximum efficiency. Perhaps a student wants to grab lunch on campus or run by the library between classes. With the tracking system, he or she can manage this responsibly, without risk of arriving late to class.

The “Safe Ride Program”

USC also offers the “Safe Ride Program,” which is designed for students who study, work, or take classes at night. The program averages nearly 3,000 rides per week, and it utilizes three methods of transportation in the evenings. Students can travel by bus, just as they can also use Campus Cruiser or Rideshare.

The bus system functions at night just as it does in the day, only with less drivers and routes in operation. To offset this, the Campus

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Cruiser Service offers either a walking or vehicle escort to the student’s destination. Students can request a Cruiser online or through a smartphone app. They are matched with a driver instantly, and the app also provides real-time trip updates. When calling Campus Cruiser, students are expected to provide both pick-up and drop-off addresses, the number of males and females who will be going to the destination, and the last name of the caller. This is for identification purposes but also to make the service as efficient as possible. If other callers

have similar locations and destinations, they may be grouped in the same car to save time.

USC also utilizes a third-party option called Rideshare. The school has partnered with Lyft to offer free rides within designated free-ride zones. Students may use the free service as often as they need, and hours of operation take place between 7 p.m. and 2 a.m. each day. For safety purposes, students are advised to consult the Rideshare app prior to entering any vehicle so they can double-check the driver’s identification, the make and model of the vehicle,

Challenge:

Incorporating innovative, state-of-the-art sustainable technologies to optimize comfort and indoor environmental quality while keeping long-term operating costs to a minimum.

Worcester Polytechnic Institute Sports & Recreation Center

This award-winning facility has been credited as being one of the greenest sports centers in the nation.

WPI Sports & Recreation Center is an environmentally friendly facility containing a 38-meter pool, a fitness center, a four-court gymnasium, an indoor running track, rowing tanks, racquetball and squash courts, dance studios, and offices and meeting spaces for the coaches and staff. The center is home to the wrestling team as well as the practice facility for men’s and women’s rowing and varsity team training.

Sustainability is important to WPI which boasts several LEED certified facilities on campus. The school has a broad reaching sustainability planning process which includes students as well as faculty. Faculty members have incorporated sustainability into many student projects and focused on various aspects of sustainability around the world. In 2012 alone, some fifty-one energy-related projects were completed at the school.



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and the license plate. They are also encouraged to travel in pairs. If this is not possible, students are encouraged to use the “Share Your Ride” feature on the Rideshare app, which enables the passenger to be tracked by friends. USC also provides the safety measure of pick-up and drop-off zones.

A Car-Free Culture at Champlain College

The campus of Champlain College is vastly smaller than the sprawling grounds of USC, consisting of 42 buildings over 2.5 city blocks in the residential Hill Section of Burlington, Vermont.

In 2018, Champlain implemented a policy in which freshmen are prohibited from bringing a vehicle to campus. The policy aligns with the “Sustainability Vision” at Champlain—to reduce the environmental impact of excess vehicles and parking spaces, thereby strengthening the livability and character of the local community.

What is fascinating is that once students at Champlain grow accustomed to living without a car during their first enrollment year, they tend to go without one until they graduate. In fact, over 80% of the student body remain carless for the next three years, a percentage sizeable enough to suggest that Champlain has managed

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to change the thinking about both car ownership and public transportation, thereby fundamentally altering the local culture. Such a percentage also suggests that students have found value in not worrying about parking permits, car maintenance, insurance, registration, or fuel costs.

Students and employees at Champlain have access to a free shuttle-bus system that operates every day of the week, and they can access a

GPS-tracking system via the “My Champlain” app. Also available is the Green Mountain Transit (GMT) bus, another free service that operates throughout the counties of Chittenden and Addison. When boarding, passengers simply swipe their Champlain ID card through the fare box card reader.

The bicycle culture at Champlain is strong and no doubt encouraged by the availability of

several bike-related services. Students can use ChampShop, a bicycle mechanic workshop that remains open 24/7 for self-service. The Greenride Bikeshare program is a regional bikeshare system in Burlington, and one available to the entire campus community. Champlain also provides indoor bike storage rooms in several of its buildings.

CarShare Vermont is another option, one that allows drivers to reserve a vehicle of choice nearby. This alleviates the need to own a car but also gives students access to use one when it may be more convenient than public transportation. Champlain has partnered with CarShare Vermont so that all full-time Champlain students and employees are eligible for discounted membership rates. Once the driver becomes a member, he or she simply reserves a vehicle choice nearby. After using the car, all the driver needs to do is return it to the original parking spot.

Campus Service Vehicles at Stanford University

Stanford University (Stanford, California) is home to an 8,180-acre (12.8 sq. miles) campus, one of the largest in the country. The task of navigating the entire campus can be a challenge for students, especially for freshmen, who—like those at Champlain College—are not permitted to bring cars to campus.

The policy eases on-campus traffic and parking congestion, and it applies to freshmen primarily because Stanford believes freshmen are among the least impacted. This is due in part to the additional requirement that all freshmen live in residence halls with board plans, and any freshman who needs a job may obtain one directly on campus. Further, because Stanford provides its community with such an impressive array of transportation options, it aims to set a precedent in which students will ideally think twice about the need to bring their cars during subsequent years.

The Marguerite is one of Stanford’s public transportation options. The shuttle-bus system is free and open to the public—no ID is required. The main shuttle lines traverse the campus Monday through Friday all year, and several lines offer evening routes. All buses are wheelchair-accessible, and the vast majority have bike racks. The Marguerite can also take passengers to neighboring cities for shopping, dining, and entertainment. For those eager to visit nearby San Francisco, the Marguerite connects to Caltrain, a local train service.

Like Champlain College, Stanford provides a car sharing program. Zipcar at Stanford functions as a self-service, on-demand car sharing program. To use it, drivers register as a member, reserve a

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car online or by phone, use a proprietary Zipcard to enter the car, and simply drive away. After using the car, they return it to the same location where it was picked up. There are over 40 Zipcars available at more than 26 Stanford locations.

Stanford also champions a Rideshare program. Anyone interested signs up with a ride matching service (Scoop is one example), which allows individuals to post a profile seeking a ride or to view existing rideshare groups.

The bicycle culture at Stanford is, frankly, the model for which all private universities and colleges should aspire. Stanford has invested in bicycling to reduce carbon footprint, encourage fitness, and increase connection to the community.

Stanford is the only university to receive a renewal of its Platinum designation and was the first university to be recognized at the highest level when the program launched in 2011. This year's Bicycle Friendly University (BFU) award extends Stanford's second Platinum designation (2015-2019) for another four years (2019-2023).

Not only does Stanford offer free bike safety classes, but it offers 7 bicycle safety repair stands on campus, each containing multiple tools for repair as well as a bike pump to inflate tires. The stands are available 24/7 and are free to use. Across campus, several bike share programs have also been implemented. Those who commute by bike to campus can even rent bike storage cages and lockers.

Reimagining What's Possible

Across the country, private universities and colleges are coming up with creative, eco-friendly solutions to traffic and parking congestion. With the use of campus service vehicles, campuses are transformed into more efficient, aesthetically appealing spaces that attract prospective students and keep current ones satisfied even without transportation of their own.

What we are witnessing with campus service vehicles is a reimagining of what our campus spaces can look like and how they can function. We should be excited by the possibilities.



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Dr. David Vinson has a PhD in English with specializations in transatlantic literature and cultural studies. He is a committed scholar, teacher, husband, and dad. If you ever meet David, avoid the subject of soccer. His fandom borders on the truly obnoxious.

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