



The Purple Path

*The Multiple Use Path for the
University at Albany Community*

UNIVERSITY AT
Albany
STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK
Geography
and
Planning

University at Albany
Graduate Planning Studio

Fall 2005



1.2 Project Overview

The Fall 2005 Master's of Urban and Regional Planning Studio concentrated on developing a proposal for the Purple Path. As described in this document, the proposed Path will be a purple multi-use 5k loop around the inner perimeter of the campus ring road. The new facility will help humanize the campus by offering students, faculty & staff a great place to run, walk & bike in a scenic and educational environment. The Path will also provide needed connections to local neighborhoods and retail establishments as well as regional transportation networks.

1.3 Existing Conditions

Presently, the campus has a discontinuous system of sidewalks and dirt paths that follow the inside edge of the ring road. The path's surface changes between asphalt, concrete, dirt and stone dust, depending on the location along the system. The current perimeter path crosses motor vehicle rights-of-way twenty-three times (not including ring road crossings). At each of these crossings, the right-of-way is unclear for bicyclists, pedestrians and vehicles, creating multiple

conflict points. The design of these crossings, ranging in width from 24.5 ft to 85 ft., focus almost entirely on moving motor vehicles from the road to the parking areas.

1.4 Multi-Use Path

Once fully implemented, the main portions of the path will consist of bike lanes on both sides of a traffic calmed loop road, and a dual surfaced, purple path along the inside of University Drive. Experienced bicyclists will be able to utilize the bicycle lanes along the ring road while slower, less-experienced cyclists will have the opportunity to ride on the paved portion of the path. For all other non-motorized users, the dual surfaced path will provide a year-round facility for walking, running, skating, skiing, etc. A large paved surface and a smaller low-impact surface will compose the dual surfaced path.

Paved Surface provides sufficient space for multiple uses and designed for year-round maintenance.

Low-Impact Surface provides runners and the UAlbany Cross Country team with a soft yet durable surface that is more forgiving on the athlete's body. Although the non-paved surface will not be plowed during the snow season, it will be available for winter recreational uses such as cross-country skiing or snowshoeing.

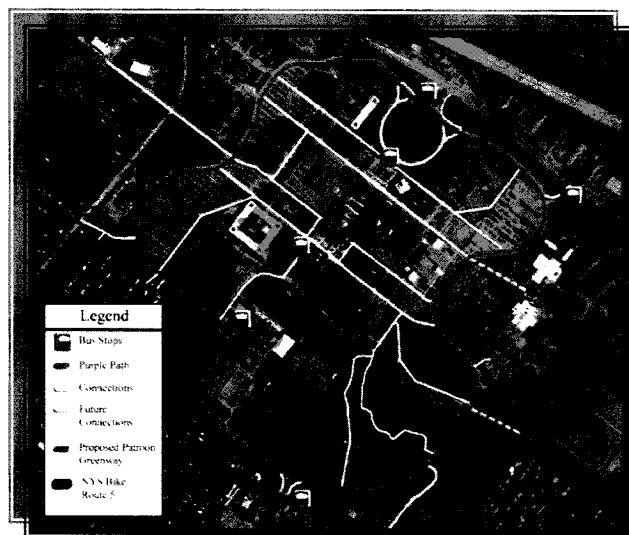


1.5 University Image

The physical image of the campus as well as the perceptions of the student population, and the relationships with the local communities will be dramatically improved. The University can use this project to improve its physical environment by beautifying and humanizing an encompassing *greenbelt* around the entire campus. Through well applied landscaping, the parking lots can be disguised and the additional vegetation will bring the potential physical beauty of the campus to fruition. Student-driven art and historical exhibits displayed along the path will improve the unique character of the grounds and the University's institutional identity, by providing a focus for campus pride and student inclusion in the ongoing design of the campus form. The perceptual image will be improved through an increased ease of navigation due to new way-finding signage. The greatest image improvement benefit for the University will be to offer this rare, progressive, multiple benefit facility to its surrounding communities and neighbors.

