February 23, 2021

Good Afternoon,

Several years ago, when campus Wi-Fi was made available, the range was extended to Parking Lots 6 and 7 for students who needed/wanted to connect from their vehicles. Since leadership has changed over and over, this information has been “lost”, for lack of a better term.

Because I am teaching a remote live course that requires an audience for performance, I put in my syllabus that the parking lot was an option for students who did not have reliable Wi-Fi for those days they were giving speeches. Working from their car is the not the best option, BUT during COVID-19, we are all adapting the best we can to maintain academic integrity and help our students continue their education successfully!

Recently when SAC was named as a new POD site for COVID-19 Vaccines (which is a very positive), I inquired which parking lots to re-direct students to for wi-fi access. I directed my e-mail to my Dean, Dr. Dower and Dr. Lamb.

The e-mail was forwarded to Michael Hong Director of ITS for the District by Dr. Dower.

A parking lot was identified by ITS, but I was informed that the Wi-Fi signal was not very strong there. (parking lot in front of the W, H, and Gym)

THEN Dr. Lamb told me to hold off notifying my students because the issue needed to be brought up to President’s Council. The meeting was to be held the next day so I felt the issue would be swiftly resolved.

Here is Dr. Lamb’s reply after the council meeting:

Colleagues,

              I brought this request before Cabinet and I must share with you that we are not authorized to use SAC parking lots as Wi-Fi access points for students.  As I expressed below, we are having unusually high volumes of access to campus.  Additionally, there are public safety concerns as students sit in their cars.  In essence, we are liable for their health and safety while on campus.  Lastly, and on a positive note, you can let students know that the Academic Computing Center is open and students can reserve time in the center to use computers and access the internet.  Lastly, I was also informed that we are exploring the option of buying Hotspots for students to use.  These would, if we can work out the details, be distributed much like our Digital Dons.

Jeff

There are several issues with this solution.

First, the Academic Computing Center offers NO evening hours at all.

Second, having students speaking out loud delivering a speech would disrupt others IF they COULD utilize the Academic Computing Center AND speaking out loud distributes air particle which increases COVID-19 transmission, so that does not solve anything for my students.

Third, there are some students in EVERY section I am teaching where reliable Wi-Fi is a big issue. During regular class days, we all do the best we can and adapt. BUT on speech days, this will not work! I spent time individually with each student who has issues and we virtually walked around their homes/yards to try and find a better signal. For some we found an area, for others I suggested sitting in a car on campus. They all were willing. They want to finish the class!

Fourth, if we are only at the point of “exploring options” about hotspots for students it will be long time before we have them and are able to distribute them.

Fifth, I see this as a huge equity issue. Students who cannot afford or do not have strong bandwidth should not be prevented from successfully completing courses WHEN A SOLUTION IS AVAILABLE!

I belong to a Facebook group of Communication Professors sharing resources/best practices during COVID-19. I posted a question on Friday asking how many of their campuses have designated a spot, on campus, for students to access wi-fi.

 WITHIN 2 hours I had a list of 60 colleges and the number keeps growing! I even received official documents of how they are handling it, and SOME PUBLISH IT IN THEIR SCHEDULE OF CLASSES!

Some schools have had wi-fi available for a long time. Many of these schools started providing wi-fi immediately when COVID-19 forced closures. Some arrived at the decision to provide it when they realized it was preventing students from enrolling or completing classes. Many have opened restrooms, as well! They installed hotspots in parking structures and designated parking lots.

My next fact gathering step was to contact the State Chancellor’s office for guidance. I spoke with the Vice-Chancellor Barney Gomez. He said while there is no directive from the state to provide this service MANY community colleges ARE. He did say that there are cyber security issues to consider, BUT THEY are WILLING to provide any campus ITS dept. guidance on best practices to mitigate those issues. They are not costly issues, basic 2nd factor authorization, solves the issue. AND if we have already been using lots 6 & 7, and have not had a major issue,

the framework must be already in place. There have been no personal safety issues that he is aware of that have occurred. He agreed that this is a big equity issue and that campuses that are at all able SHOULD provide this service.

Next, I called several districts locally and THEY DO allow students this access! In our immediate area Golden West, Cypress, Fullerton, even SCC said they did! These colleges are within 20-30 min of SAC. Are we going to lose enrollment to these districts because they are providing this service?

I checked with SAC Campus Safety and an officer, who asked not to be named, stated that there had been no reduction in hours for Public Safety officers on campus—full time or part-time during the COVID-19 closure. If our campus safety staff is sufficient to handle operations under normal conditions, why is it a safety issue to monitor ONE parking lot when campus has a huge decrease in on-campus presence?

Add to that the gates at most entrances are closed so there is currently one entrance/exit to campus that is open—RIGHT in front of the Safety Office. I do realize that there will be huge numbers of people on campus getting vaccines BUT I really do not think all the burden of orchestrating this falls entirely on campus personnel. I am SURE there are many government agencies helping. AND it is a drive through site with a very organized entry/egress NOT utilizing the entrance on 17th Street.

Equity for our students is a huge issue and I see this as a roadblock that is unnecessary. I WANT our students to continue their educational journey! I WANT them to stay at SAC! I know this will not help students without access to a vehicle, but it is another step in the right direction.

One parking lot open from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. that provides this service does not seem to be a huge expense or require a change in operations.

I addressed the Board of Trustee’s last night with this issue. I am hoping, that as leaders on our campus, you will join me in voicing your concern. Perhaps a resolution to district leaders is in order?

Sincerely,

Stephanie Fondren

Professor of Communication Studies