

Initiative: Introducing a Shopper Shuttle Service at UL Lafayette

A survey, summary and proposed solution

The Office of Transportation Services currently provides limited on-call shuttle services to reach nearby grocery options, Albertson's and Rouses, on Friday afternoons. These locations are a low-cost extension of on-campus service. This initiative was co-initiated by the Office of Transportation Services and a group of graduate students to specifically address the needs of international students and those with limited transportation access. The current service was meant as a stepping stone to a broader program and has strong potential to serve the campus community if it is expanded.

Extending the "Shopper Shuttle" project should aim to recognize the specific needs of our community, enhance accessibility, foster stronger community ties, and promote inclusivity within the UL Lafayette campus, objectives which align with our University's core values. This endeavor not only fulfills a pressing need within our community but also demonstrates our commitment to nurturing a supportive and thriving campus environment through the following axes.

Inclusivity and Equality: A free shopper shuttle aligns with the university's commitment to inclusivity, offering equal access to necessities, thereby fostering a more inclusive environment for financially constrained students. We know that students from historically excluded background are particularly affected by a lack of public services, such as free transportation to off-campus resources. (add a box from Campus Diversity)

Enhanced Physical Wellbeing: By addressing health concerns linked to inadequate access to fresh produce, the shuttle service encourages better eating habits and improves overall student wellbeing. (box from Health services)

Improved Mental Health: Free transportation to downtown Lafayette, community events, parks and cultural sites will improve students' sense of belonging, positively impacting mental health and academic performance of the future University ambassadors. This service can easily have other university activities integrated, allowing students with limited transportation to access events like guided nature-walks, yoga in the park, or museum tours. Further, reliable and secure transportation to necessities will provide a sense of autonomy to students, an essential component of a healthy lifestyle.

Environmental Sustainability: Regular shuttle routes will reduce the reliance of students on individual transportation, such as rideshare services. This will serve the university's sustainability plan to "encourage faculty, staff, and students to utilize low- or zero-emission transportation methods, including rideshare, mass transit, and electric or hybrid vehicles" ([University Sustainability Strategic Plan](#)). (box from sustainability office)

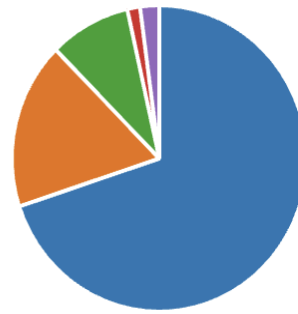
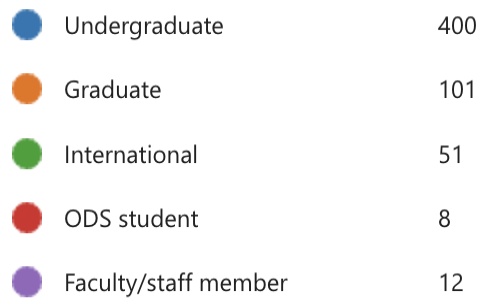
Support for Vulnerable Communities: Free, secure, and reliable transportation is especially beneficial for students served by the LIFE Program and ODS. Individuals with disabilities can leverage this service to enhance quality of life as these services will be their primary route to self-reliance and form foundational skills they will use beyond the academic environment.

Financial and International Appeal: Free shuttle services benefit the university's financial prospects of community members with limited local networks, such as international students. Improving the quality of life for international students and staff will benefit retention and boost the university's global standing.

While the current services offered by the transportation office are a valuable first step, users of this service commonly request extension to more affordable grocery stores, access to more diverse resources and more consistent routes. We conducted a survey to better understand the needs of the campus community and guide a cross-campus initiative to devise, fund, and support extended shuttle services to off-campus resources.

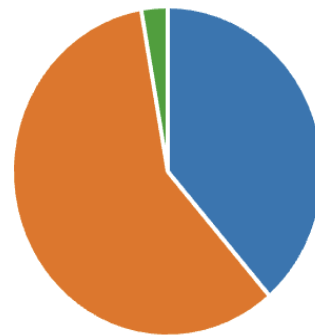
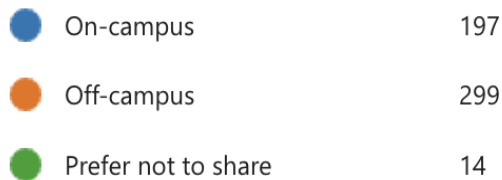
Survey Insights:

Our survey analyzed the preferences and necessities of various groups within the ULL community, including faculty, undergraduates, staff, international students, and students with disabilities. Insights from this survey highlighted the necessity and interest in a shuttle service to aid in accessing essential amenities like grocery stores, bookshops, malls, and similar establishments.