1.6 Transportation

The Purple Path offers more than just recreational benefits, commuting will be facilitated through connections of the path and the campus roadways. The connections will provide safe, paved linkages to the internal facilities on campus as well as the Administration Building, Freedom Quad, Albany Nanotech and CESTM. Along with these campus connections, the new facility will provide several external linkages to the surrounding neighborhoods, numerous local commercial areas and several existing local and regional transportation networks.



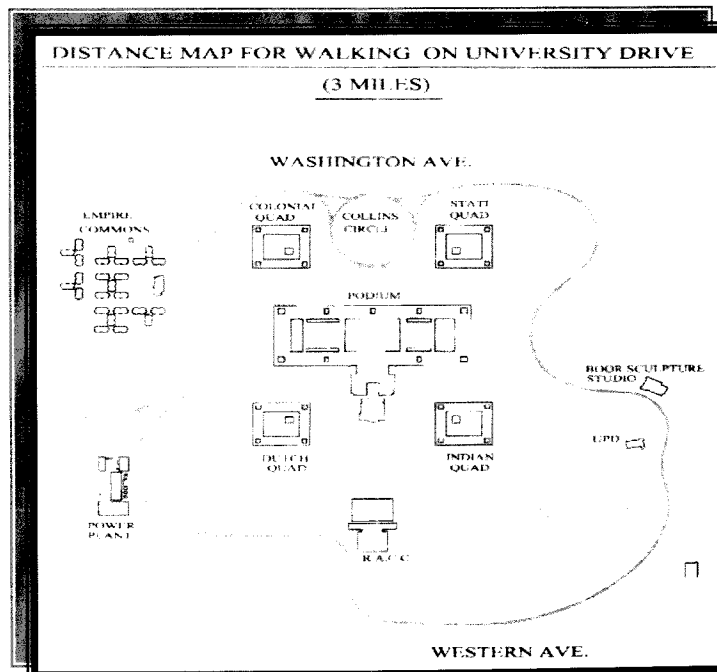
1.7 Safety and Security

The Purple Path will enhance the safety on campus by reducing numerous existing bicycle-pedestrian-car conflicts and providing a well-signed, uniform facility. Campus security will be strengthened by the incorporation of a completely enclosed and brightly lit lighting system that would reduce evening security concerns, as well as increased usage during the night.

1.8 Health and Fitness

Studies have traditionally shown that new facilities generate new users: "If you build it, they will come." The increased level of exercise, spurred by the provision of a safe and attractive facility will result in a substantial health benefit to the campus community. According to the U.S. Surgeon General, moderate physical activity performed a few days a week can substantially reduce the risk of heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes and other obesity related maladies. Using a *physical inactivity cost calculator*, the current health care cost of the University community's lack of physical activity

amounts to approximately \$6,950,429 each year (estimated using University student population statistics). If 5% of the inactive student population became more physically active, an estimated \$350,000 would be saved each year in health care costs.



1.9 Funding and Phasing

The Purple Path can be funded through a variety of resources while additionally creating new fundraising opportunities for the University. The path will provide commuting options through connections to several regional transportation networks, making it eligible for federal transportation funding. A case can be made for this facility to be an integral part of a comprehensive emergency evacuation route, opening eligibility for federal homeland security funding. Sections of the path, benches and other amenities can be sponsored by alumni or friends of the University and the completed 5k loop can be used for an alumni run or other athletic fundraising events. Through a combination of various sources, the Purple Path can generate its construction and maintenance costs while providing the University and its surrounding community with a long-term fundraising asset. The Path can also be included in future growth plans for the University which would alleviate the need for a large separate funding source.

