College’N’Carpool

Long road trips are standard in college life, be it a trip for Spring Break or a return trip home for the holidays. Almost every student has undertaken the task of driving great distances to be with family, particularly over the summer and winter months when students are forced out of the dorms to allow the preparations for the next semester to be completed. This mandatory move pushes thousands of students in the direction of home, and for some that means road trip.

But the problem with multi-state or cross-country road trips is the seemingly endless miles that stretch on toward the destination. Boredom is a highly common occurrence on highways and freeways as the drive consists of one-way driving for hours on end with little stimuli to keep the brain engaged and aware. The radio can help this phenomenon to an extent, but that too will eventually become static noise – not to mention the areas without radio reception. Perhaps satellite radio will always be there, but the fact of the matter is music is often not enough of a stimulus to keep the brain from zoning out. Cell phones, hand held gaming devices, music players, and in-car TV’s can offer enough auditory and visual stimulation, but they serve as dangerous distractions or illegal activities more than a helpful tool to stave of exhaustion or zoning out.

Statistically the age ranges most likely to have a car accident are individuals between the ages of 16 – 44 worldwide. In the United States, there are 37,000 deaths as a result of a crash,
8,000 of which (%) are individuals between the ages of 16 – 20*. This means college students are at risk of becoming one of these statistics, especially when undertaking such long trips alone. Being alone decreases the amount of activity your brain must expend in order to remain cognizant, which then increases the chances of having an automobile accident. When the brain lacks various stimuli, it begins to slow down all functions in preparation for rest or general relaxation – a dangerous state of being when driving, no matter how short a distance. Driving requires focus and attentiveness, both of which gradually ebb away when nothing new or different occurs in the surrounding environment. Without a change of pace or some reason to maintain a heightened state of consciousness it quickly becomes dangerous to be behind the wheel of a motorized vehicle. Inattentiveness in a car is far more likely to end in serious injury or fatality.

Having a passenger in your car is the best means of lowering the risk of accidents. Although there can be some residual distraction due to conversation, the overall benefits outweigh the risks. A passenger offers auditory and visual stimulation as well as an occasional tactile stimulus when the driver is nodding off or distracted. A passenger can serve as an alternate driver, allowing the primary driver to rest when a hotel, motel, rest stop, or relative’s house is too far away. And – possibly the most important aspect of a passenger – the extra set of eyes offered by the passenger can prove to be the most beneficial assistance when driving for the long haul. The passenger proves invaluable as either a navigator or a general second set of eyes watching the road for any unexpected changes in traffic, weather, or terrain.

But finding a passenger can be difficult, especially during the holidays when everyone is trying to get home. Friends will likely be heading in other directions, so where can a student find a passenger to accompany on the road trip? The easy answer is to carpool, but there is no real easy way to connect with people heading in the same direction around the same time. Even if you do
find people, how do you know who they are, whether they have the means to transport you as well, or if they’re willing to even consider carpooling?

That is where College’N’Carpool enters the scene. This app allows college students to connect with fellow students willing to carpool to the same locations, or locations close enough to their destination. University of Arizona students, utilizing their email address and NetID as verification, can only use the app. College’N’Carpool allows students to create an account with a profile offering basic information (name, major, age, and year) as well as a short bio to give fellow students a snapshot view of who their potential passenger(s) may be. The profile also features links to various social networking sites for easy communication between members. To start the carpool search a student must input a location (city, state, zip code), the date they intend to travel (month, year, day), the number of passengers they are either able or willing to take, and the miles from their destination they are willing to travel. Once that information has been inputted, the user presses the search button, and the results are presented. Each result has the username, date, location, and distance from the searcher’s location listed, as well as a link to their College’N’Carpool profile. The profile button will allow the driver to view potential passengers, as well as see their social media pages for further insight into the possible passenger. Once a decision has been made, the driver can connect with his or her possible passengers, and this will allow the driver to calculate the expected price each passenger should pay for gas money. This feature is optional and can be used merely to calculate expected expenditures, but there is the option to pay directly through the app.

