WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT PARKING

December 2021

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A Proposal For Accessible, Sensible, User-Centered
Parking Regulations

The following report was developed as a joint effort by the undergraduate and graduate Student Government Association Offices for the Vice Presidents of Campus Services. The data contained therein was obtained with cooperation from the Georgia Tech Parking & Transportation Services. The opinions, views, and recommendations expressed within this document do not necessarily reflect the opinions, views, or recommendations of any group outside of the authors and the undergraduate and graduate Student Government Assocations.

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Dear GT Community,

Here's the deal. We think parking enforcement is a necessary function of keeping our campus open to all.

Now that might sound wacky, but hear us out.

Without some level of parking enforcement on campus, the incentive disappears for individuals to not park in places like ADA spaces, construction zones, and other parking areas that keep campus welcoming and accessible. The core frustration with parking doesn't originate with the enforcement of parking rules. **It's the rules and regulations that govern parking enforcement that result in the vast majority of issues that arise from parking on-campus.**

These aren't rules imposed by the State of Georgia or the City of Atlanta or the Board of Regents. These are Georgia Tech's own rules. These are rules that we've imposed on ourselves, and **they are rules that we can change.**

It is our hope that these findings can be used to improve the accessibility of parking rules, modify procedures to be more sensible, and drive changes that are user-centered. But why is this something SGA is taking on?

For many students, staff and faculty, parking is the first and last experience they have with Georgia Tech each and every day. SGA has received complaints for a number of years about parking on-campus and we want to help improve the parking experience and lessen the burden that is placed on GT community members to decipher the do's and don'ts of parking on-campus.

Over the next few pages of this report, we detail the data behind parking enforcement at Tech, walk through a key example that demonstrates the core issue with parking rules, and provide a series of actionable recommendations that Parking & Transportation Services (PTS) can take to address the issues we're raising.

There is no panacea for the issues concerning parking, but at some point in time, we need to stop talking and start doing.

Now is the time when we begin the latter.

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Common Parking Concerns

Although SGA encounters a number of concerns daily, what worries us more than any specific issue is an issue that disrupts trust. For example, several years ago, students had just about given up on the Housing & Residence Life maintenance request process. The maintenance request process is the system used by on-campus residents to submit a request to have something in their on-campus residential room fixed (leaky faucet, dead lightbulb, broken towel rack, etc.). By the fall semester of 2019, there were thousands of open work orders, the submission process consisted of an online form with minimal follow up, and it was taking weeks to months to get maintenance requests addressed. This systematically broke any sense of collective confidence held by students living on-campus that their maintenance requests would ever be dealt with.

This lack of trust in the system disincentivized students who were living on campus to take the time to submit a maintenance request. So, not only were submitted requests not being addressed, but new problems that arose were not fixed because students stopped submitting maintenance requests. Why take the time to submit a maintenance request using a very user-unfriendly system if there was a high likelihood that your issue would never be fixed?

We sense a similar problem with PTS.

Here are the top five complaints SGA has received from students about parking (via email, social media, and constituent meetings):

1. PTS makes a profit from parking enforcement
2. PTS is too aggressive in its citation practices
3. Students do not understand the rules for parking (typically in reference to a particular lot or permit type)
4. PTS is unresponsive and not transparent
5. Students cannot find an important piece of information (typically in reference to a parking rule or price for a PTS-related service)

What do these five concerns tell us about the issues that underlie parking at Tech? As the introduction of our report alluded to, we believe the core of each of these complaints comes back to a lack of accessible, sensible, and user-centered parking regulations.

We hear all of the time from folks about parking. We get it - it's easy to complain about parking. Due to the bureaucratic processes behind parking regulations, it's quite difficult though to pinpoint the cause of these complaints. Unlike the Housing Maintenance Request Disaster of 2019™, the consequences of our current parking woes are less tangible and less visible, which has resulted in distrust of our parking system mired in collective skepticism.

Our next section digs into these processes, aims to decipher our main issues with the PTS rules and regulations, and examines why we believe these specific issues to be the guilty party in the case of Students v. Parking.

BY THE NUMBERS

In 2019 (fiscal + academic year), there were...

