

Implementation of a Pedestrian Safety Program at an Urban University

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Abstract

The safety of its students is always of paramount importance to a University. When a large University is located in the heart of a large metropolitan city, attention to pedestrian safety is amplified. In 2002, traffic violations at crosswalks adjacent to the Georgia State University campus caused traffic accidents resulting in student deaths. The University has experienced exponential enrollment in the last two years resulting in more pedestrian traffic and heightened concern for student safety. Roughly thirty thousand students plus faculty, staff and visitors use crossings at major thoroughways such as Decatur Street, Courtland Street, Piedmont Street, and Peachtree Street. Traffic speeds were unchecked and poles and trees made visibility difficult. The opening of a new classroom building in Fall 2002 exacerbated the pedestrian problem. In March 2002, the University Planning and Development Committee created a Traffic Safety Subcommittee with the charge to improve pedestrian safety on the Georgia State University campus.

Introduction of the Organization

Georgia State University is one of the nation's leading urban research universities and is located in the heart of downtown Atlanta, Georgia. The *Princeton Review* recently ranked Georgia State University as one of the Best Southeastern Colleges in a 10-state area. Currently, more than 40,000 students are actively seeking degrees, and 28,000 of them are enrolled on campus each semester. Georgia State University has students from all of Georgia's 159 counties. And even though 85% of the students at the University are Georgians, students that attend Georgia State University also come from every state in the nation and from more than 145 countries. 52 degrees are offered at Georgia State University in 250 fields of study through 6 different colleges and schools. Georgia State

University is a diverse, urban university that allows students to experience a real-world education.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

Georgia State University is a large urban University located in the heart of downtown Atlanta, Georgia. Roughly twenty-five thousand students plus faculty, staff and visitors use crossings at major thoroughways surrounding the University. In the fall of 2002, the University opened a new classroom building on the west side of campus, which increased pedestrian travel substantially across the campus. As the University is not a designated "school zone", traffic speeds unchecked through red lights and around blind corners. In order to prevent future accidents and to provide for the continuous safety of the students, the University Planning and Development Committee created a Traffic Safety Subcommittee to design an immediate action plan for implementing a traffic safety program for the University and in particular for the corridor between University Plaza and the Aderhold Learning Center.

Design

The University Planning and Development committee sanctioned a Traffic Safety subcommittee whose membership included the Office of the Vice President of Finance and Administration; interested faculty members from the Planning and Development Committee, the Director of University Planning and key staff members of the Police Department. The

charge to the Subcommittee was to coordinate and study the options and create an action plan for implementing a traffic safety program for the Georgia State University campus. Because the University is located within the city limits of Atlanta, a key to the success of any program would include involvement from the City of Atlanta Police and the City of Atlanta traffic engineers and the Mayor's office.

The Subcommittee recommended that a study be conducted by the Facilities and Planning Department to gather, analyze, and publish statistics and other data on traffic violations, accidents and problems at campus-adjacent intersections and crosswalks. In addition, they would identify those areas on campus that have the highest university pedestrian traffic and risk and in conjunction with Police Services, prioritize the resources needed to address the problems identified.

It was determined that the action plan would include the three E's of safety: Education, Enforcement and Engineering. The education portion of the plan includes educating drivers and pedestrians about safety rules and regulations. A brochure was created to distribute for this purpose. The Pedestrian Safety Team of 5-6 officers would enforce the traffic laws. As needed, changes and alterations to the physical environment would be engineered to improve safety. This would include, but not be limited to, the use and placement of signs, equipment, and request of traffic signals.

The three E' of safety became the mantra of the program. The design of an educational program for pedestrian safety needed to include current students as well as prospective students and their families. The educational system would also be directed at the faculty and staff who traversed the campus by car and foot. And, the program would include aspects for drivers that are in and around the campus. The educational program would only solve part of the problem and was linked to an enforcement program designed by police services.

It was determined that 5-6 officers would be dedicated to the Pedestrian Safety Team. Police administration was able to alter schedules and duties to limit hiring new staff. Officers were trained and stationed around the high volume traffic areas during the beginning weeks of Fall Semester 2002 to assist and educate pedestrians and drivers. This increased enforcement of traffic laws was a coordinated effort between the Georgia State University Police and the City of Atlanta Police. The University's Office of Facilities Planning and the City of Atlanta traffic engineers worked together to devise methods to further assist with pedestrian safety. Through their efforts, plans were written to request the upgrade of existing traffic control devices; installation of new crossing lights and additional safety signage.