The distance from location (the distance a driver is willing to go from their final destination) can be set from 1 mile to 100 miles. The date must match exactly, but any and all information can be altered to rerun a search for maximum optimization of passenger results. The in-app profile will include a picture as well as name, age, major, hometown, and year (freshman,
sophomore, junior, or senior) in addition to the short biography and links to social media pages. The payment system works for debit or credit, and is optional – there is no mandatory use of the payment feature of the app. The ability to communicate through the users’ social media page(s) allows this feature to be optional. Connecting through the social media pages will allow alternate negotiations for payment or the possibility of swapping drivers. The ability to communicate and meet before the trip will prove beneficial for working out any payment plans. The payment feature, however, works by calculating the average cost for gas money per person. This is done through inputting the mpg of the car, number of passengers embarking on the trip, the total distance traveled (based upon the driver’s destination from starting point), and the average gas price. From this information, the cost per person is given, and this price could be merely used for estimation purposes or as the only cost to carpool. But, again, the ability to communicate via social media will allow talks of food prices, alternate choices in cars, and, if the trip is long enough, overnight expenditures.

College’N’Carpool can be applied to trips spanning the entirety of the country (from Tucson to Baltimore), the distance of a few states (Arizona to California), between cities (Tucson to Phoenix), or a food run at midnight if the user so chose and other students had a similar plan. The primary use is intended for longer road trips (outside a 20 mile radius), but can be applied to trips as short as a mile if that is the desire of the driver and the desire of like-minded passengers. College’N’Carpool has the flexibility for short distances and long distances and can prove a unique way to meet with fellow students. The app also serves as a starting point for planning any trip, especially trips spreading across hundreds of miles.

Still, road trips take time to plan, as knowing the routes, how many miles to drive in a single day, and the possible places to rest, eat and fill up on gas will make for the most efficient
and safe journey. Uploading travel searches a few weeks in advance is the best way to optimize College’N’Carpool. This app is not a means of planning out the entirety of a road trip, nor should it be used as such. Instead it should be used to find and connect with other students who are open to the option of carpooling. Although it cannot guarantee all students will find someone to carpool with, it does increase the likelihood of connecting with another student to carpool with and so allow them to embark on a trip safely.

College’N’Carpool will help improve the University of Arizona campus by offering students a safe and efficient means of traveling from Tucson to anywhere the students may live. This will lead to a lower risk of accidents around the winter and summer months, which entails more students returning to the campus and enriching the overall environment of the university. The features of the app allows students to easily identify possible passengers and determine if it is within their best interest to bring the candidates along. There are economic, environmental, security, and networking benefits to College’N’Carpool that will prove beneficial to students of the University of Arizona as well.

College’N’Carpool allows college students to take full advantage of numerous economic benefits, starting with gas prices. Taking into consideration a trip from Tucson to San Diego is 419 miles, and the driver has a car with 15 mpg, the gas money will cost about $80 (based on an average gas price of $2.70). The trip to San Diego has a base price of $80, excluding cost for food and drinks. To take out the dangers of driving alone, an airline ticket could be purchased, but due to finals the earliest date available to make the trip could be as late as December 18th. By that date, a flight to San Diego could cost upwards of $500. By carpooling with 6 passengers (including the driver) the average price for gas per passenger becomes $13 (based on the 419 mile trip and $2.70 average gas price). This becomes easily affordable to college students, and presents itself as the
best option for traveling. The ability to communicate with the passengers allows the details of how the cost of travel will be split – beyond that of just gas prices. Determining the method of payment and the breakdown of how the payment is divided among the passengers can also prove invaluable in reducing the total cost of food and lodging, particularly when it comes to long-distance trips. Using the same method of splitting the cost for all costs can prove to be the most financially sound method for all parties involved.

Carpooling not only saves money on gas, it cuts back on the amount of traffic over highways and interstates. This reduced traffic leads to lower fossil fuel emissions, which in turn cuts back on air pollution. Decreased air pollution decreases the amount and concentration of acid rain, which trickles down to reducing all manner of events, from erosion of buildings to alteration of ecosystems based on algae and other plants that require less acidic water to survive. College’N’Carpool lends benefits toward the University of Arizona’s sustainability projects, as it reduces the carbon footprint left behind by the university’s students.

