

# The Bulletin

## Rideline: Oberlin's Student-Run Shuttle Service

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Oberlin's student-run shuttle service of 26 years, Rideline, is in its peak season of use during Oberlin's coldest winter months. Rideline shuttles students across campus, from dining halls to dorms and classrooms to performance venues, while keeping them warm and dry. Rideline functions on a taxi model — students call

and the shuttle comes to them. There is no set route, and a lot of behind-the-scenes work goes into the coordination and execution of Rideline. For every ride request that Rideline receives, there is a dispatcher receiving the call, a driving group delivering the rider, and one student managing it all. The *Review* spent a night with Rideline. Here's how it went.

**Tonight, Kailah Grace Robbins is working dispatch.**

Robbins, a Conservatory fourth-year, has been working with Rideline for two years.

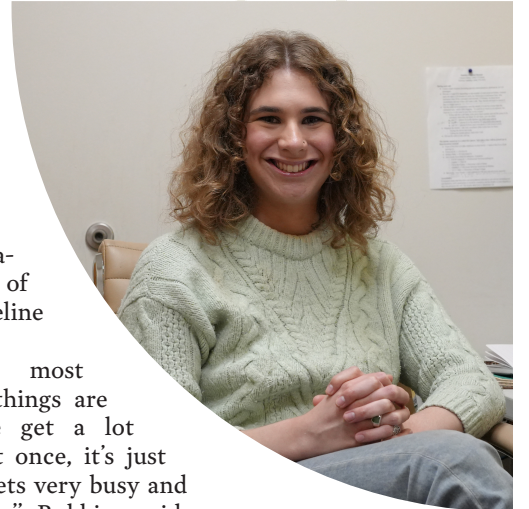
When a call comes in, it's Robbins' job to send the van to the caller and get the student to their destination. Throughout the night, Robbins will log the calls, communicate with the driver, and give time estimates to riders waiting for their pickup. Robbins sends messages to the driver every time a call comes in and makes sure the driver has successfully fulfilled every ride request.

With thousands of students on campus, there are times when Rideline will receive more than 300 calls in one night, making the

role of dispatcher all the more crucial to the organization of the Rideline service.

"The most stressful things are when we get a lot of calls at once, it's just when it gets very busy and backed up," Robbins said. "Especially on weekends, sometimes people will get impatient, [but] it's really only during peak times when we have a lot of people coming in that it can get stressful."

Robbins works dispatch, driver, and jump seat, depending on where the Rideline needs her most, but her favorite is driving.



**Tonight, Donovan Musicant is driving.**

Musicant is a third-year Conservatory student who works as a driver for Rideline. He's usually joined by another student sitting in the passenger seat — the jump seat — who helps the driver manage the stops, but tonight, Musicant is managing it by himself.

When a ride request comes in, Musicant gets messages from dispatch relaying the pick up location, the number of riders, and their destination. He determines his route based on the riders already in the van and proceeds to take everyone to their destinations.

"I find it most rewarding when it's someone who really needs it, like someone who might be disabled or injured ... who would have such a difficult time getting across cam-

pus or maybe someone who doesn't feel the safest walking alone at night," Robbins said, reflecting on the experiences she's had driving for Rideline.

"I'm glad to sort of provide that safety and comfortable environment when I can," Robbins said.

Driving for Rideline is also a great way to meet new people, especially ones you wouldn't normally overlap with.

"As a Conservatory student, my time here in Oberlin just in general is a bubble within a bubble," Robbins said. "I think this was a good way to actually meet a lot of liberal arts students that I might not have otherwise."

There are times when drivers are coordinating hundreds of pickups, and other times when they are just waiting for calls. The busiest nights tend to be weekends, as well as Tues-

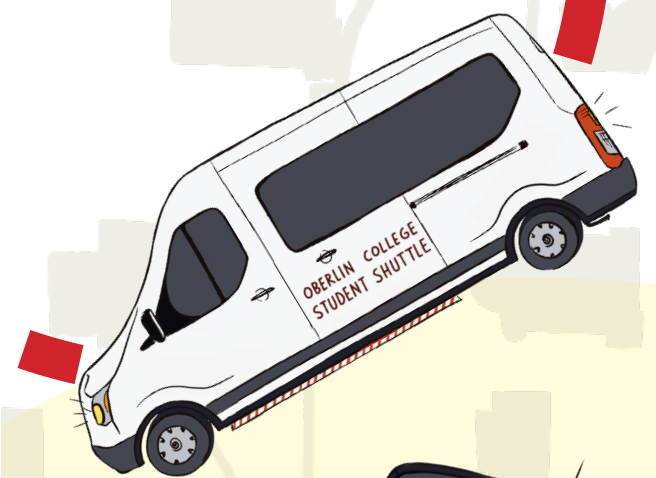
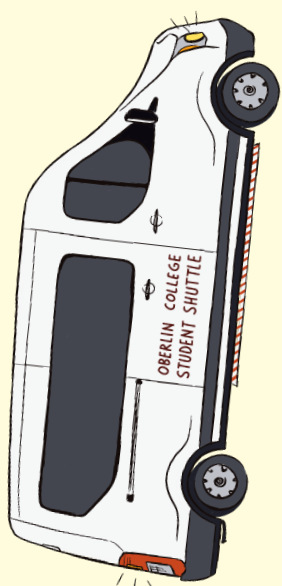
day and Wednesday nights, when The Feve holds its \$2 Tuesday and Long Island Night promotions.

"On party nights, sometimes it can be a nice atmosphere," Robbins said. "Everyone's having fun, and usually we have the aux cord in the van and we can play the music people want, and that can be fun sometimes, too."

It's clear from riding with Musicant that riders are appreciative of the Rideline service. A lot of people that Musicant picked up were bundled up and grateful for the warmth when the shuttle arrived. They thanked Musicant as they hopped off at their destinations and pulled the van door shut.

"Could you close the door one more time?" Musicant asked. "Really yank it."

The stubborn van door takes some practice. That's how you can pick out the Rideline regulars.



**Behind the scenes, Nathaniel Liu is making sure everything is going smoothly.**

Liu is a College third-year. He started working for Rideline his first year at Oberlin, stepped into a supervisory role his second year, and has stayed there ever since. Liu has seen a lot of changes in the service since he started working there.

Before Liu got to Oberlin, Rideline, like most

other campus services, had suffered greatly during COVID-19. The service had just purchased a new van, but wasn't allowed to operate during the pandemic and lost a lot of their regular riders.

"[Like] a lot of things during Covid... people didn't know about it," Liu said. "It lost all institutional memory, so when I came on in my first year, the service was pretty limited. ... Very few people knew about it."

At that point, Rideline wasn't operating on weekends and was struggling to continue its service with a

small staff. Liu knew that Rideline could be a great service.

"I saw so much potential for it," Liu said.

When Nathaniel stepped into a managing position, he was determined to bring Rideline's ridership back. He expanded the staff and was strategic about the people he was bringing onto his team.

"I definitely made sure I hired people that had a lot of friends and liked to be extroverted and roll down the window and say, 'Get in my big white van!'" Liu said.

Building a community of enthusiastic drivers was how Rideline began spreading the word about the service it provided. The team of five people quickly grew to 30, and the shuttle went from running three or four nights a week, to every day.

At its core, Rideline is one of Oberlin's primary public transportation services. Although it's not open to the public, it's open to all of Oberlin's campus; serving students across years and disciplines, it unites a vibrant community by making it more accessible for everyone.