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Building Revenue from On-Campus Tickets for Moving Violations

By Chief Bob Downey (Ret.)



A graduate of the FBI National Academy (218th session), Bob Downey holds a Bachelors and Masters Degree in Criminal Justice. While serving with the Allegheny County Police (1980-2008), Bob's career progressed from patrol officer through detective, supervisor for the Crimes Property Unit, General Investigations commanding officer, SWAT team tactical commander, and Public Information Officer. After retiring from Allegheny County, Bob worked as the Chief of Police & Director of Public Safety for Slippery Rock University before assuming the same position at the California University of Pennsylvania. In 2013, Bob became the Chief of Police for Green Tree Borough and retired from active law enforcement in May of 2015.

Annually, college administrators are faced with the challenge of providing quality education at an affordable rate in the face of funding cut-backs and increased costs associated with the delivery of high value services. Should administrators significantly raise tuition and fees? Should they reduce staff and faculty? How about cutting back on student enrichment programs? Should they reduce spending on infrastructure improvements and upkeep? To answer yes to any of these questions will ultimately impact student enrollment, further complicating their dilemma. To meet these challenges, colleges and universities must be creative and devise ways to generate new revenue streams or funding sources.

Parking and Permit Fees became a funding source

Several years ago, parking on many campuses was free or permit fees were negligible. Most lots were on a first-come, first served basis; while enforcement and the issuance of parking tickets was reserved for only the most egregious violations. Free and non-enforced lots encourage students to drive from dormitories to classroom buildings, resulting in packed lots and increased traffic on campus streets. But in recent years, colleges recognized that they were giving away acres of valuable land with free parking concepts. To compound the issue further, they spent significant funds to maintain these lots yet were generally unable to recoup their investments.

Rather than significantly raise tuition or fees, administrators looked at parking to meet some of their challenges. Permit fees were either implemented or raised to levels comparable to their municipal counterparts as a revenue stream to offset related costs. Parking fees became a "user fee" for students, staff and visitors who wish to bring a vehicle onto campus. The revenue generated by the implementation or increase in fees had a positive cash infusion without significant tuition increases. In order to insure that student and staff investments were not infringed upon by those trying to skirt the rules, colleges and universities placed infractions and associated monetary fine structures into their rules of conduct. Thus, it became necessary to vigorously enforce parking violations. This was especially true when it came to parking a vehicle on campus without the proper permit or in unauthorized spaces and locations. Revenue had potential to be positively influenced with the fines that are collected from parking enforcement infractions.

This is not a new concept; it mirrors municipal ordinance systems where payment is expected to be made directly to the municipality or the University, rather than the funding going directly to the state. In the municipal ordinance structure, to insure compliance the municipality can threaten to turn the parking ticket into a “State Citation” that translates into higher fines or the possible loss of license or registration privileges. In the University setting, there is an additional inducement to pay the parking ticket assessment; as colleges have the option to tie non-remittance to the student’s ability to register for future classes or to receive their diploma or transcripts for transferring students.

Keeping the campus safe, includes enforcing traffic violations

Parents trust their most precious possessions – their children – to college administrations and expect their children to be protected. In return, colleges have expanded their police forces and simultaneously developed programs designed to provide maximum safety and security on campus. Part of this strategy involves traffic safety and enforcement.

College administrations and police departments are aware of the National Highway Transportation statistics that the 16-24 year old age range represents approximately 13% of our population (NHTSA); yet they account for over 30% of the costs associated with vehicular accidents (Center for Disease Control and Prevention-CDC) and over 40% of all traffic violations enforced by law enforcement involve drivers in this age range. On a daily basis, 7 teens are killed in vehicular accidents, and based on miles driven, teens are 3 times more likely to be involved in a fatal accident (CDC). Traffic fatalities are the leading cause of death for young people in the 15-29 year age range (NHTSA).

Why are these statistics important? College police departments and administrations, know that the bulk of the drivers on their campus fall directly into these categories (which comprise about 80% of a college population). Obviously, there exists a need to monitor and enforce traffic violations. Turning a blind eye toward traffic enforcement is essentially a ticking time bomb that has the potential to result in needless tragedies.