Phase 1

Design and Construct Walking and Running Paths

Phase 2

Add Amenities and Landscaping

Phase 3

Construct Connections and Public Spaces

Phase 4

Reconstruction of University Drive with Bicycle Lanes

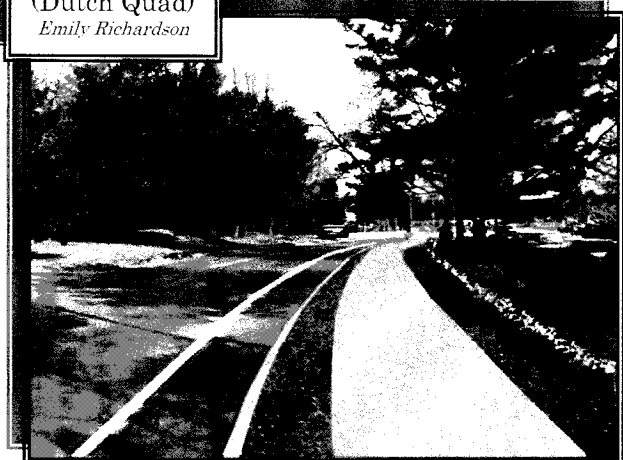
Potential Grants for Design and Implementation

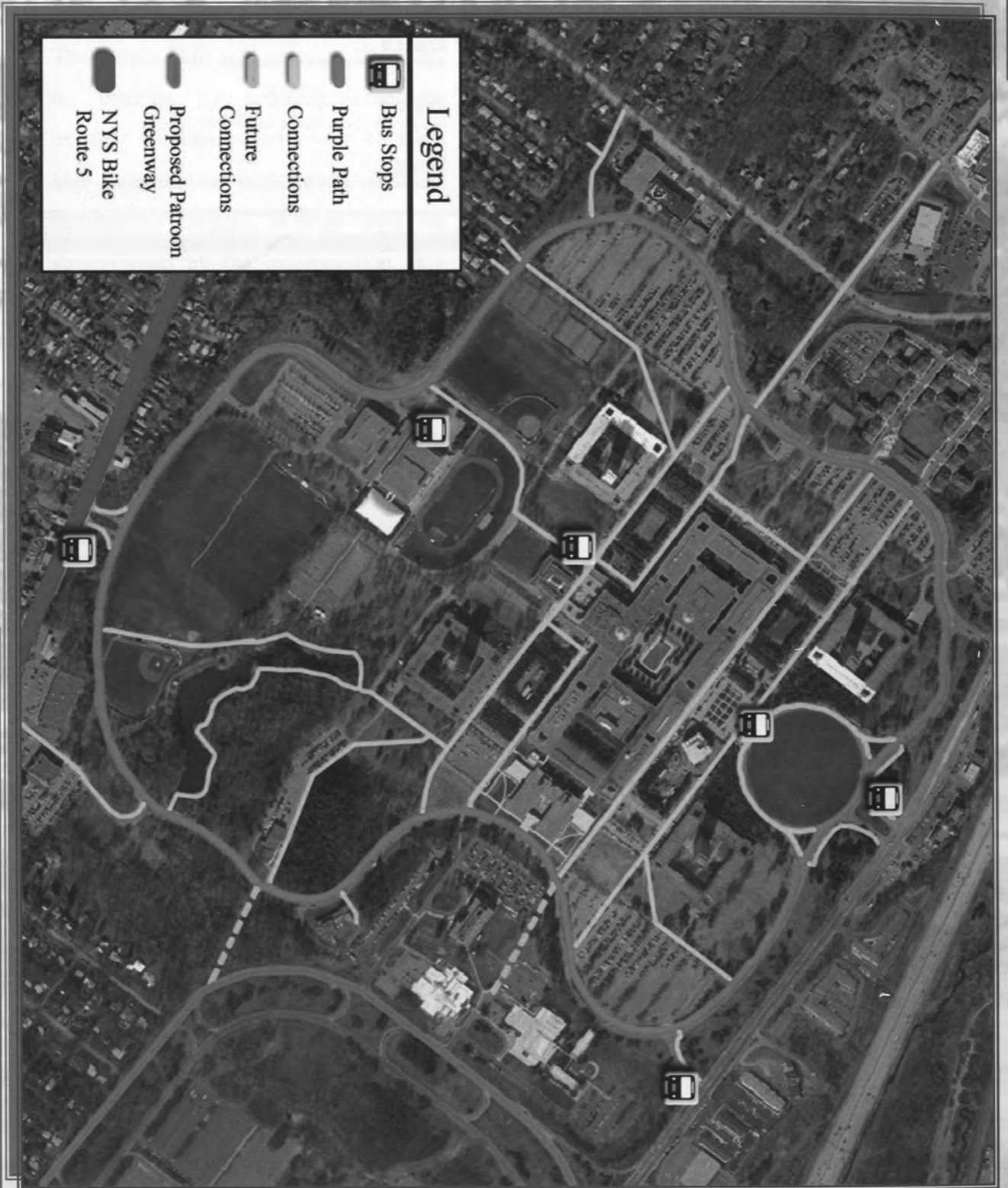
- Transportation Enhancements Program
- Recreation Trails Program
- Quality Communities Program

