

Parking SMARTER

SURGE IN ENROLLMENT DEMANDS STRATEGIC PARKING SOLUTIONS

BY BRIDGET GORMAN WENDLING

As community colleges continue to experience record enrollments, administrators must face the challenges of growth. Parking is emotional. Ask anyone late for class who can't find a spot. People have opinions, horror stories—even rage—about parking.

RICHARD NEWSTEAD/GETTY IMAGES

The unprecedented growth in community college enrollment is due to both the rising expense of higher education at four-year institutions and the number of people returning to school to train for careers in higher demand. As military personnel re-enter the private sector and displaced workers

change careers, students are flocking to community colleges to take advantage of government and state programs that reimburse for retraining.

Faced with full parking lots, frustrated commuter students, and inadequate infrastructure, many colleges have considered hiring a qualified

parking professional to help them develop a parking management plan.

Mike Martindill, vice president of Timothy Haahs & Associates, a Pennsylvania-based architectural and engineering firm, has seen firsthand how community colleges are addressing the parking

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challenge: “The community colleges we are working with are studying how to use a combination of parking permits and parking fees to fund their parking structures. And, much like four-year institutions, these same community colleges are open to using either public or private capital as a funding source.”

Architect Matt Jobin of Rich and Associates in Southfield, Mich., specializes in parking issues. Though the ideal scenario is to provide ample, adequate, efficient parking for every person who wants it, he says meeting the parking needs of community colleges requires several steps.

Determine Your Needs. The first step is to understand how students and staff are commuting and to measure how many are doing so in their private vehicles. Factor in alternative transportation modes (e.g., bicycle, shuttle, subway, rail, bus) to determine the number of spaces needed. Conduct regular parking usage surveys, which, over time, can be used to more accurately gauge your parking needs. Some colleges work with parking consultants to craft surveys and capture vital information.

Develop a Strategy. It is important to weigh all factors, including land availability, community impact, and public transportation options. Suburban campuses usually have more flexibility to develop a parking infrastructure than urban campuses, as land is often more readily available and affordable. Says Jobin, “New surface parking lots make sense when land is plentiful, because they are generally less expensive to develop than parking structures. However, parking lots represent a very inefficient use of land, so they generally aren’t an option for urban campuses or suburban schools that are landlocked.”

Urban campuses generally build parking structures that can accommodate many more vehicles on the same footprint than parking lots, provide a number of safety advantages, and provide space to meet other campus needs, such as housing or classrooms, he says.

Structured parking can be a community resource when educational institutions partner with other organizations to share their parking facilities. For instance, churches, which typically experience peak parking use during weekends, can share parking facilities with community colleges whose peak usage occurs on weekdays. Or, in other instances, community colleges can partner with local officials to make on-street spaces and municipal parking available to faculty and students.

Consider Public Transit. It is important to consider the availability of public transportation to and from campus. By promoting the use of public transit, community colleges can lower parking demand and the costs of developing infrastructure. There are a number of

Online Parking Resources and More: www.parking.org

The International Parking Institute (IPI) offers training, certification, and resources for community college parking personnel, including:

- An online Knowledge Center with a searchable database that highlights proven practices and provides statistics and relevant parking facts and information;
- *The Parking Professional*, a monthly magazine that provides in-depth coverage of new parking technologies, best practices, and examples of innovative parking operations;
- A national job board to aid in the search for those with parking expertise;
- A shop offering textbooks, primers, and manuals on parking, plus the *2010 Parking Buyers Guide & Consultants Directory*; and
- Web-based seminars on a range of parking topics.



A provocative advertising campaign lets students and faculty know about campus parking resources.

ways institutions can promote public transportation, including locating bus stops on campus and negotiating discounts for students using public transit systems.

Lansing Community College (LCC) in Lansing, Mich., is a growing urban campus. Its main campus serves 19,000 students. On a typical day, there are about 5,000 students and 1,200 employees on campus. Its campus is relatively landlocked, and expansion would encroach on adjacent neighborhoods. The college maintains a healthy relationship with the local community, and administrators are hesitant to expand for fear of upsetting residents.

In lieu of expansion, Eric Glohr, LCC's director of auxiliary services, says administrators have tried a number of approaches to ease congestion, including the installation of programmable LCD signs that provide up-to-date information about where parking is available.

A proactive advertising campaign lets students and faculty know about campus parking resources via local advertising, YouTube videos, a website, and frequent mailings.

LCC's comprehensive parking program encourages students and staff to

Modular offices installed during construction of a new parking structure at California's Grossmont College

use public transportation, shares parking resources with municipal agencies, and provides campus-based parking facilities to commuter students who drive their own vehicles.

Even so, there is confusion. Municipal bus stops on or near campuses often attract nonstudent riders, which can increase traffic and commuter congestion.

When officials at Montgomery College (MC) in Rockville, Md., discovered that nonstudent community members were parking on campus and taking a nearby bus to work, they decided to more stringently enforce a longstanding parking-decal policy and negotiated a new UPass system, whereby students with a current college ID are eligible to receive a 50 percent discount on public transportation. The campus opened a new parking structure in January 2010 and plans to build another in the next five years.

"Working with an experienced strategist to address parking issues was key," says Mark Pace, MC's parking and transportation manager. "Montgomery College really looks for professional qualifications and experience as well as price. That means not always going with the lowest bidder." To soften the impact of a parking permit price increase that is inevitable once work begins on a new parking garage, Pace suggests a graduated increase amortized over time, beginning at the onset of the planning process.

Communicate. To successfully implement a new parking program, administrators must communicate with affected people and be clear about program



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requirements. Communications campaigns that use social-networking sites and text messaging to relay real-time parking information are becoming more commonplace. Mobile messaging, LCD screens, e-mail alerts and traditional wayfinding are also effective. By managing people's expectations and arming them with knowledge about the parking system, experts say administrators can lessen frustration and promote cooperation.

Tap New Technologies. Parking technologies are advancing rapidly, with several offering new efficiencies, better revenue control, energy savings, and improved customer service. Radio frequency identification tags or keycards used for entrance to parking facilities, smart cards and other e-payment devices, high-speed doors, and self-service payment improve service and operational efficiencies. Energy-efficient lighting, such as LED or fluorescent lights, can lower operating costs and provide tax credits. Fluorescent lighting consumes 30 percent to 85 percent less energy than incandescent and high-intensity discharge lighting at equal or greater light levels.

New multistory parking structure at Grossmont College in California

Consider Working With a Parking Professional. Parking professionals can consult with colleges on traffic patterns as well as structure design for exits, entries, circulation patterns, and parking capacity. These experts sometimes provide advice on facility lighting, energy efficiencies, parking rates, new technologies, and regulations, and often are able to assist in developing RFPs and contracts with private operators. Negotiating with community groups and working to solve parking issues that affect the community are other services parking professionals sometimes provide.

A Smart Investment

Experts say evaluating parking needs, developing a strategy, and implementing a sound plan can enhance students' college experience while boosting a community college's revenue and reducing expenses.

"We've watched with great interest as community colleges have increasingly reached out in search of professional, competent, unbiased, and cutting-edge solutions to their growing parking issues," says Shawn Conrad, executive director of the International Parking Institute, an independent trade association representing parking professionals. "College administrators are relieved that there are resources available to educate their staffs about current parking trends and provide information on an array of solutions."

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