22,658
citations
written

12,500
parking
spaces
on campus

2,650
appeals
requested

12,000
permits sold

10.287
in expenses
(millions)

16.84m
in revenue
(millions)

559k
in citation
revenue
(thousands)

55%
of permits
holders were
students

10.63m
in revenue
for permits
sold
(millions)

The Rules & Regulations

Open your mobile device's preferred browser or open a new tab on your desktop and head over to the <u>PTS Rules and Regulations page</u> (https://pts.gatech.edu/rules-and-regulations). Pick any of the forty rules and regulations documents and spend a few seconds familiarizing yourself with the structure and content of your chosen rule and/or regulation.

Congratulations! You've now discovered where all of the rules and regulations for parking on-campus are located. Now that you've seen what the parking rules & regulations look like (if it's your first time ever visiting that page, we solemnly swear not to tell PTS), let's get into our concerns with their structure.

<u>Accessibility</u>

Before we discuss the content of the current rules and regulations, just accessing the rules and regulations themselves can be quite difficult. In spite of minimal communication about the existence of this page, if you do happen upon the PTS website, the issues you might encounter could include the following:

Issue #1: The rules and regulations page is not easily accessed

From a user's standpoint, the rules and regulations page is very difficult to find, particularly if you are accessing this page from a mobile device. The only visible link to the rules and regulations page is at the bottom of the sub-menu header labeled "Parking." The top four highlighted items on the <u>PTS homepage</u> (https://pts.gatech.edu/) are Driver's Seat, Campus Transit, Visitors, and Commute. None of these four highlighted items include any sub-links to the rules and regulations for parking.

For mobile users, those four highlighted items will more than likely take up the majority of the screen space, and to access the rules and regulations page, a mobile user must click on the menu button, select the parking header, and then find the rules and regulations page link at the bottom of the list.

Issue #2: The rules and regulations are split up into forty different documents

Once on the page, one is likely to be overwhelmed by the sheer number of parking regulation documents available to view. At the time of this publication, there were exactly forty documents listed on the rules and regulations page. For different permit holders, it is unclear which regulation documents are pertinent to one's respective permit and which ones are not. Much of the text between the documents is common and unnecessarily repetitive.

The number of documents and lack of clarity of their respective pertinence to various permits creates an unnecessary burden for permit holders, who essentially have to read every parking regulation to find information relevant to their individual permit. While a semester permit holder might rightly assume they need to be aware of the "Semester Permit (Pilot)" regulation document, do they also need to read the "Parking Permit Agreement" document? Is the "Benefits of Purchasing an Annual Individual Parking Permit" document really a necessary regulation or rule-enforced document? These are questions unresolved by the structure of the current page and leave one discontented by the disarray of the page.

Issue #3: The forty different documents are in PDF form

If you manage to figure out which documents are relevant to your situation, the rules and regulations documents can be just as difficult to read. Of the scenarios in which one is attempting to look up a particular PTS regulation or rule, one of the most likely situations is when you are attempting to park on-campus and want to know if you can park in a particular lot.

As one may recognize, PDFs are not the most user-friendly documents. There are other departments at Georgia Tech that have successfully implemented a mobile-friendly policy hosting platform that could be reasonably emulated (e.g. the GT Policy Library - https://policylibrary.gatech.edu).

<u>Sensibility</u>

Parking rules need to make sense. It's as simple as that.

Issue #4: The rules are not adaptive to the needs of students

Of course, PTS has a wide array of customers that they must cater their rules and regulations to (staff, students, faculty, visitors, etc.). While we recognize this, students still represent the single largest purchaser of parking permits each and every year. During the 2016-2017 academic year, students purchased approximately 7,750 annual individual and carpool permits, consisting of 56% of total permits purchased during that academic year. Student permit purchasing has declined since to about 6,700 annual individual and carpool permits purchased during the 2019-2020 academic year. Despite this decline, student purchasing still represented approximately 50% of the permits purchased during the last academic year. Accordingly, faculty purchased about 2,400 permits and staff purchased about 3,300 permits during the 2019-2020 academic year.

All of this to say, students are a substantial portion of the permit users at Georgia Tech, but the rules and regulations don't exactly reflect that. For example, for annual individual and semester permit holders, after-hours parking begins at 5pm. As Tuesday/Thursday evening class students very well know, the class schedule for Tuesdays and Thursdays includes a class slot from 5pm-6:15pm. For these students, the 5pm start time to after-hours parking is not a very sensible parking regulation.

