

AGGIELIFE

THE BATTALION

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Campus bus drivers share what it's like to be Behind the wheel

By Lyndsey Sage
THE BATTALION

Parallel parking a bus has become second nature for senior anthropology major Jennifer Corley. In fact, Corley confesses she can parallel park a bus better than she can her own car.

Corley has been employed with Bus Operations, the campus transportation system for five years. Since its beginning in 1982, Bus Operations has relied on students to drive the buses through campus and the community from early in the morning until late at night.

Corley said that although she was "scared to death" to drive her first route, driving a bus has now become "as easy as snapping your fingers."

Corley said bus drivers undergo vigorous training that prepares them to handle the difficulties of maneuvering a bus.

Assistant Director of Bus Operations Gary Jackson said the students' driving records are monitored before they are even considered to be a bus driver.

He said having less than two citations indicates that the student has a decent driving history.

Once their driving records have been reviewed, applicants go through the interviewing process to be hired. Then, before the two-week training session, the hired drivers obtain learners' permits from the Department of Public Safety [DPS] to drive the buses. Jackson said they must take five tests to get their learners' permits.

"It is a computer test that we give them a book to study for. Once they pass the test, we put them through about 20 to 25 hours of academics," he said.

After the classroom training, the students are allowed in the driver's seat. This section of the training consists of about 20 to 25 hours of hands-on experience.

"After they go through the driving part, we take them down to the DPS office so they can take the test to obtain their license," Jackson said. "About 97 to 98 percent of students pass the first time. In my five years here, it has only taken one student three times to pass the test, everyone else has passed by the second time."

Bus Operations currently employs approximately 400 students to operate a fleet of 80 buses, Jackson said.

Daryl Pratho, a senior history major, said he felt prepared when he first sat behind the wheel last January.

"[Bus Operations] does an excellent job in training," Pratho said. "It covers all aspects of what we might find, different situations that might happen, what to do in case of an emergency."

However, he admits that there is still "a lot of learning involved after you start driving routes."

Bus accidents, Jackson said, especially major ones, are rare but do occur.

"Historically, we have a rash of little ones at the beginning of the semester. Even though the drivers are trained very well, it takes time getting used to having a bus full of people. There are about four to five accidents for every 100,000 miles," Jackson said.

Both Pratho and Corley acknowledge that driving buses offers a lot of benefits, such as the camaraderie among drivers and the handsome paychecks.

Corley describes the atmosphere of Bus Operations as a "great community."

"A lot of my friends from college, I've meet at Bus Ops," she said.

Pratho said being a part of Bus Operations has given him the sense of being connected to a "big extended family."

Corley said driving buses has also presented her with amazing opportunities.

"I've met George and Barbara Bush twice," Corley said. "I was driving people that were going to have dinner with him. When I opened the bus doors, he was standing there waiting to meet and greet."

"Since I've been here so long, I've gotten to drive for a lot of important people, including the Board of Regents."

Pratho said being in an atmosphere of students is one of his biggest perks. He said interaction with passengers makes the shift go by faster.

However, working in an environment with students can have its drawbacks.

"Sometimes people yell at you because the bus system does not always flow perfectly," Corley said. "They don't realize that it isn't the bus drivers' fault and that we can't do anything to change the bus system. When they are 30 minutes late for class it doesn't matter what we tell them, they just want to yell at someone."

Pratho said traffic irritates him the most when he is driving his route.

"There are some people that don't need to be driving or people that don't carpool. Then there are people that are driving on campus and just stop to pick someone up or wait to try to find the best parking spot so then you have to wait on them," Pratho said.

In addition to driving regular three to four-hour routes during the week, students are given the option to drive for other events, primarily charters.

"Some of my most interesting experiences have come when I



ALISSA HOLLIMAN • THE BATTALION

Senior management information systems major J.T. Altieri inspects the bus tires before he goes on route.