College’N’Carpool uses a University of Arizona email address and NetID as verification to ensure only those University of Arizona students currently enrolled (not Alumni, previously laid off professors, or those students who have dropped out) have access to the app. This decreases the danger of having non-students contact students thus increasing the safety of college students. By connecting only with fellow students, there is an added measure of security as it becomes far easier to meet in person, thus giving the opportunity to know who the potential passengers really are. Most students will live on campus or have classes close enough to one another where meeting face-to-face shouldn’t be a problem. The app’s ability to link users to one another via social networking sights further increases the security of the users because it allows quick, seamless communication between potential carpool companions. This ease of communication will increase the safety of the
drivers and passengers, as it will allow efficient and effective insight to the personalities of all those entering the vehicle. The app’s ability to connect to the various social networking sites allows users to quickly perform a pseudo-background check, much like corporations would on potential employees. This ability to perform a free, nondiscriminatory background check offers incredible insight and vast information on the individuals entering the vehicle, as many people post the majority of their lives on their social media pages.

Networking apart from security benefits, the College’N’Carpool app creates the potential to form a large network among students. This network can prove invaluable for future careers, allowing students to create a web of connections that will allow multiple points of support, influence, and resources that are beneficial to successful careers in nearly every field of employment. Apart from professional networking, the experiences gained from meeting new people and interacting with the unfamiliar personalities and individual habits will provide useful and applicable experience in all aspects of life. College’N’Carpool will allow the overall atmosphere of the University of Arizona to become more connected, granting the ability for students to connect with one another based on a common location, regardless of major or year. The ability to connect with one another grants students of the University of Arizona a unique opportunity to meet one another and form friendships and relationships that will affect their experiences not only at the campus, but throughout the entirety of their lives.

The organization that would be able to make this app reach its true potential and be able get Carpool‘N’College up and running the fastest would be the University of Arizona Park and Transportation Services. This sector of the University of Arizona would be most fit to run this app because they have the most experience running programs such as Safe Ride and other transportation services. The app is only accessible to University of Arizona students so it would only seem fit that the school be responsible for running the app. With the schools resources and funds, it would make it easier for the app to be created. In
order to get the app going, the University of Arizona would have the easiest time mass marketing the product. One of the few ways that the University of Arizona could market the app would be through its email system which would be able to send and email soliciting the app to over 40,000 students in less then a couple of minutes. Another asset the University of Arizona could use to market the app is through orientation for the incoming freshman class. This would be a perfect time to get both the parents and students hooked on the app and its versatile capabilities. The freshmen are the most likely candidates to use the app because they don’t usually bring their own cars the first year. With over 25% of students coming from out-of-state, this app could be a huge asset for the University of Arizona. If the university ran this app, they could use it as leverage when trying to get out-of-state students to enroll because it will cut the students’ travel costs tremendously. The school would also be able to monitor the use of the app and make sure only students are using its services. With its ample amount of open rooms and building space, the University of Arizona could hold meet and greets for the students so that they can get to know the person before driving long distances with them. The University of Arizona will reap benefits both for itself and its student body if they created and ran Carpool‘N’College.

With the innovative Carpool‘N’College app, students at the University of Arizona will have the ability to travel home for the holidays at exponentially decreased rates that better suit their current financial situations. Not only is the app economically feasible, but it also benefits the driver who may have otherwise grown too tired at the wheel and made poor judgment calls, potentially causing injury or death. Carpool‘N’College would be a university-run application, in specific through the University of Arizona Park and Transportation Services. The university would additionally reap the benefit of possibly increasing the variability of their student body demographic by addressing the needs of out-of-state students. The creation and implementation of Carpool‘N’College would both assist drivers, passengers and the university, as well as promote safer driving during the already hectic holiday season.

*Statistics from Association for Safe International Road Travel (ASIRT)*

The link to our MIS Showcase Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jhr1oIz6uWk