The plans that were presented to the University Planning and Development Committee included the budget for additional officers, the

cost of printing a pedestrian safety brochure, purchase of additional police bicycles with emergency equipment and portable pedestrian crosswalk indicators. The project budget is shown below.

<i>Sources of Funds</i>		
Grant from Governor's Office of Hwy Safety	\$ 15,000	
Allocation from FACP*	50,000	
* (Faculty Advisory Council to the President)		
Total Sources of Funds	\$ 65,000	
<i>Uses of Funds</i>		
Pedestrian Safety Brochures	\$ 5,000	
Police Bicycles with emergency equipment	8,500	
Portable Pedestrian Crosswalk Indicator	1,500	
Police Depart. - Salaries	40,000	
Campus Signs	10,000	
Total Uses of Funds	\$ 65,000	

Implementation

Portions of the Pedestrian Safety Program for Georgia State University were implemented as expediently as possible. Once the action plan was submitted by the Traffic Safety Subcommittee and approved by the Planning and Development Committee, the Faculty and Staff Advisory Council to the President recommended that \$50,000 be allocated for the funding of the project. With the money available, the subcommittee had directional signs made by the campus sign shop and installed by the maintenance department. Equipment for the police officers was purchased and schedules changed to fulfill the need to have police

officers stationed at high traffic areas. Simultaneously, student-crossing signs were ordered for the three main crosswalks on Peachtree Street. The orientation program for the students already included a safety presentation and was easily augmented to include pedestrian safety tips. The information from the presentation was used to create a pedestrian safety brochure that is given to any motorist or pedestrian that is identified in violation of a safety law.

Benefits

This program has benefited Georgia State University in several ways. It has helped to solidify the Police Department's relationship with the City of Atlanta Police Department. Because of this program, the Georgia State University has applied for and received a grant for \$15,000 from the Governor's Office of Highway Safety. Georgia State University was also the recipient of an award at the recent Golden Shoe Awards, which is hosted by the Margaret Mitchell House & Museum

This excerpt from the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* sums up the benefit of the program best.

"When we first got out here, cars were just blowing by and people were darting out into the street," said Cpl. Keith Byrd, who was supervising the afternoon pedestrian patrol. "This has helped out a little bit."

Anyone who works goes to school or drives in downtown Atlanta knows it's a rare event when somebody follows the rules on pedestrians. Motorists

seem oblivious to the state's pedestrian laws, while walkers routinely jaywalk, cross at midblock and ignore pedestrian signals.

Byrd and his uniformed colleagues are slowly but surely changing those habits between Five Points and Peachtree Center, downtown's busiest pedestrian corridor. "We've written over 800 traffic citations there since August," said GSU Police Chief Connie Sampson. "We are also doing pedestrian education, handing out information on basic general safety rules."

GSU recently got a \$15,000 pedestrian safety grant from the Governor's Office of Highway Safety, but Sampson said the enforcement effort preceded the money. "We opened a new classroom facility on the opposite side of Peachtree from where most of our classrooms are, so we knew we'd have additional pedestrian traffic," said Sampson. Pedestrian advocates are elated about the effort. Previous pedestrian enforcement by the Atlanta Police Department had been spotty at best. "This is proving how much difference it makes when the police are out there enforcing on a regular basis," said Sally Flocks, president of PEDS, Pedestrians Educating Drivers on Safety. "In the past, it was once every three months during a sting operation, and it makes a splash but nothing really changes." Flocks said the GSU officers are "making pedestrians more confident. "I'm seeing drivers being more respectful," she said. "They are driving more cautiously and slower. The cars are really stopping for them."

Retrospect

Because Georgia State University is a part of a major city, changes do not happen as quickly as some might like. Many of the things we would like to see occur on the streets can only happen with the City of Atlanta approval. And, as the student population continues to increase, there are more and more critical corners that need attention. We need more automatic traffic crossing signs, speed bumps, and better signage.

Even with our program in place, pedestrian accidents still occur. We have recently begun to petition the Mayor's Office to request that several streets around the campus be given a "School Zone" designation. In retrospect, the subcommittee should have pushed for this designation from the beginning of this project, instead of waiting for two terrible pedestrian accidents to occur.

The pedestrian safety project is on going and continues to monitor the safety of the faculty, staff and students at Georgia State University. Our goal is to ensure a safe place for our students, faculty and staff to learn, work and play.