Note: These programs need a lead agency



**Dutch Lane
(Dutch Quad)**
Emily Richardson





3.3 Campus Image

When approaching the campus one gets a sense of swimming through a sea of asphalt, a habitat for vehicles, guided by painted lines and unnamed passages, only to reach the anonymous massive concrete heart at its center. The campus symmetry makes navigating the campus confusing while the dull uniformity prevents the landscape from attaining a unique sense of place. Recently, the University has received negative press and reviews tarnishing the public's perception. A combination of these attributes hinders the University at Albany from reaching its full potential as a nationally recognized academic institution and a locally anchored treasure.

In creating a new path system, the University shows its understanding that automobiles are not the only mode of travel, increasing the awareness and importance of walking and biking on campus. The Purple Path will transform the aesthetic image of the campus by improving the natural and artistic beauty along with providing aid in campus navigation. It will counter the perceptual

stigma by increasing the amount of outdoor interaction, bringing more activity to the edges of campus. The Purple Path will help to attract more students to study at the University, as well as enhance the interactions with the surrounding neighborhoods.

Aesthetic Image

The aesthetic beauty and distinctive identity of the uptown campus will be dramatically improved through the Purple Path's development. The Path will apply landscaping techniques such as concealing the parking lots with rows of trees and shrubs to not only make it safer and easier to use, but buffers also make the campus more uniquely beautiful. Special focus on the major gateways to the campus will dramatically affect the first impressions that one gets when arriving on campus. Exhibits of art and historical significance will add a unique flavor to campus and attract users to the path. Signage and information kiosks along the path will help guide the users in their navigation of the campus.



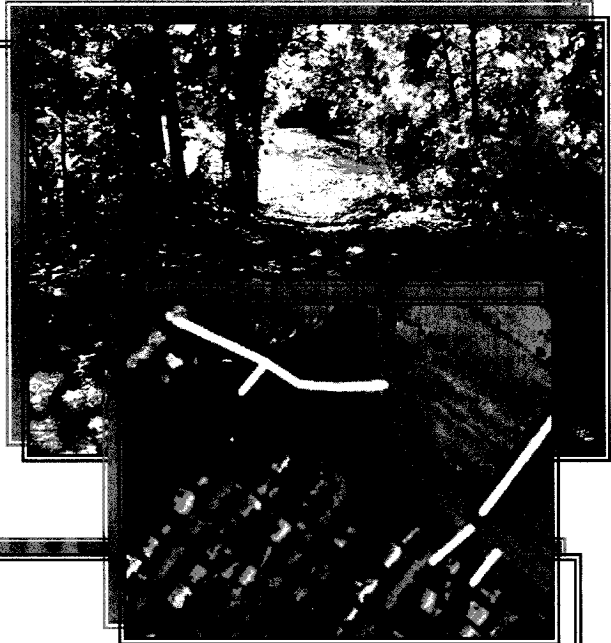
Neighborhood/Commercial

The Purple Path will not only connect different sections of the University but also integrate the campus with its surrounding neighborhoods and business districts. This is a mission of President Hall who stated, "The University needs to make a sustained commitment, at its highest levels, to working with the neighborhoods immediately adjacent to each of our campuses...both in its infrastructure and its integration into the neighborhood."