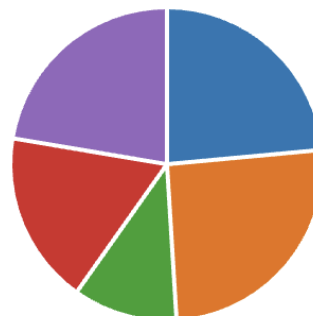
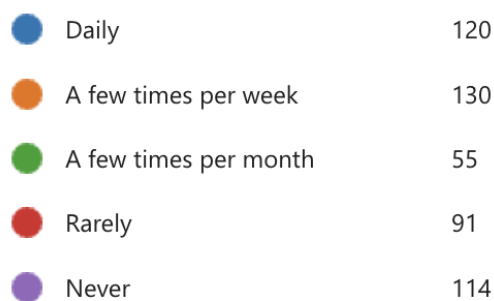


Through limited internet promotion and in-person canvassing, we received responses from over 500 campus community members, representing all levels of university involvement. Survey responses also represented both on-campus and off-campus residents. Both indicate that a shopper shuttle program will provide a valuable service to a wide swath of the campus community.

I live...



I currently use campus transportation...



While many respondents currently make limited use of on-campus transportation services, an expansion of off-campus services to meet their specific necessities would motivate them to change their transportation use habits. Providing expanded shopper shuttle services present an opportunity

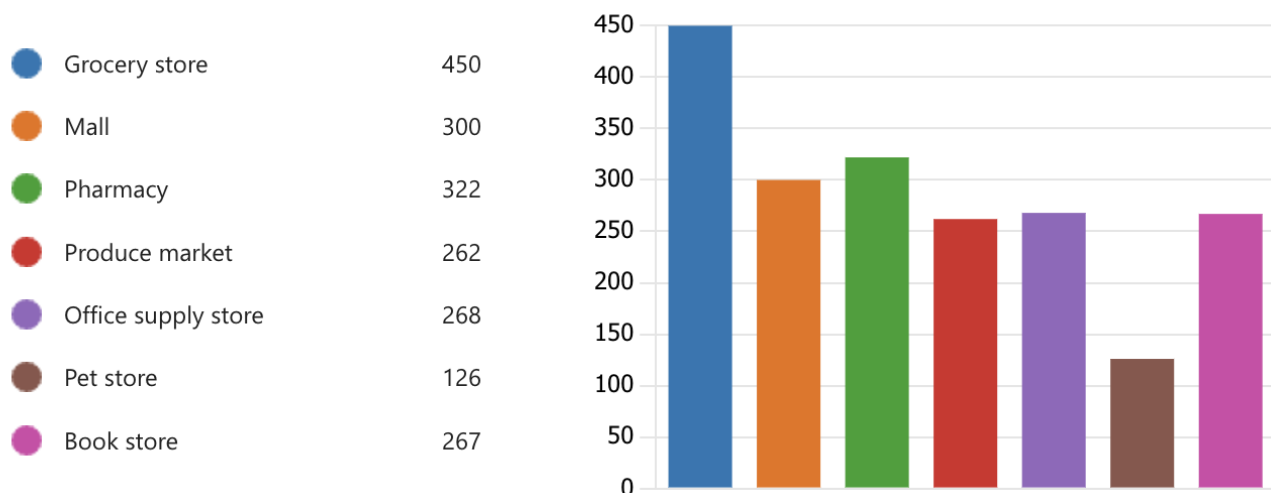
I would use this service...

