

| Colleges with 'parking problems' have hundreds of empty spaces

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For several North Carolina colleges, parking is an issue that doesn't go away. N.C. State, Western Carolina University and East Carolina University continuously develop new plans to accommodate students and faculty who park on campus, but many would still rather risk getting ticketed for parking illegally than parking in some of the lots provided for them.

Parking permits at ECU are the cheapest in the UNC System, but according to parking information provided by university officials in recent months in response to a public records request, the school still issues about 23,000 citations a year. N.C. State issues about 37,000, and Western about 41,000. Combined, this is an average of 92 citations a day for the three schools — a number that could be reduced by encouraging students and staff to take advantage of space that is already available.

On ECU's campus, one of those areas is the commuter lot near Minges Coliseum. About a mile from campus, this parking area has a bus that runs to the ECU main campus every five minutes.

Jack Tawney, the interim director of parking and transportation at ECU, boasts reduction of citations issued and cars towed from parking lots since assuming his position at ECU and attributes this to "educating students about parking." But even after educating students about available options for parking, the Minges lot still doesn't fill up.

"You could go almost any time of day, and I could point out to you 200 empty spaces," he said.

The number of cars towed in the past year is 363 — almost one a day — which is significant because according to Tawney's estimate drivers should have had a couple hundred other spaces to choose from.

At N.C. State, Tom Kendig, the director of parking and transportation, says even with six parking decks and two under construction, the need for parking seems to keep growing, because there are still lots that are avoided by commuters.

"We have our difficult-to-fill areas that will hopefully change as campus is built up," said Kendig. The lots at N.C. State's Centennial Campus contain hundreds of parking spaces, but because of their distance from the rest of campus, students tend to look for parking closer to main campus.

Western Carolina University has several trouble spots of its own. Dispersed among the four corners of Western's rural campus are the commuter parking lots.

Josh Miller, student body vice president at Western, says people aren't going to use outlying parking lots like these unless they absolutely have to. He says there is ample parking around the track and baseball fields, but "no one wants to walk a half mile to class."

Jennifer Smith, a freshman at Western, says she has never parked in outlying areas. "It's just too far away," she said. "I really don't know anyone who parks out there."

With hundreds of resident spaces being blocked off because of building construction at Western, "People are being forced to park in those (outlying) parking spaces. Those parking lots have always been there for people to park in but no one wants to park there. There are always empty spaces," said Miller.

Even with construction in progress, when it comes to parking, schools are always looking for alternatives to building up. Tawney plans to continue his parking education campaign because "word of mouth is the best way to get students to use multiple methods for getting to campus.

"We market to students through orientations, the (parking and transportation) Web site and SGA tries to get information out to students," he said. He also hopes to have an article published in the university newspaper addressing the problem.

N.C. State takes a more direct approach by appealing to students' wallets. According to Kendig, over the past three years, N.C. State has been able to increase the usage of an outlying parking lot from 44 percent to 60 percent by letting freshmen and residents pay to use those lots for parking or storage for their vehicles. The school is looking at a plan that would reduce the costs of parking in undesirable areas to make them more appealing to students.