

Undergraduate Student Representative Report

Report By: Dylan France and William Treloar, Undergraduate Student
Representatives to the Board of Trustees
For: Full Board Meeting – May 11, 2024
Date: April 24, 2024

What it's like to be a student right now

The topics below are updates from our November report about food and transportation issues. With equity still at the forefront of our priorities, we share our findings and recommendations as a true testament to the student experience outside of the classroom that directly impacts students' basic needs, specifically disadvantaged students, regarding financial and physical accessibility. We return with the same topics to the board because, while some progress has been made regarding these issues they have still not been fully addressed. These issues continue to leave a lasting impact on the student experience as it directly affect students' access to services and academic opportunities. We urge the board to continue working on the issues we will discuss below as they can improve the overall student experience and equity.

Late Night Transportation - LYFT/Uber Funding Proposal

After meeting with multiple transportation constituents across campus, we have updates regarding expanding transportation resources on campus. Since reporting in November 2023, the transportation department has developed trolley services to service the Euclid off-campus community from 6 PM to 1:25 AM on weekdays and 2:50 AM on weekends. The Euclid loop picks up about ~150-200 students daily, supplementing travel for off-campus residents. This is a huge improvement to the transportation infrastructure, as this area occupied many campus safety shuttle requests. Through conversations with transportation, we have also learned that they're working to implement a transportation supervisor to oversee all transportation routes and a better transportation communication system to inform students of when trolleys are out of service. Moving forward, they plan to supplement transportation efforts by increasing the number of trolleys running throughout all routes.

However, after receiving the campus safety shuttle numbers, the response time for students throughout the 2024 fiscal year has increased to ~44.1 minutes, an increase of about 7 minutes from what was reported in our November 2023 report. The transportation department has remarked that this number was due to drivers calling out of their shifts last minute with no additional drivers able to cover their shifts. They also highlighted that graduate students occupy a disproportionate portion of shuttle rides at 53%, as a few students utilize this late-night service daily rather than its usage as a safety shuttle. Transportation was initially intended for the safety shuttle service to help primarily undergraduate underclassmen who cannot have their own vehicles on campus. However, over the past two years, there have been underlying issues with implementing this service despite actions to stop servicing transportation when both the pickup and drop-off destinations are off-campus and not servicing locations along trolley routes.

After speaking with students across campus about their frustrations with the shuttle service and holding initial conversations with the transportation department, Pete Sala, and Student Engagement, we worked alongside rising senior Adam Baltaxe to propose an additional Uber/Lyft service for students across campus. We would like this service to run alongside existing transportation infrastructure from 2 AM to 6 AM, where students will receive a set number of monthly rides for emergency services if both the trolley and shuttle services are unavailable.

This proposal was inspired by numerous students utilizing the Uber and Lyft ride-call service during late-night travels due to not being directly on a trolley route, when trolley cancellations are not communicated, or they cannot access a safety shuttle in a reasonable amount of time. Many universities across the country utilize free or subsidized Uber and Lyft services and incorporate them into their transportation infrastructure. This includes nearby schools such as SUNY Onondaga Community College, which offers subsidized rides throughout the day for a set number of rides per month when the destination starts from their campus locations.

With this proposal, there are a few issues, such as the costs associated with implementing a service available to 22,000+ students. However, the undergraduate Student Association is passionate about getting this initiative off the ground which is why the previous administration, led by us, the undergraduate representatives, and Yasmin Nayrouz has committed \$500,000 from the carryover Undergraduate Student Activity fee to help make this initiative a reality by implementing a similar model in subsidizing rideshare costs. With the continued work by Adam and the incoming leaders of the Student Association, we aim to test the compatibility of a Lyft/Uber program with the launch at the start of the Spring 2025 semester. Though this is not a sustainable source of funding, we hold our firm belief that through working with the budgeting offices of both transportation and campus-wide budgeting, we can find a path for this initiative to successfully launch to help students so they no longer have to find the money to purchase ride-shares when transportation services is unable to serve them.

However, if this program is not adopted we still strongly urge the board to take a critical look at transportation services and how they serve the needs of students. Throughout the semester we have received numerous complaints regarding bus/trolley capacity during peak hours, bus/trolley consistency late at night and overall accessibility of certain parts of campus without using rideshare services or car ownership. We believe that while improvements are being made to transportation, it needs to be approached with an understanding that student needs have changed after COVID and currently the services do not meet those needs.

Food Accessibility

Since we first reported to you on this issue in the fall we have seen some massive improvements in food services across campus. Pages Cafe, which is located inside Bird Library, is now open until 9 p.m. and accepts meal swipes from 3 p.m.–9 p.m. This has greatly improved student food accessibility during late-night study sessions, and we have received a lot of positive feedback from students regarding the expanded hours. Furthermore, many of the changes made to the Goldstein Student Center on South Campus

have been met with resounding positive feedback, especially the expansion of food options that accept meal swipes as payments. In our meetings with Food Services, we have also received good news surrounding the expansion of food options in Food.com, the dining location within Newhouse, which we believe will be positively met by students and decrease the overall load in the Schine Student Center. There is also progress being made regarding vegan and vegetarian food options from both food vendors and the dining halls which is greatly improving food accessibility for students with dietary restrictions.

While these changes are all positive, we believe that the initial issue that we came to the Board with in the Fall is still not fully addressed. Dining hall hours are only open until 9 PM, 15 to 45 minutes before some classes end. Many students attending late classes are still finding it difficult to get food for dinner if they have a late class. While there are now more options for late-night dining on South Campus, all of the options on Main Campus require students to use dining dollars, Cuse cash or their own money. Specifically for underclassmen, they are required to pay \$3,825 for a semester of unlimited meal swipes but only \$330 dining dollars, which means they can only purchase a limited number of meals at the different cafes and Schine Student Center dining locations. With no meal swipe equivalent options available on Main Campus beyond 9 PM, it gives students who run out of dining dollars no other option but to purchase food by adding money to their Cuse Cash accounts or outright purchasing food using their own money.

This creates an equity issue across campus where those students who have access to excess funds can take advantage of late classes and order delivery or walk to Marshall Street, while students who do not have those funds are restricted in their opportunity or forced to skip meals. While we understand that the hours of the dining halls are restricted due to staffing difficulties, we urge the Board to make hiring new staff a top priority of the university so that some dining halls can have expanded hours until at least 10:30 PM, giving all students on a meal plan access to meals without any restriction on their academic opportunities.