Court Gives Students Appeal Rights

BY MARK MORGAN

Once a week, four people meet in a small room on the campus to decide whether or not a student should be fined for violations in USC parking regulations.

One member is a USC student, another represents the USC faculty, and another represents the administration. The fourth is Assistant Director of Security, Danny Baker, who presides over the meeting.

The meeting place is called the appeals court, but it is not really a court at all. It is more appropriately called a listening hall for extenuating circumstances.

In the middle of the room is a long table with eight black chairs around it. The room is decorated with colorful wall paper and the floor is covered with a matching carpet. On the table are four stacks of appeals to be read. A separate folder contains the appeals that are to be heard in the court that day. Danny Baker, secretary of the court, came in first. He told me that the appeals court is "not a gimmick" and that if USC didn't have the court, "it (parking fines) would really be a rip-off." Next, Shelby Kiff, faculty representative, came in followed by Paula Kress representing the student body. Bill Carter, administration representative, was the last to arrive. Once all the members have taken their places at the table, they call for the first appeal.

The first appeal involved a student who said that he did not get a letter informing him that one of the student parking lots was changed to a commuting student lot over the holidays and thus required a CS sticker. The members of the court had decided to waive all CS parking violations before the court began because they felt many students did not get the letters informing them of the change. They also felt that many students didn't notice the signs because they reasoned a student doesn't look at parking signs every time he goes into a parking lot. However, they did inform the student that if he was ticketed there again they would not waive the fine. The next three appeals were CS violations and the tickets were all waived.

One student who had been ticketed for failure to register his car. The court did not make him pay the $10 fine, but it did make him buy a $15 student sticker. The student said he usually parks his car off campus, but this time he did not. There may have been extenuating circumstances here, but the student did not voice them. The student representative did not feel the student should be fined or made to buy a sticker, but the rest of the court did. However, it must be realized that the sign says "decal parking only."

Another student re-appealed the decision of the court to not waive the fine for parking in a reserved zone. The student said he had to carry some heavy stuff up to his room on Horseshoe and could not park anywhere. He said he was only gone for a few minutes. The court decided to deliberate on the ticket. It decided that since the space had a number on it (meaning it belonged to a dean) they would reduce the fine to $3. The student representative did not agree with the decision but was out voted. Carter said if a student feels he has been cheated he can go see Dr. Jones and talk to him about it. Carter, in defending the appeals court, said they have to consider the circumstances of an offense. He said if the court feels the circumstances warrant it, the fine will be waived.

When the court finishes with the appeals to be heard, all three members take a stack of appeals and read them to decide if the fines will be waived. If the student is unhappy with this decision he can re-appeal his fine as many times as he likes. Some people according to Danny Baker, have appealed as many as eight times.

Baker said he remembers a student who drove a Rolls Royce. He parked his car anywhere he pleased during a semester and would write a check for his fines at the end of each semester. Baker said most schools would probably issue a warrant for the person who ran up these kind of bills, but he said it was ok with him as long as the student settles his fines at the end of the semester.

All things considered, the appeals court is a fair deal for the student who feels he has been ticketed wrongly. However, one should not forget that the members of the appeal board are human and they make mistakes in judgement like anyone else. The student would be wise before he discounts a university organization to find out what it is all about. As Danny Baker says, "It's not a gimmick; the appeals court is here to help the students."

PARKING

The intersection of Pendleton and Pickens Streets was restricted to non-commuting students only. So I asked Leigh Leventis why we weren't allowed to park at the Coliseum. They've changed it now and I've been parking there without being charged.