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Commuter Affairs Office caters to increasing number of off-campus students

October 01, 2009 | Teresa Dunham

When undergraduate students choose Liberty University, they typically come for more than the degree. They're looking for the entire Liberty experience — great recreational facilities, concerts, guest speakers and the kind of Christian bonding that comes with living in the dorms. They get a high-quality education, but the memories are just as important.

For commuter students, making those memories and staying connected can require a little more effort, but the Commuter Affairs Office is here to help.

Re-established last August, the office sends out a weekly e-newsletter to update commuters on campus events that are announced to residential students in hall meetings. It also prepares students for off-campus living through a commuter orientation program, helps students find housing, coordinates campus bulletin board messages and helps commuters meet other students and spiritual mentors. The office can even connect carpoolers.

“Liberty does a wonderful job at making the connection still available to commuters,” said senior Matthew Mihelic. “I didn’t feel any less connected by living off-campus in this past year.”

In Mihelic’s view, Liberty’s goal is not to have all the students living on campus; rather, LU seeks to have a unified student body that continues to glorify Christ in the community.



Affairs Director Larry Provost and staff member Melissa Keiser work together at the office in Campus North.

“It’s very important, with a large percentage of our students living off campus, that somebody advocate on their behalf and remind the administration that commuters have a different set of needs than on-campus [students],” said Director Larry Provost.

Approximately 4,937 students are commuting to LU this fall, and some have traveled from as far as Richmond in past years. Those students are looking for optimal parking, quiet study areas, ways to socialize with other students and spiritual support.

“They need connection with people who are good, Bible-believing Christians, whether [they’re] from Liberty or not. That can be a connection that I think many students could lose. In the dorms, it’s given to you, and you can almost take it for granted,” said Provost, who is working with Liberty’s Spiritual Life leaders to create voluntary small groups and other spiritual initiatives for commuters.

The semester before students begin commuting, the office arms them with information through a prerequisite “real world” seminar. Over 700 students attended the seminar last semester. Focusing on basic knowledge for living independently, as well as ways to stay involved on campus and reminders to keep up their Christian testimony, students leave the seminar with some solid guidance about the responsibility of living off-campus.

“It’s always good when you hear people in the community say, ‘We can tell a Liberty student apart by their countenance or the way they’re acting.’ We do not ever want to see that change,” Provost said.

Instead of one large required Commuter Seminar at the end of each semester for students who want to move off campus, several smaller Commuter Orientations are now being offered throughout the year to highlight valuable information, from community relations to renter’s insurance facts.

A unique spring commuter convocation will also give students a final send-off into the community. Provost describes the convocation as “a formal charge to go off and do great things for God in the local community.”

Besides equipping students with the knowledge to succeed off campus, Commuter Affairs also hosts apartment fairs to connect students with more than a dozen local landlords of large housing areas.

Approximately 1,500 students participated in an apartment fair last semester, and many of them signed a lease that day.

A few students commented that the fair literally saved them three weeks of work. For those who want to simplify the apartment search this fall, another fair is scheduled for Monday, Nov. 2, from 11 to 3 p.m.

Students may also access an online Apartment Finder by visiting the [Commuter Affairs website](#).

“We wish more students knew about the service because when they come to us and say they need a place to live, we say, ‘Have you checked the LU Apartment Finder?’ A lot of them have never heard of it before,” said Melissa Keiser, administrative assistant.

The Apartment Finder, developed by Liberty’s IT department, allows students to search for local apartments based on factors such as price range, pet-friendly status, number of bedrooms and basic amenities. Eventually, Keiser said, the site could even include photos and online maps to the apartments.

Constantly finding ways to support LU in general, the Commuter Affairs Office also drew a lot of attention during the last election season for registering students to vote. Besides signing up thousands on campus, the office encouraged approximately 1,500 commuters to register for the first time.

“We always need to be doing more to connect the commuter with the campus and the community in a non-intrusive way,” Provost said.

KEEPING COMMUTERS CONNTECTED:

www.liberty.edu/commuter

(434) 592-3067

Office on Campus North: Inside the Tilley Student Center; second floor