Every week	270
Twice per month	150
Rarely	90

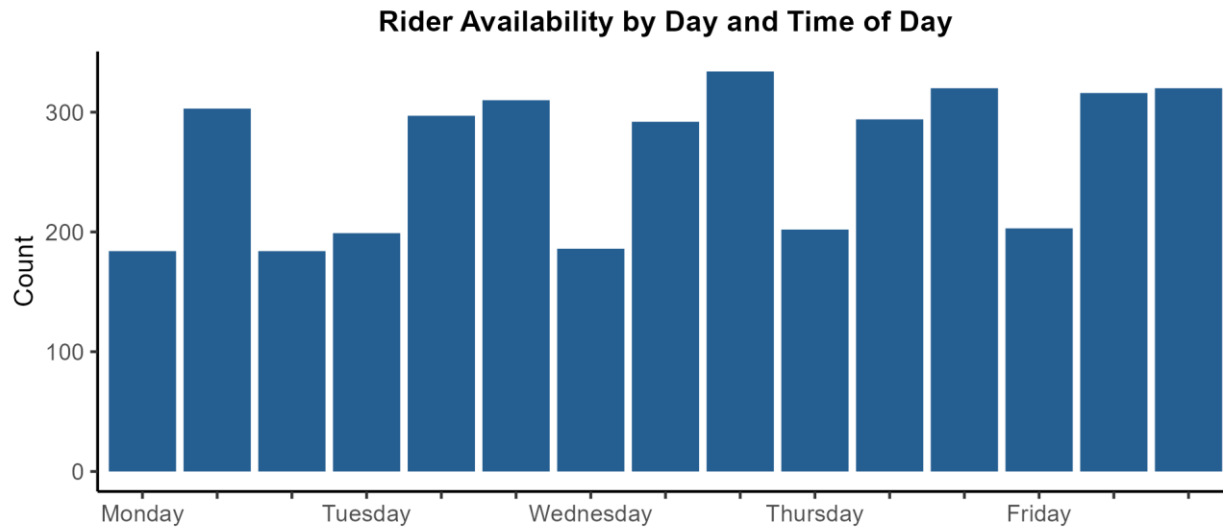


to expand mass transit use within our campus-community. Given the high proportion of participants who would use this service weekly, we can anticipate a rate of ridership that would justify a strong investment by the university.

I would use a university shuttle service to access a...



90% of respondents are in need of access to grocery stores, and more than 50% of respondents are in need of access to malls, pharmacies, produce markets, office supply stores and book stores. About 20% of respondents are in need of pet store access. We also received many comments from students regarding need to specialty shops for culturally important ingredients. Further, many respondents noted a need for transportation access to churches, banks, downtown Lafayette, parks, and medical services. The breadth of responses highlights the value of access to large markets, which can meet many needs, and shuttle routes that reach areas with special value (parks, specialty shops, etc.)



Our respondents had highly diverse ideal times for shuttle services. Deeper analysis showed that shuttle services from Friday afternoon through Friday evening meets the needs of 90% of those surveyed. Many respondents requested services be provided on the weekends, an option we did not include in the survey due to our understanding of the Office of Transportation's current operating hours. This option may be valuable as it provides greater service for student access to cultural and recreational spaces, which are impactful in benefiting student mental health.

Concerns to Address for Office of Transportation

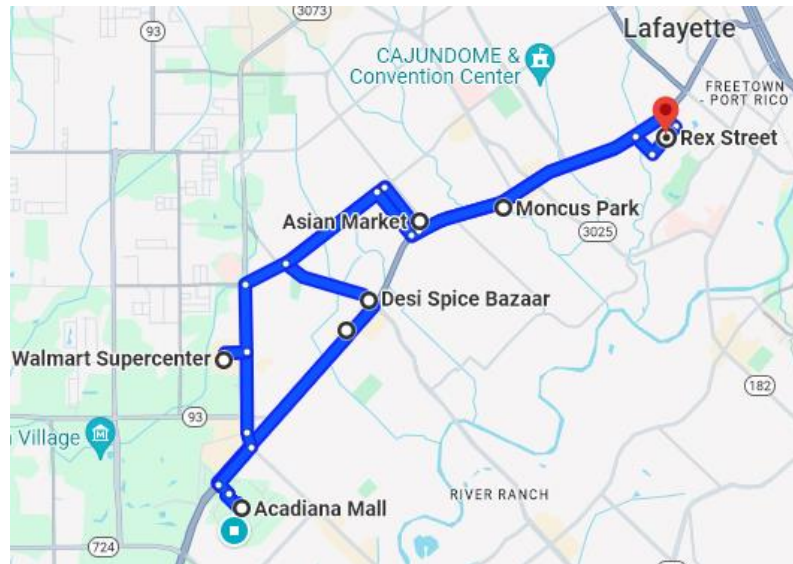
The office of transportation shared important considerations at the beginning of the Fall 2023 semester regarding the administration of an expanded shuttle service. Below we have addressed these concerns and possible solutions to allow the effective operation of a Shopper Shuttle service. The concerns shared were:

- 1) Need to clearly mark locations for students to meet shuttles
- 2) Maintenance and hygiene of shuttles, particularly keeping space on shuttle orderly
- 3) Equitable access to space on shuttles for riders, with enough space and clear rules for riders' space to be used
- 4) Need for financial investment from University departments to support driver, resource, and administrative costs