What some may be surprised to find out is that many of the gated lots around campus become available to active permit holders approximately 15 minutes before 5pm; however, this knowledge is not publicized or advertised in any written format. If this policy were to be applied to ungated lots, this concern could easily be addressed, but alas, an unwritten policy is not of much use.

Issue #5: The rules are not written consistently and often difficult to understand

Despite the repetitive information contained within many of the rules and regulations documents, the language used is not consistent among the active policies. This is likely due to the compounding of rules over time. This has created inconsistent and at times confusing wording.

Take, for example, the after-hours parking language variation between the semester and annual individual permits (both of which have identical after-hours parking privileges):

Semester Parking Permit
(https://pts.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/documents/semester_parking_permit_002.pdf):
"Semester Parking Permits are for use in their assigned location; and Semester permit holders may park in non-residential and gated parking areas from 5:00 p.m. – 8:00 a.m. Monday – Thursday. (BuzzCards can be used to access gated areas after hours). Permits may also be used from 5:00 p.m. through 8:00 a.m. Monday for weekend access. After-hours access for the E45 and E81 parking zones is granted from 5:00 p.m. – 6:00 a.m. weekdays. The E40 parking lot at Turner Place is unavailable to non-E40 permit customers after-hours; E44 and E82 parking locations are also not available for after-hours parking."

Annual Individual Parking Permit
(http://pts.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/images/annual_individual_parking_permit_9-21-18.pdf):
"Annual Individual permit holders may park after hours (5 p.m. to 8 a.m.) and on weekends (5 p.m. Friday to 8 a.m. Monday) in non-residential, non-visitor parking areas (6 a.m. daily for E45 and E81). Permit holders may not park after-hours in E48 and E82, unless their primary permit assignment is E48 or E82."

As mentioned, the semester parking permit and annual individual parking permit holders have identical after-hours (evening and weekend) parking privileges, but the written rules vary in key ways. For example, the annual individual language specifies eligible lots as "non-residential, non-visitor parking areas" while the semester language specifies "non-residential and gated parking areas;" thus, the semester language does not inform permit users to not park in visitor lots after-hours (a violation that can result in a parking citation).

Another example of this can be seen in the language regarding weekend parking. The semester permit language says "permits may also be used from 5:00 p.m. through 8:00 a.m. Monday for weekend access." While it may be assumed that it is referring to Friday at 5pm through Monday at 8am, this language does not make that explicit; however, the annual individual permit language, on the other hand, does state "5 p.m. Friday to 8 a.m. Monday."

These might seem like minor details, but parking should be simple. One should not need to be a wordsmith to understand where you can and cannot park.

<u>User-Centered</u>

The rules and regulations that govern parking were not written by students, and we're not advocating that they should be; however, they should, at the very minimum, be written with students in mind.

Issue #6: It is not clear which rules apply to which customers

As listed, a student has no way to know which rules and regulations apply to their particular permit. When we apply for a parking permit, we accept a series of terms and conditions, but those terms and conditions do not necessarily translate to the active rules and regulations made public by PTS.

If you are an annual individual permit holder, there is a set of rules and regulations that is applied to all annual individual permit holders. But if you park in the E82 lot, then there is a whole other regulation document that you also need to know about. Another common example of these extra regulations can be seen by those who plan to park on-campus close to a football game or in a lot that's used for special events; these areas have niche regulations that aren't effectively presented in the current iteration of the parking rules and regulations. There's a lot of information out there, but it's not easily digestible.

Issue #7: The rules are structured for PTS, not for customers

The current version of the rules and regulations does not aid customers in understanding their rights as a permit holder. Two examples help us in explaining this issue.

First, we would posit that most annual individual and semester permit holders do not know that they are able to request one free, day parking permit for one guest each month. These benefits would greatly aid students, but go unnoticed due to their presence in the chaos of the rules and regulations page.

