

As one of the more thankless jobs on campus, bus drivers put up with broken-down buses, Bryan-College Station traffic and the occasional psychotic rider.

A&M BUS DRIVERS

BY STEPHEN WELLS
Staff writer

Every day, the students of Texas A&M depend on the actions of people they barely notice. The janitors keep our campus clean. PTTS ensures every car is in its proper place. And the student bus drivers help students make their classes on time.

The Texas A&M Bus Operations is one of the largest student employers on campus. Each semester, 350 students find work driving 65 buses.

Trevor Hull, training coordinator for Bus Operations, explained the hiring process.

"Basically, we go through a pretty thorough and professional committee interview process," Hull said. "This semester, we had 160 applicants for 80 open positions, so we usually look at hiring half of the applicants. The application process is really good practice for the real world."

Several requirements are made for applicants to promote safety in the student bussing system.

"It's required that applicants have a Class B commercial permit before they start training," Hull said. "We also have our own courses on defensive driving and driving

safety. The students spend about as much time in a [training] lecture as they do driving, and they are tested on every part of the class. We take them out to Riverside campus to begin practice driving, then move up to neighborhood driving and night driving."

Jamie Wilson, a bus driver and junior molecular biology major, said the training is not hard work.

"They just take you out and tell you to drive," Wilson said. "It's really not that difficult. You get to run a slalom course forward and backward, and in one of the practice drives, they make you slam on the brakes and jack knife a bus, which gets fun. The only bad part was that training took place over the Christmas holiday which was a pain."

Bus Operations is completely run by students except for two full-time positions: charter coordinator and manager.

"It's quite a challenge being responsible for that many people," Hull said. "But I think our system works out best for the students."

The student bus drivers work 12 hours a week, working three, four hour shifts a week. The schedules are during class hours, so sometimes driving a bus gets in the way of classes.

"You have to work 12 hours a week," Wilson said. "Sometimes it gets really tedious. You just drive around for four hours, and the radio is your only entertainment if nobody talks to you."

"Your shifts are supposed to work around your schedule, but sometimes they don't. For example, I take a lot of classes that are offered at only one time, and I found scheduling to be a big hassle."

Beth Focht, a junior journalism major, said working as a bus driver is no different than working at any other job and demands the same sacrifices.

"I could work at Target and have to work all night after class," Focht said. "It's always hard to work around a student's schedule, but if you like to drive and can get used to the traffic around College Station, this job is easier than working at a department store."

Student bus drivers do not need to worry about a boss lurking over them all the time.

"There's nobody looking over your shoulder," Focht said. "It's really a trust thing. We only get evaluated once a semester."

Some bus drivers who drive the same route for a long time get to know their passengers better.

"Most people just talk to you when they want their stop," Focht said. "But there are a few people that I see a lot. I drive the Oak shuttle, and it's a small bus that you can talk to people in. So we ask each other how we're doing and how school is going. Once I walked into a bank, and one of my passengers started pointing me out to his friends

as his bus driver."

In keeping with Murphy's Law as it applies to a college student's life, bus drivers get their share of tough days.

"My crazy days are always when my bus decides to break down," Focht said. "Or when you hear all these people asking about Wehner and pronouncing it wrong. Once I got stuck at Fish Pond. Our buses have a sensor that locks the parking brake when the air brakes reach a certain pressure. My bus did that, and I just sat there at Fish Pond for a while."

Sometimes life as a bus driver can deliver some surreal exchanges with passengers.

"Last year, I had a guy ask me what I

would do if somebody walked on the bus, put a gun to my head and told me where to drive," Wilson said. "Of course, this is late at night and he's the only one who is on the bus with me. That was no fun."

Although it is socially acceptable to complain about the bus system, Texas A&M is doing well when compared to other public transit systems.

"We had an opportunity to work at the [Atlanta Summer] Olympics last year," Hull said. "We brought about 30 or 40 drivers, and they were very impressed with the job we did. Other people kept coming up to us asking how we ran our buses. It's nice to know we've set up such a successful system."

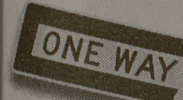


Top: Avery Schaeffer, a senior Community Health major, has been driving buses for two years.

Right: Kami Rapp, a junior animal science major, drives an on-campus route Tuesday afternoon.

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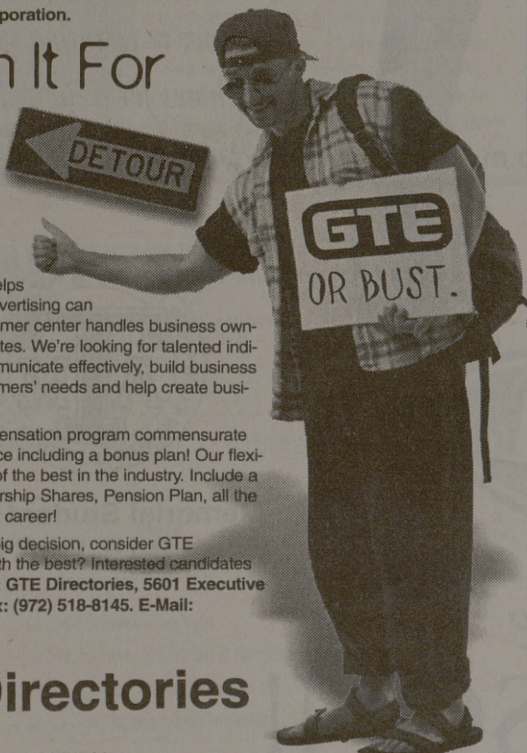
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