The Purple Path will blend the borders between the campus and the McKownville neighborhood by formalizing the dirt paths leading to Norwood St, Glenwood St, Parkwood St, and Knowles Terrace. The McKownville Improvement Association who wishes to make their neighborhood more bicycle and pedestrian-friendly supports access enhancements like these. These connections are also called for in the McKownville Corridor Study produced by the Capital District Transportation Committee.

Stuyvesant Plaza is a major retail location within a short walking or biking distance

of the campus. A connection already exists from the ring road to Fuller Road, which is planned for reconstruction in the near future. This project should continue to the Stuyvesant Plaza entrance. The University will again need to partner with Albany County to redesign Fuller Road, making it more accommodating to pedestrians and bicyclists.



This will bring more residents onto the campus while increasing the likelihood of faculty or staff buying homes in the surrounding community. These are also important for allowing access from campus to the businesses along Western Avenue. Other connections that support this business district are at the Western



Urban Planning Quotes from President Hall's Faculty Address April 27, 2004

Since I stepped off my Utah space ship and landed here, a series of **paradoxes of place and purpose** have become apparent. Let me share with you a few of them, since they provide an entering wedge in understanding our University.

- It is a place that prides itself on academic success and houses a chapter of Phi Beta Kappa, but ranks as the nation's number one party school.
- A place that sits in a city, but that has no urban strategy.
- A place that proposes to inform the world about how to plan, but has no signage to direct its visitors across the podium, through its three campuses, and in and out of its buildings.
- A place that has increased its share of Group One students, but has lost enrollment and with it the revenue necessary to finance its ambitions.
- A place with an alumni board begging to make a difference, and an alumni giving rate well below the national average.
- A place with a University Council determined to make a difference, but whose existence seems to make no difference at all.
- A place with the nation's second best criminal justice program, but where students in its downtown neighborhood talk casually with the president about gun fire, knifings, drugs, and break-ins,
- where a student writes to the president to explain that her apartment was broken into five times in one year,
- where one parent is so concerned about the safety of her daughter that she suggests we contact Curtis Sliwa and the Guardian Angels to restore order,

My purpose is to launch a dialogue about what we value at a level appropriate to a great university, but to do so with the prudent urgency appropriate to our situation. I invoke my office as a bully pulpit to urge us to act not merely to discuss.

Our enrollment has dropped by about 600 full time students in the past three years and that has cost the University \$2 million dollars.

Even more troubling is that the numbers of students applying to the University are down as well, almost 900 since 2002.

Over the past three years, the percentage of Group 1 students has gone up by more than 10 percent, with about 40 percent of the new student population in this group. At the same time, however, the overall student population has declined.

Finally, the dashboard reminds us of one of the central weaknesses of the University - its private and alumni base of support. The University has the lowest endowment of any of its peer institutions - and the lowest of the research centers in New York.

We need a little home cooking, some basic planning, and some re-calibration. I offer this view while keeping in mind Mark Twain's observation that "I am all for progress, but it is change that I can't stand." **The way forward**, at least in the short term, looks to me to involve the following:

- A renewed dedication to an urban mission, to the neighborhoods in which we teach and learn, and to providing opportunities for the diverse ethnic and racial groups from these neighborhoods;
-

We need a planning process, moreover, because we have so many plans. As I have combed through the University's past decade of activity, I am struck by how many task force and other kinds of reports there are, dealing with undergraduate education, honors programs, international education, multi-cultural affairs, the undergraduate experience, parking, food services, Fuller Road, the East Campus, signage, and on and on. It is as if an army had been lined up but never fired a bullet.

The person to oversee this process should be our provost, whose selection I hope will be completed shortly. The search committee for the provost, chaired by Distinguished Service Professor John Pipkin, has done a remarkable job under extraordinarily tight time constraints.

Second, we need to revisit **the student experience** in general and the experience of our undergraduate students in particular. The task before us is simple: we need get our student enrollment back to where it was, given our financial model, and we need better prepared students, given our role as a research university. And those students need to have the best possible experience that we can provide.

Of all of the issues before the University, the student experience has the greatest _-urgency.