Second, we have found that visitor's lots are quite confusing for students. As looked at earlier, the language within specific rules and regulations may vary, but many students do not know the variation in parking lot types. With construction churning on, parking lots, particularly surface lots (i.e. the one story, open air parking lots without gates) can be a source of confusion. Which lots are visitor lots vs. residential lots vs. regular lots? To access this information, one must venture over to the <u>Maps & Zones page</u> (https://pts.gatech.edu/parking-maps-zones). Unfortunately, the table at the bottom of this page does not include this clarifying information. To find the classification of lots, one must open up the <u>Zones Map</u> (http://pts.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/images/gt_parking_zones_map_2_18_20.pdf). We've harped enough on PDFs for one report, but you better believe that we think this is not the best way to present this information. We're certain that map is useful for PTS as they make decisions from a high-level, but most users don't need information on every single lot.

With that deconstruction of the parking rules out of the way, what if we told you, despite the existence of all forty regulation documents, that there are unwritten parking rules that exist, some of which have been used to issue citations? Unfortunately, this is a real thing and exemplified by the following case study of the Stamps Health Center parking lot.

Case Study: Student Health Center

During the summer of 2021, SGA was contacted with a complaint from a student who had just received a citation after parking in the Stamps Health Center lot. The individual in question parked in the Stamps Health Center parking lot for an appointment, but upon arriving back at their car discovered a parking citation. SGA brought up this concern to PTS and soon discovered that Stamps patients are supposed to jot down their license plate information at the Stamps front desk or they could be subject to receiving a parking citation.

At the time of this discovery, this information was not available on either the Stamps website (https://health.gatech.edu/contact) or the PTS website (https://pts.gatech.edu/parking-maps-zones). And we would know - we read through all forty PTS rules and regulations. The Stamps parking lot does have signs up in the parking lot that say "receptionist check-in required;" however, for the past year-and-a-half, the Stamps check-in process has been digital due to the COVID-19 pandemic and most Stamps patients would not know to ask for this mysterious parking check-in sheet.

After a second complaint almost identical to the first, we requested data on the citations and appeals related to the Stamps Health Center lot. We found that this issue was not greatly exacerbated due to the online check-in change; however, we did find that this issue has been present for quite some time.

In 2019, there were a total of 22,658 citations given out by PTS. There are approximately 12,500 parking spots on campus. So, for every parking spot on campus, there are about 1.81 citations given out. This average is not mirrored by the Stamps Health Center lot.

Of these 2019 citations, 384 were given out in the Stamps Health Center lot. The Stamps Health Center lot has 18 parking spots.

Accordingly, for a lot that holds 0.144% of the total parking spots on-campus, it was the location of 1.695% of the total citations given out in 2019 (21.33 citations per parking spot). This data gets even more interesting once you take a look at the appeals data.

Of the 384 citations given out in 2019 in the Stamps parking lot, 123 were appealed. Only 16% of the submitted appeals were upheld. This means that 84% of the appeals submitted were successfully dismissed, had the fine reduced, or were reduced to a warning. After confirming with PTS, this is a particularly high success rate for appeals.

Essentially, there are a substantial number of citations originating from the Stamps Health Center parking lot given out to Stamps patients. Following this data dive, signage was added by Stamps to their entrance doors reminding people to physically check-in with the front desk if they parked in the Stamps parking lot.

Following a third complaint from a student who received a parking citation after visiting Stamps for a symptomatic test, SGA pushed once again for this situation to be addressed by implementing a new system. As those who have had to head over to Stamps for a symptomatic COVID test know, you are specifically instructed to not enter the building under any circumstances. Regardless of the new signage, there will still be students disproportionately impacted by citations given out in this lot for a rule that as of the writing of this report, still remains unwritten in the PTS rules and regulations.

Despite the high appeal success rate, we also have concern that there are students who received a citation that are not aware they can appeal their citation if they were at Stamps for an appointment or symptomatic test. Again, information about this parking lot has still not been posted on either the Stamps' website or the PTS website despite multiple direct requests from SGA. If one visits the Zones Map (http://pts.gatech.edu/sites/default/files/ima ges/gt_parking_zones_map_2_18_20.pdf), you'll find that the Stamps parking lot is denoted with a special yellow color, but no additional guidance is provided.

Fundamentally, part of this issue stems from a disconnect in communication between Stamps and PTS, but at the end of the day, someone needs to take ownership and resolve the issue. We believe that this situation is emblematic of the problem that plagues PTS: unwritten rules that create an unnecessary burden on students.

