

## ***WMU encourages bike use to reduce carbon footprint***

By Ociel Torres

*Have you ever wondered just how much gas and other carbon emissions are released every day, week or semester if you drive through campus? Just how much CO<sub>2</sub> do you release in to the atmosphere and at what cost?*

Lauren Cooper, a first-year student in the occupational therapy program, is used to driving her car all around Kalamazoo and Western Michigan University's campus.

"Without my car, I wouldn't be able to do much around the city of Kalamazoo and [have] enough time to get to my classes," Cooper said.

Cooper said it's even more helpful driving in the East Campus area where the College of Health and Human Services is located and most of her prerequisite occupational therapy classes are held.

Cooper, like many other WMU students, leave behind a carbon footprint every time they drive on campus.

"Carbon footprint is an estimation of how much tons of carbon dioxide and other gases a single person creates a year," said Jeff Spoelstra, the sustainability coordinator for the [Office for Sustainability](#). WMU has set a goal to become carbon neutral by 2065, Spoelstra said.

"We are really trying to push this through non-motorized transportation," Spoelstra said. "A lot of students commute and burn fossil fuels."

Spoelstra said carbon neutrality is a way of making zero emissions of carbon by either finding ways to absorb carbon emissions such as increasing tree life or by reducing the systems that produce carbon emissions.

A WMU student, on average, drives through the main campus three times a week, according to the annual WMU Parking Enforcement Report for the 2013-2014 academic year.

Students frequently drive through well-traveled areas that make up a total of 5.4 miles: The Valley parking lots, the Schneider Hall parking lot adjacent to the Bus Transit Lot, the Miller Auditorium parking structure, Brown Hall and the Ellsworth/Bernhard parking structure.

If a student who lives in the Valley neighborhoods drives around the main campus through these four locations three times a week, this student would have produced in one semester over 0.7 tons of carbon dioxide emissions and would have driven 259 miles throughout campus according to the free carbon footprint calculator from the website [nature.org](#).

"A lot of students don't realize the repercussions that gas emissions do to our atmosphere," said Brian Petersen, an assistant professor of [environmental and sustainable studies](#) at Western Michigan University.

"Carbon footprint can be anything small like using hairspray to anything big like driving a vehicle and wasting gas at any given time," Petersen said.

"Most of the carbon footprint we release is carbon dioxide which is the primary greenhouse gas in our atmosphere," Petersen said. "The amount of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere directly influences how much of the sun's heat stays on Earth."

Petersen also said that cars are a big problem to our atmosphere.

"Cars can be a vital thing on campus, but we also have to realize that endless driving from one part to the other can be very detrimental to our atmosphere," he said.

Morgan McFarlane, a junior studying environmental science and political science, said that a solution to the problem could be offering more bike racks on campus.

"It could increase bike usage on campus and reduce carbon footprint," McFarlane said.

McFarlane, who is also the Campus Sustainability Chair for the [Western Student Association](#), created a [resolution](#) in November of last year to have more bike racks on campus, specifically in the Valley neighborhood. The resolution she brought to the Senate of the Western Student Association passed with a vote of 72-0-2.

“My hope is that not just Valley students use bikes on campus, but also students living off campus,” she said. “To students that live off campus, they will get more bike racks on main campus areas to leave their bikes in.”

Having more bike racks on campus can significantly reduce the cases bike theft at WMU. Reports of damaged, stolen and rusted bikes had surfaced over the years from students who have left their bikes on the racks, according to the Annual Security and Fire Safety Report for the 2013-2014 academic year.

According to this report, of 14 reported thefts, all but one were bike thefts, said Police Chief Scott Merlo, deputy captain of WMU Public Safety.

“Most of those thefts reported were from the Valleys and all had to do with bike thefts in some measure,” Chief Merlo said.

Chief Merlo also said that WMU Public Safety only documents damage created to WMU property and not personal property.

“There have been reports of damage caused to bikes and those figures have increased due to so many students packing their bikes in the racks available that can rust their bikes or break them apart,” he said.

Students like Peyton Whitley, a student studying business management, said he only drives because of damage caused to his bike that he had left at the bike racks in Valley 3. “My bike was damaged here and ever since I have decided to take it back home and drive around everywhere,” he said.

Some students also have noted the financial impact of driving around campus.

“It’s also hit my bank account hard with the gas I waste,” Cooper said.

A student who produces 1.2 tons of carbon emissions in a single week will spend about \$12.63 on gas alone if purchased at the Speedway on Stadium Drive, a station that many students frequent. A student will spend about \$37.90 in one week, \$149.76 in one month and \$606.52 in one semester on gas money.

“That’s just a student driving in the main campus, it could be more expensive and produce more carbon footprint if a student drove to the Health and Human Services building and the Parkview campus daily,” McFarlane said.

McFarlane said that using bikes more will reduce this financial burden for students.

“Using bikes instead of cars will not only make campus more carbon neutral but also lead to less money being used by the students,” McFarlane said. “The price for a parking sticker for a full time student is \$300.”

McFarlane said that a bike culture has already started on campus thanks to the efforts by the Office of Sustainability.

“The office is trying to decrease use of cars on campus is by opening a bike stable on campus where students can have their bikes fixed or pumped for air,” said Derek Kanwischer, the coordinator of sustainability projects at the Office for Sustainability.

Kanwischer also said that the office is starting a lot more bike features and options in the Office for Sustainability. “The office has also started a Rent-a-Bike program where students can rent bikes for a semester,” Kanwischer said.

“To rent for the semester, it would only cost students \$75 and you get all of the services that are offered. This new incentive for students will hopefully foster a more vibrant bike culture and see WMU become carbon neutral a lot earlier than previously expected,” Kanwischer said.

Even with these new incentives and new initiatives sound very optimistic for Lauren Cooper, she said she is still wary about using her bike again.

“It’s too cold and slippery for me to use my bike, I think I’ll use the buses to get around,” Cooper said. “They are very efficient and save me more money, my bike can wait until springtime.”