What do these documents suggest? Let me tick off some items for action:

- an identity for the University
 - more effective parking and parking regulation
 - better campus lighting
 - fewer alarms about safety and crime
 - more access to wellness facilities
 - creation of a *Principles of Community* document
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Let me shift our attention to another area for short-term attention but long-term gain. The University has played a critical role in **economic development** of the region. These efforts need to continue, especially as Albany and the region become increasingly attractive for these kinds of businesses. Part of the social compact for public universities in our time is precisely that, and this university in the capital city of the state cannot walk away from that responsibility.

The University needs to make a sustained commitment, at its highest levels, to **working with the neighborhoods** immediately adjacent to each of our campuses, particularly our downtown campus. That campus, I would note, needs attention, both in its infrastructure and its integration into the neighborhood.

We need contact with the various constituencies that make up this neighborhood. We also need to foster a better working relationship with the city, to help every way that we can with the Mid-town re-development plan, and to provide a safer community for our students living there.

Doing so may require some non-traditional approaches to housing in these areas, but it is in our interests to have more viable neighborhoods, safer places for our students to live, and a retail and service sector that will not only attract students but staff and faculty as well.

Let me underscore that these four areas do not encompass all of what we need to do, but they are initial steps toward re-engaging the social compact that has frayed, re-directing attention to our student population, **re-affirming our commitment to participating in making Albany and the region a better place to live, work, and study**, and re-energizing our efforts to tell our story even better than we have.

The university recently constructed a sidewalk along the inside of the perimeter road between the new Life Sciences building and the driveway leading to the UAB. Unfortunately, that sidewalk was built immediately adjacent to the roadway. Such a design is undesirable for pedestrians for several reasons. One is that pedestrians are more impacted by adjacent vehicle traffic, such as by noise or splashing of rain or slush. Another is that any pedestrian spillover ends up in the roadway, such as when two pedestrians wish to walk abreast and encounter a runner going the other way. A third is an improved sense of security for pedestrians from some separation from vehicular traffic. National design standards (such as the Oregon DOT Bicycle/Pedestrian Plan) recommend at least five feet of green space between a roadway and an adjacent sidewalk, and suggest that trees and other plantings in the green space will further enhance the pedestrian experience.

The original sidewalks along the perimeter road, such as in and near Collins Circle, have such a green strip between the roadway and the sidewalk.

Getting off campus

The uptown campus is a commuter destination for nearly all faculty and staff, and for all of the thousands of students who live off-campus. At present, nearly all of these commuters must drive, because there are few friendly, safe routes to campus for pedestrians and bicyclists.

At the same time, thousands of students who live on campus often go off campus for a variety of reasons—shopping, services, entertainment. Some of their destinations are within reasonable walking or biking distance from campus.

The University should seek ways to encourage people to travel to and from the campus by foot or bicycle. One important reason is public health considerations. The Director of the Center for Disease Control's Center for Environmental Health, Richard J. Jackson, M. D., wrote recently, "There is a connection...between the fact that the urban sprawl we live with daily makes no room for sidewalks or bike paths and the fact that we are an overweight, heart disease-ridden society." A more practical reason is that people who commute to campus by foot or bicycle don't clog the campus roads and help overload the campus parking lots.

But simply encouraging non-motorized travel to and from the campus is not enough. The University should get behind efforts to provide safe infrastructure for pedestrians and bicyclists to use to reach the campus. Much of the area around the campus is very unfriendly to pedestrians and cyclists. Washington Avenue Extension, and Fuller Road north of Loughlin Street are unsafe for pedestrians. Western Avenue is part of New York State Bike Route #5, and Western Ave., Washington Ave. and Fuller Road are all part of the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC)'s Bike and Pedestrian Task Force's Priority Bike/Ped network, but these highways all have high amounts of traffic and are not safe for other than highly skilled and motivated bicyclists. As Don Odell, Albany County Director of Planning, stated in 1993 during the CDTC New Visions process: "Cyclists (and walkers) are not stupid. If there isn't a safe place for them to ride (or walk), they won't do so."