Expanding the ticket model on campuses to moving violations – it’s an idea worth exploring

Unfortunately, there is always a cost associated with safety on our campuses, and traffic enforcement is no exception. But, it does not have to be a burdensome cost factor. There is a real potential to recoup some expenses by expanding the parking ticket model to include certain traffic and moving violations. Some of the more progressive universities have begun to adopt this model and enforce certain moving violations in a similar fashion that they use to enforce parking infractions, by issuing “campus violations” instead of standard state citations.

Colleges and Universities govern the behavior of their students, staff and faculty with a comprehensive Code of Conduct that are well publicized. Parking infractions and corresponding penalties are spelled out, with an ability to appeal, to a university-based committee. The code of conduct is revised annually, and necessary changes can be implemented and enforced accordingly. Certain traffic or moving violations can be incorporated into these manuals along with a list of corresponding penalties. The cost of safety on our campuses has risen exponentially in recent years,

and this concept provides a way to recoup some of that investment. The time has come for university leaders to look at maximizing their revenue streams and reduce associated costs.

Mutual Benefits

Using this type of enforcement model has the potential to offer mutual benefits to both the person charged with the traffic violation and the University as well. The individual benefits by paying a much lower fine and having no adverse sanctions applied to their driving record. If given a choice of paying higher fees and receiving points assigned to your driver's license or paying a lower fine with no associated sanctions toward one's license, which would be the more palatable option for the student? More often than not, state citations are appealed to avoid points being assessed to the driver. In many of these instances, there is usually a plea bargain struck at the traffic hearing where the points are eliminated while the defendant still pays a fine. How efficient is that process for the student who has to miss classes for a court appearance? Can the student afford the higher fines associated with a state citation? A University assessed fine still costs the student some of their money; but it much more affordable in the long run.

How efficient is that process for the police department or the officer? To make a court appearance, the officer must either go on their off-duty time or they must be taken off patrol. The University obviously benefits by receiving the entire fine amount and not sharing it or having it go the state or county court system, yet there exists a need to maximize efficiency and vigilance. The proposed system helps colleges achieve an increase in efficiency and simultaneously contribute to the bottom line. Other associated benefits to the University would include the cost savings connected with a corresponding reduction in premium pay for officers that have to appear in court during their off-duty time.

Implementation of this model

To begin the process, as previously mentioned, the student handbook and code of conduct would need to be revised to include traffic infractions and associated fines that would be implemented in order for campus police to issue "on-campus" tickets. In most instances, the fines would be slightly lower than what is charged on a state citation. For example, a state citation for "Failure to stop at a posted stop sign" with fine and other costs may total \$125.00 with 3-points being assessed against the drivers record. Conversely, the University fee schedule for the same violation would be listed at \$50.00 with no further fees or costs associated with that violation nor would there be any points assessed to their driving record. It is an extremely simple process.

How do you appeal an "on-campus" ticket?

For integrity purposes, the only appeal for an "on-campus" ticket would have to take place within a small timeframe, perhaps 5-days. Once a request for appeal is made, the officer would then convert the ticket to a state citation, and the recipient could appeal to the county or state judiciary and request a hearing. The recipient of the citation would then be subject to the higher fines and any assessment of points if found guilty of the violation. In the event the ticket is not appealed or paid

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within the prescribed timeframe, the individual charged would be subject to other internal sanctions, such as the inability to register for classes or having their diploma and transcripts held until their obligations are fulfilled.

The time has come

The ability to raise revenue and seek new funding sources for colleges is a challenge faced by many administrators. The concept for issuing “on-campus” tickets for moving violations is a natural progression that’s time has come. There are significant financial benefits available by taking this approach. With little or no drawbacks, it would be foolhardy to ignore the potential benefits by continuing to do business the old-fashioned way.

There will always be a bit of reluctance and apprehension anytime a new program is implemented; however, that should not deter universities from applying this concept to their everyday enforcement strategies.

Bob Downey welcomes comments and questions and can be contacted at bdowney@upsafety.net

Statistics obtained from:

- National Highway Transportation and Safety Agency (NHTSA) – NHTSA.dot.gov
- Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CD) – cdc.gov/MotorVehicleSafety/Teen-Drivers