It should not take a group of students analyzing citation data to uncover these problems. We understand that administrators often get pulled in many different directions and are often just trying to survive their schedule, but the only way to move forward in building a better system is to build back trust. Students have lost trust in believing that PTS is operating in the best interest of our community.

Recommendations

#1 - Overhaul the Rules & Regulations

Core to this report and the concerns expressed within are the issues with the current rules and regulations. We are first and foremost recommending that the current iterations of all parking-specific rules and regulations be completely reworked to be more accessible, sensible, and user-centered.

Before we can make specific recommendations about what rules students would like to see changed, we need to understand better what the existing rules are. Given this, we are requesting the reworked rules and regulations to follow these guidelines:
- Be mobile-friendly
- Include all currently unwritten policies used for enforcement practices
- Written in a consolidated format to reduce repetitive information
- Integrated into the PTS website to help permit holders search for specific rules
- Include better visualizations (that are not just linked PDFs)

#2 - Ditch Driver's Seat

While we can't pretend to understand what the behind-the-scenes of the permit purchasing system, known as Driver's Seat, looks like, if it's anything like what the customer-facing portal looks like, this report recommends that we ditch Driver's Seat. Of course, it can be quite humorous when technical glitches occur at Georgia Tech, but Driver's Seat's lack of useful features is decidedly not funny.

More specifically, we are recommending that every permit holder have access to an online account that provides the following:

1. Tailored list of parking rules that apply to one's specific permit type
2. History of all parking notifications sent out to permit holders
3. Citations/appeals portal for tracking the status of one's citations and pending appeals
4. Visualizations of available on-campus parking that detail when and where one can park with a respective permit

How such a parking portal is implemented will be up to PTS, but to provide a visual aid of what we're requesting, we built the Buzz Buzz Parking website (https://www.buzzbuzzparking.com). This page doesn't contain all of the functionalities we would expect to be available for permit holders, but our hope is that this provides a better idea of what we're requesting. Getting rid of the old system is just Step 1, and we want student input to be a part of the selection process for a new system.

#3 - Create an Optional Education Program

During the brainstorming phase of this project, we wanted to come up with a recommendation outside of the more obvious #1 and #2 recommendations. From our conversations with students, administrators, and other stakeholders, we believe there to be a chasm between parking customers and the current rules and regulations.

As this report has demonstrated, the available information regarding parking rules and regulations is simultaneously overwhelming, yet not informative enough. So, we would like to propose that PTS create an optional, training program for new and current permit holders.

The goal of this program would be simple: students are encouraged to sign-up and attend a short training program where a PTS representative will present a detailed review of the current rules and regulations to educate students on their rights as they engage with parking on campus. In this program, students will gain access to expertise on the particulars of their permit and have their questions and concerns addressed.

In return, participants would receive a $30-$60 discount on their parking permit (depending on the permit type). This program would incentivize students to participate, help bridge the gap between existing rules and existing customers, and provide a small, but meaningful reduction in the cost of a parking permit. To quote Michael Scott, this program would be "win-win-win" for students, PTS, and the GT community.

Conclusion

We understand that a single document is not the answer to all parking problems, so we present these recommendations and advocate for open communication between PTS and students. These solutions will serve as our voice in creating trust between students and PTS. Although this document and these regulations are a step in the right direction, we know that time is essential to build a better relationship. These steps are just the first transition to building a better campus for all.

SGA has continued to meet with PTS leadership on a regular basis and hopes to continue bringing these concerns to light. Additionally, PTS has already indicated their interest in finding a new platform to replace Driver's Seat. These are optimistic steps that we hope signal an openness to change; yet, there are still several barriers to implementing the recommendations we've provided. Most pointedly, the Director of Parking position has been vacant for over a year. This vacancy has severely hindered progress and slowed our advocacy efforts considerably.

As we've outlined in this document, parking enforcement is an essential part of keeping Georgia Tech open to all. With the current state of the rules and regulations, students are confused, frustrated, and do not know where to turn for direct, honest answers, but we want to change that. With open communication and concrete steps in the right direction, we believe that trust can be regained.

We hope that PTS evaluates our concerns and issues regarding the current state of parking regulations. The rules that govern parking on-campus may never be perfect, but they can certainly be much better.