





STREET SMARTS

Texas Tech launches a motion awareness program with great results.

**By Heather Medley and
Eric Crouch**

Students riding the bus to the Texas Tech campus felt and heard a thump after their vehicle stopped to pick up more passengers. Looking out the window, they saw a student sprawled on the ground with his backpack contents scattered and his cell phone in pieces on the sidewalk around him.

The student had been texting and walking, and he walked right into the side of the bus. Rattled but O.K., he picked up his things and went on his way.

Distracted driving, bicycling, and even walking have gained much attention recently because of the increased risk of crashes when people talk, text, and play games on mobile phones. More perilous still are the multi-taskers, veering and swerving on crowded streets, marching to the rhythm of their mobile devices, and blind to their surroundings. While most injuries are minor—jammed fingers and thumbs, twisted ankles, and sore pride—some can be extremely serious, and those serious consequences are on the rise.

Commuters are constantly engaged with their mobile devices, using them to talk, text, listen to music, play games, and connect with the world on the go. All of those activities make focusing on one task such as driving, walking, or bicycling seem unproductive or even boring. From awareness studies at Western Washington University (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/acp.1638/abstract>) to YouTube videos of moon-walking bears, it's clear that people notice and respond to things they can anticipate.

Increasing Awareness

To bring awareness to our campus community about cell phone use issues, we hosted events, lectures, petition drives, and more. To start, we established a committee comprised of campus and municipal departments, educators, and student and community organizations to help. Involvement from as many facets as possible was essential to reaching target groups and crafting the appropriate messages for modifying students' behavior.

Understanding that everyone who is mobile on campus must be aware of their surroundings, our committee decided to incorporate all modes of transportation into the program: walking, biking, driving, and taking the bus. To achieve the most sustainable change on the matter, the committee decided to address education, enforcement, and engineering in a comprehensive problem-solving approach. The goal of the campaign was to increase awareness and modify any harmful habits in all four identified actions.

Pedestrians

Everyone is a pedestrian at some point in the commute to their office, class, meetings, and the like. Most plan their routes carefully to navigate efficiently across campus, but no one plans to be the cause of an accident or the victim of negligence. An estimated 59,000 pedestrians were injured in U.S. traffic crashes in 2009, according to BeStreetSmart.net. And many campuses operate like urban areas, with many of the same opportunities and challenges they face.

To boost pedestrian awareness, we used marketing methods such as the school's announcement system, posters, A-frame signs on sidewalks, and social media to convey our message in eye-catching ways, incorporating visual images along with short text information. QR codes that could be scanned with smart phones directed pedestrians to our campaign website, videos, and our online Street Smart Pledge.

Partnering with others helped us use our resources wisely. Contacting other local agencies that were already invested in public safety and groups that promoted walking, bike riding, and other alternative transportation modes provided great resources for our inaugural campaign.

To educate pedestrians, we involved them in fun activities including a fun run that asked participants to donate gently used running shoes to a local non-profit.

Cyclists

Cycling is a healthy mode of commuting and campus mobility when practiced properly. As children, most of us were given a bike, instructed to stay out of the street, and warned to stay within eye-shot of the house. As we get older, commuting and being mobile on campus by bicycle makes it hard to stay out of the street or stay near home. On-campus cycling poses a whole new set of rules, most of which riders are unaware exist or apply to them.

Partnering with local bike shops, cycling clubs, on-campus outdoor enthusiast groups, and the student activities committee helped us organize a safe ride around campus. Other ideas worked well, too: hosting training sessions about proper safety and etiquette on the road beforehand could serve the riders well. Asking students to form groups to promote bicycle safety is a plus. Finding a philanthropic cause to support with a ride encourages participation from avid cyclists who already know and follow the rules of the road.

We also took a look at intersections that posed the most danger to pedestrians and cyclists with those in charge of traffic engineering on our committee, and we asked them to examine possible solutions. Providing education about those intersections through an information blitz with posters on A-frame signs, student-to-student interactions, and email blasts to those parking and working in nearby facilities were met with a positive reaction.

Motorists

Much attention has been focused in recent years on driving safety, incorporating everything from texting to alcohol consumption to drowsy driving to seat belts and more. Relating all of these concerns to campus motion awareness while engaging our target audience in a new, fresh way posed a few challenges. Other successful programs such as www.drivingskillsforlife.com served



as guidance for constructing a comprehensive program without it being overwhelming.

Partnering with on-campus departments including the Student Recreation Center, Student Health, Hospitality Services, Athletics, and Campus Life, along with local and state agencies such as the Department of Public Safety and Department of Transportation, we created a night that focused on fun while incorporating education. Hosting the first “Mix it Up” event on campus at the indoor pool was a huge success. We served non-alcoholic versions of popular cocktails, hosted educational interactive stations, gave out door prizes, and more. The feedback was unanimously positive.

Guest speakers were a large component of the driver safety element. We hosted the parents of a girl who was killed while texting and driving; the Help End Auto Theft Task Force; a campus police officer trained in drunk driving prevention; and the DPS roll-over simulator that helped students feel what it was like to drive drunk and drive while texting.

Bus Riders

Because it only takes 21 days to form a habit, hosting a safety event during the beginning of classes to increase awareness about high-traffic areas around the school can help form safe habits early. During high traffic times, stationing campus leaders and student organizations in strategic areas to talk to those passing by, hand out information about safety, provide tips for campus transportation, and maybe give away coupons for a local auto mechanic helps start some of those conversations about safety that often only occur after tragedy strikes a campus. The advertising revenue from local mechanics can help pay for the cost of printing all these marketing materials!

With a local TV sports team, we hosted a challenge course that incorporated all aspects of campus transportation. Our team raced the three sportscasters to see who could run the course with the fastest time and the fewest mistakes. The challenge aired on local TV several times, promoting our week full of activities.

Through a partnership with local businesses and on-campus auxiliary departments, students were encouraged to sign a “Be Street Smart” pledge online; this unlocked coupons for free, buy-one-get-one, and percent-off deals at local establishments. Additionally, the committee gathered prizes and put on a Twitter party that asked students to participate using the hashtag #BeStreetSmart. We asked questions about all aspects of campus safety, including being a safe passenger on the campus buses. The questions were scripted but the conversation was very personable and well received. Prizes were given out at predetermined intervals for participation, correct answers, and innovative ideas. Winners were asked to pick up their prizes at our Free Car Clinic, which was hosted as part of the Be Street Smart activities, which increased participation and awareness for that event as well.

To construct our model we followed the pattern of the BeStreetSmart.net program, an annual public education, awareness and behavioral change campaign in Washington, D.C. The program is coordinated by the National Capital Region Transportation Planning Board (TPB), and is supported by federal funds made available through state governments, and funding from some TPB member jurisdictions. Because the program is federally funded, they were happy to share their ideas and materials with us.



HEATHER MEDLEY is marketing and training coordinator at Texas Tech University Parking Services. She can be reached at heather.medley@ttu.edu or 806.742.7275.



ERIC CROUCH is managing director of university services at Texas Tech University. He can be reached at eric.crouch@ttu.edu.