

Freshmen still depend on bus system after downtown crash

Some students now feel less safe relying on public transportation

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Freshman Claudia Yokum cannot have a car due to university policy so she depends on the Asheville city bus system to get downtown almost every week. She only takes the bus in the afternoon because she said she feels it's safer riding it at these hours rather than in the evening.

However, after a city bus crashed in downtown Asheville on the morning of April 17, Yokum said she has mixed feelings about riding the bus again.

"I think the university should definitely show a strong voice in keeping its students safe. If they are promoting us to use the bus by making it free, they should make sure it's safe for us to use," the 19-year-old freshman said.

According to UNC Asheville policy, freshmen and transfer students with less than 25 credit hours are not permitted to have cars on campus due to environmental reasons and student budgets. However, freshmen and transfer students, in addition to other students and faculty members, can use the city bus system for free.

"I think using the bus is a great way to learn about the other ways of getting downtown. I still don't think freshmen should have cars," Yokum said.

Freshman Matthew Underwood said he agrees and enjoys riding the bus.

"I like taking the bus. I don't really mind that I can't have a car my first year since I haven't needed my own car yet. And, it's sort of nice not depending on one," he said.

Underwood, like Yokum, said he primarily uses the bus system to go downtown more than any other location. However, Underwood said when were a few times that he felt unsafe on the bus.

"The last time I rode the bus it seemed like the driver was riding up on the people in front of us the whole time, but I



Photo by Anna Kiser- Business Manager

The city bus crashed on College Street downtown, damaging the fronts of several businesses.

don't know much about bus driving," he said.

Despite his lack of bus driving knowledge, Underwood said he still feels safe riding the bus after the accident.

"(I feel) less safe than before, but I don't think I am going to die on the bus," he said.

In the downtown city bus crash, there were no injuries for those riding the bus, but one female pedestrian was hit during the crash. According to the Asheville Police Department, the bus driver, 52-year-old Arden resident Ralph

Dwodle, blacked out while he was driving. The blackout is being credited to an undiagnosed medical condition, according to the police accident investigation.

According to recently discovered police wreck reports, Dwodle has been involved in four accidents since 2007. The reason that Dwodle was able to drive the bus was due to the type of license he had to drive it: a commercial driver's license. In North Carolina, a commercial driver's license is not usually revoked for minor accidents.

Though Yokum said she finds the crash

tragic, she said she hopes this will inspire the city to do a better job and prevent this from happening again.

"I am thinking they'll start to clean up their act. Only after tragedy strikes do people pull it together and make it better."

Underwood said he will continue to ride the bus.

"It sounds like a freak accident," he said. "It's pretty irresponsible on the part of the bus company, but I don't think it will affect my attitude toward riding the bus."