We shall survey some possibilities to connect the uptown campus to the greater community by foot and bicycle more safely. We start next to the campus and move farther away.

I. McKownville, including Stuyvesant Plaza.

All of McKownville, and Stuyvesant Plaza in particular, is within a short walking distance to campus. It should be easy and friendly to walk between the campus and its closest adjacent community.

The Town of Guilderland and the CDTC has made the walking environment in McKownville a high priority. Following adoption of the Town of Guilderland's Comprehensive Plan in 2001, the CDTC funded a McKownville Corridor Study, which focused on improving the environment in the hamlet for walking. That study in turn led to the

inclusion of sidewalks along Western Avenue in McKownville as a \$750,000 TIP (Transportation Improvement Program) project, with construction expected to start in around five years.

One reason for the high priority for walking in McKownville is that in addition to McKownville residents, many University residents and employees walk to the shops, services and entertainment in McKownville.

The University should support efforts to make the walking connections between the uptown campus and its neighboring community more safe and attractive. Here are some ideas:

A. Since the only sidewalk along Fuller Road is on the west side, anyone walking from campus to Stuyvesant Plaza, or from the neighborhood west of Fuller Road to campus, must cross Fuller Road, typically at or near the most southern unsignalized intersection of the campus roadways with Fuller Road, across from Mercer Street. There is a crosswalk at that intersection, but it would be desirable to warn motorists explicitly that according to a recent (2003) state law, vehicles traveling in either direction must stop when a pedestrian steps onto the crosswalk. This could be done with a blinking yellow light and by updated signage. Fuller Road is a County highway, so Albany County would be responsible.

B. There is a traffic signal with a pedestrian phase at Executive Park Drive and Fuller Road. But there is no sidewalk along the east side of Fuller Road to connect that intersection with the campus road and sidewalk network, but instead just a very narrow but well-worn dirt path. The crosswalk near Mercer Street is inadequately signed, and traffic on Fuller Road is heavy, so pedestrians walking from the campus to Stuyvesant Plaza typically walk south along the east side of Fuller Road, where there is no sidewalk, until there is an opening in the traffic, then dart across the highway to reach the sidewalk. It should be noted that two pedestrians have been killed crossing Fuller Road in that area during the past 30 years.

Albany County constructed a sidewalk between Providence Street and Loughlin St. on the west side of Fuller Road within the past few years. The University should encourage the County to install a sidewalk along the east side of Fuller Road at least between the southern campus entrance road and Executive Park Drive, so pedestrians can cross at the signal at Executive Park Drive.

C. How does someone walk between Freedom Quad and Stuyvesant Plaza?

Walk Along Tricentennial Drive to Fuller Road, then along Fuller Road? But there is no sidewalk or shoulder along Fuller Road next to the cemetery, so that route is dangerous.

Through the cemetery? It's certainly possible, if highly inappropriate, to cut through the cemetery to reach the sidewalk on Fuller Road south of the cemetery.

Cross Fuller Road and continue along Tricentennial Drive to the perimeter road, cross that to reach the sidewalk on the east side, then walk along that past the Alumni House area, then walk back to Fuller Road and cross Fuller Road either in midblock or at the crosswalk near Mercer Street to reach the sidewalk. No one would go that far out of their way.

Along the dirt path on the gas line that runs north from Stuyvesant Plaza along the western boundary of Freedom Quad? There is a fence separating Freedom Quad from that path. But it has been heavily vandalized. It is clear that anyone who walks between Freedom Quad and Stuyvesant Plaza would use the gas line path whenever possible. Why not recognize that and formalize the path?

D. University employees and students residing in McKownville have walked or biked to campus using the side streets off Western Avenue that back up onto the southern edge of the campus (Parkwood St., Glenwood St., Norwood St.) for many years. To continue to encourage this form of commuting, it would be desirable to formalize and improve the informal paths connecting those streets to the campus, and consider how pedestrians and bicyclists using those connections could more easily walk or bike to the podium. Perhaps this question could be addressed as part of the forthcoming master plan for athletic facilities.