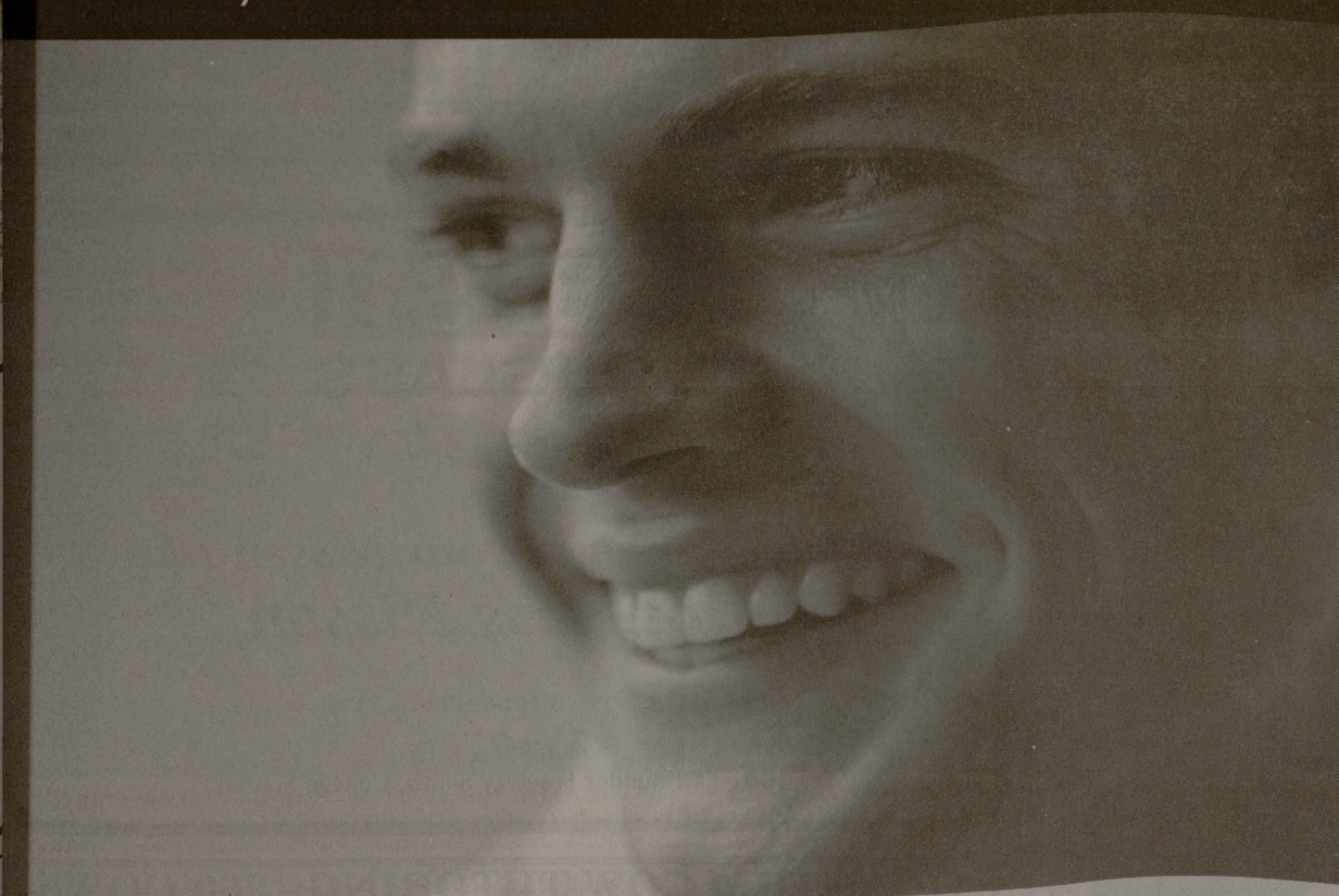
have driven in downtown Houston or Austin," Corley said. "The streets are about a foot wider than the bus and people on the bus start to panic because they don't think I can make it; it's really funny."

Another experience I had when driving a charter was when I had to go offroading in the bus. The only way to turn around was to drive through a field."

While the experiences of driving a bus can be unpredictable, Pratho said one thing is certain.

"It takes a lot of patience to be a bus driver."

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Cosmo - Fashion magazine with informative articles

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Cossack - of Turkish origin

Costard - Large English cooking apples

COSGA - SGA Committee hosting largest nationwide student-run leadership conference.

Applications for fall committee are available at the SGA office in Koldus. Visit our website <http://cosga.tamu.edu> for more information about the conference and committee.

Applications are due Tuesday, September 17 by 5 pm.

4.0 & GO

The week of September 15 - September 19

Acct 209	Part 1 of 2 Sun Sept 15 7pm-10pm	Part 2 of 2 Mon Sept 16 7pm-10pm	Check out our web page at www.4.0andGo.com	
Acct 229	Part 1 of 2 Tue Sept 17 9pm-12am	Part 2 of 2 Wed Sept 18 7pm-10pm	Next Week Biol, Chem, Econ, Info, Math, Mgmt, Mktg	
Acct 230	Part 1 of 2 Mon Sept 16 10pm-1am	Part 2 of 2 Tue Sept 17 6pm-9pm		
Chem 227	Part 1 of 3 Mon Sept 16 10pm-12am	Part 2 of 3 Tue Sept 17 8pm-11pm	Part 3 of 3 Wed Sept 18 8pm-11pm	
Finc 309	Part 1 of 4 Mon Sept 16 7pm-9pm	Part 2 of 4 Tue Sept 17 7pm-10pm	Part 3 of 4 Wed Sept 18 7pm-9pm	Part 4 of 4 Sun Sept 22 7pm-10pm
Finc 341	Part 1 of 4 Mon Sept 16 7pm-9pm	Part 2 of 4 Tue Sept 17 7pm-10pm	Part 3 of 4 Wed Sept 18 7pm-9pm	Part 4 of 4 Sun Sept 22 7pm-10pm
Mgmt 209	Part 1 of 2 Sun Sept 15 5pm-7pm	Part 2 of 2 Mon Sept 16 9pm-11pm		
Phys 201	Part 1 of 3 Mon Sept 16 7pm-10pm	Part 2 of 3 Tue Sept 17 7pm-10pm	Part 3 of 3 Wed Sept 18 7pm-10pm	
Phys 218	Part 1 of 3 Mon Sept 16 10pm-1am	Part 2 of 3 Tue Sept 17 10pm-1am	Part 3 of 3 Wed Sept 18 10pm-1am	

Tickets go on sale Sunday at 4:00 p.m. 4.0 & Go is located on the corner of SW Pkwy and Tx Ave, behind KFC next to Lack's. Check our web page at <http://www.4.0andGo.com> or call 696-8886(TUTOR)