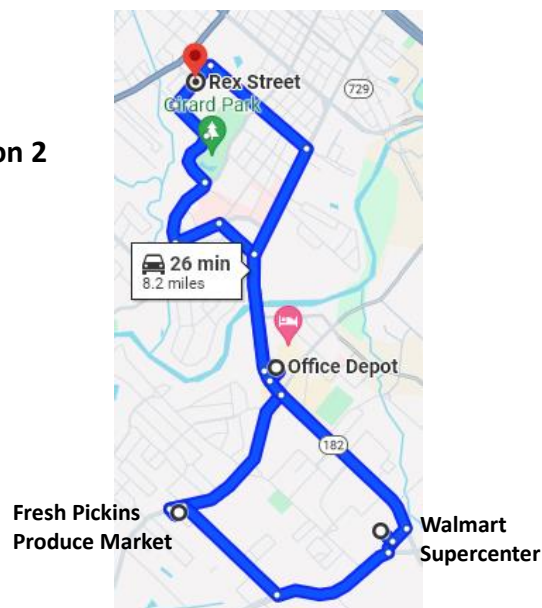
Proposed Solutions

Expanded Shuttle Routes: Based on the survey data, we created a proposed shuttle route map tailored to meet the diverse needs of our student body. We propose two options for shuttle routes, each intended to include a stop at a multi-use supermarket.

Route option 1



Route option 2



Shuttle Service Provisions: To ensure a seamless and equitable experience, we propose the provision of collapsible trolley bags, each associated with a student's ID. These bags, sanitized and maintained regularly by users, will facilitate free transportation of purchases. We propose two models of which one is for users of wheelchairs.



Further, we will clearly state that riders are expected to use no more than 2 seats of space, to limit the use of the shuttle for transportation of bulky items like furniture.

Forms: Registration via on-line forms to ensure equal access and proper use and return of borrowed shopping bags within 24 hours. We will also provide written guides about the service and space allowed to students. Pre-registration forms will also allow transportation services to anticipate ridership and allocate drivers appropriately.

Funding

We have addressed key issues to the best of our ability, but, as graduate students, we require additional support from university administrative departments to fill this need. We are kindly requesting that university departments commit funding to cover costs such as, staff support, operation costs, and the purchase of shopping bags.

Following the estimated charter shuttle cost reported on the Office of Transportation website, we anticipate the cost of shuttle operation as approximately \$60,000 per year for two shuttles operating for 8 hours every week (including breaks and summer term). We estimate shopping bags to cost \$1300 for the purchase of 60 bags as an initial pool. We anticipate administering the registration list and maintaining outreach resources to require 4 person-hours of labor from a participating department.

We believe that there are many opportunities within the University to cover the estimated costs above as the program addresses needs regarding mental health, physical wellbeing, community engagement, sustainability, and retention of students from underserved backgrounds.

We earnestly request your consideration and support for this impactful project, which promises to transform the university experience for everyone positively.

Thank you for your attention and support.

Best,

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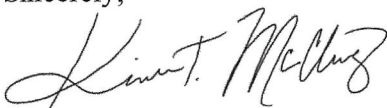
To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to express my wholehearted support for the proposed shopper shuttle initiative at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette, particularly in its mission to cater to the cultural and everyday needs of our international and economically disadvantaged students. This initiative resonates deeply with our university's Strategic Plan for Inclusive Excellence and underscores our institution's unwavering commitment to Access, Opportunity, and Success for all members of our community.

As a community, we understand that accessibility is fundamental to fostering an environment where all students can thrive academically, culturally, and socially. We must provide the necessary resources and support systems to ensure that every student, regardless of their background or circumstances, has equitable access to the opportunities and amenities available on and off campus. The shopper shuttle initiative aligns seamlessly with our university's adherence to the framework for Inclusive Excellence. By offering transportation services tailored to the unique needs of our international and economically disadvantaged students, we not only enhance their overall university experience but also reaffirm our commitment to creating a truly inclusive campus environment where every individual feels valued, respected, and supported. Furthermore, by facilitating access to essential goods and services, such as shopping districts, pharmacies, and cultural grocery stores, the shopper shuttle initiative plays a pivotal role in addressing the socio-economic barriers that may impede the academic and personal success of our students. By alleviating transportation-related challenges, we empower our students to fully engage in campus life, pursue their academic goals with renewed focus and determination and ultimately thrive as active members of our university community.

I commend the organizers spearheading the shopper shuttle initiative, and I urge our university leadership to prioritize its implementation as part of our ongoing efforts to promote inclusive excellence and ensure that every student can reach their fullest potential. I offer my enthusiastic support for the shopper shuttle initiative and stand ready to assist in any way possible to ensure its success. Together, let us continue to work towards a more inclusive and equitable campus environment where all students can flourish and succeed. Thank you.

Sincerely,



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