



Georgia College and State University Makes Security a SNAP

By Kurt Meyer

Universities everywhere are looking for ways to improve sustainability, boost security, and differentiate their campuses. The Georgia College and State University is no exception. Its campus consists of 43 acres of lawns, gardens, and columned buildings adjacent to downtown Milledgeville, Georgia, a historic town that once served as the state capital. Despite the rural setting, the school puts a big emphasis on the security of its 6,700 students. Its active Public Safety Department staffs 20 sworn police officers and four communications officers. Their top priority? Ensuring the safety of the campus community.

HAIL, SNAP!

Georgia College and State University is using an innovative security program known as Student Night Auxiliary Patrol (SNAP). The program lets students call or hail transport vehicles for free security escorts and rides across the main campus during designated night time hours.

Founded as a student-volunteer foot patrol in 1989, SNAP was slowly upgraded. In 2009, the Public Safety Department began hiring student employees and purchasing vehicles for them to drive.

HIRING AND TRAINING

Students must apply for SNAP positions online, where a selection process

identifies top candidates. “They must be in good academic standing, hold a valid Class C driver’s license, and pass criminal and driver’s background checks,” says Sgt. Michael Baker, the public service officer who oversees the program. They must also submit references and go through an interview process.

SNAP is sponsored by Public Safety, funded by student government, and run largely by students. Since SNAP drivers are employees of the college and drive college-owned vehicles, they are covered by the university’s insurance plan for motor vehicles.

“We have 18 student-employees who patrol the campus five nights a week, provide rides and security escorts, perform building checks, and support Disability Services by transporting students with special needs,” says Tucker O’Brien, a graduate student who serves as SNAP director.

During a two-day training program, SNAP drivers work with Public Safety, learning policies and procedures and vehicle use and safety. New hires then ride with a veteran driver for a week or two. Drivers are also certified in cardiopulmonary resuscitation and automated external defibrillator (AED) use.

“The SNAP team does a tremendous job for us,” says Sgt. Baker.

SMALL CARS FOR A SMALL SCHOOL

The SNAP fleet consists of five Club

Car Villager 4 transport vehicles and one Club Car Villager 6. Three are gasoline powered, three are electric.

“On a small campus like ours these vehicles are an efficient, affordable alternative to expensive buses or vans,” says Baker. The cars are marked with the green SNAP logo, which is also on the polo shirts the drivers tuck into their khaki pants.

“The vehicles are perfect for this application. They are incredibly maneuverable and easy to board,” says O’Brien. “We can drive on sidewalks, cut across campus, and pull right up to buildings and doors. And everyone loves to ride in them.”

THE SNAP APP

“I love the fact that we can just call SNAP via a button on the school app,” says student Maria Esposito. The cars are equipped with iPads with campus maps, so drivers can receive, answer, and track the status of incoming calls.

SNAP drivers make routine stops to pick up passengers at the library, a dorm and a pick-up point adjacent to the downtown areas where students often gather in local establishments at night.

“Since I live off campus and don’t like to walk in some areas that surround the campus, I use SNAP all the time,” says Esposito. “It’s such a personalized, safe mode of transportation.”

“I think students are much less intimidated by these open-air vehicles and

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student drivers than by the police cars used by Public Safety," says O'Brien.

The program enjoys continuing success. In the fall of 2009, 3,677 rides were requested via the app. By spring 2013, that had risen to more than 11,200. "Thousands of other riders got on at pick-up points or stopped us along the way and hopped on," says O'Brien.

THE RESULT? FEWER CRIMES AND LOWER COSTS

"The results of SNAP have been pretty remarkable," says Baker. In the fall of 2009, there were 28 campus DUI arrests.

By the spring of 2013 that number had fallen to five. Personal and property crimes are also down significantly.

Parents love the fact that their kids can get rides after dark. "SNAP is a big selling point for the school," Baker says.

The program is also cost effective. "The vehicles are much less expensive to purchase, operate, and insure than vans or shuttle buses would be," says Chief Mechanic Charles Gettis. "They require less maintenance than any vehicles we've ever used, and they let us put fewer miles on our Public Safety cars."

According to Gettis, it costs just pennies a day to operate the electric vehicles, and the school gets three to four years out of a battery pack.

"We've been surprised by the power of the electric cars, too," he says. "I can't imagine the campus without SNAP," says Esposito. 

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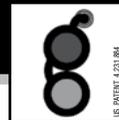
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