



Stranded in Manayunk

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When Iyarn (pronounced “I a n”) Charmont decided to rent a house in Manayunk for his senior year at La Salle University, he imagined that being off campus in a part of Philadelphia that is filled with young men and women and more bars than any college student could hope for would be “a dream.”

He never thought about some of the challenges –not being near public transportation, arriving at class late or not at all, and having no place to call his own during the down times between classes.

“It can be tough. It’s much different than the previous three years of school. I didn’t realize how much I took for granted when living on campus,” Charmont says. “Take the library, for instance. It takes a hell of a lot of effort for me to get there. I hardly ever want to go to class because it’s more of a hassle. Being a commuter just takes a lot more effort.”

Charmont is one of about 1,100 LaSalle undergraduate students who live off campus. It is a small but growing portion of La Salle’s 4,341 undergraduate population. And to serve them, the university has set up the Brother Augustine Center for Off-Campus and Commuter Students located at 5632 Uber St.

Those who work at the Brother Augustine Center are available to act as “advisors” and “liaisons” for commuter students who are looking to

get involved on campus.

But every student does it differently. Take, for example, Iyarn Charmont and how he overcame his commuting challenge one day this fall:

6:15a.m.

All that can be heard in Charmont’s dark, small room is the dull buzz of an old, rusted window fan accompanied by the incessant “beep, beep, beep” of his alarm clock. He hits snooze and gives himself another 10 minutes of sleep’s utter bliss.

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That bliss is short-lived. He gets out of bed, mumbling some profanities about his roommate leaving the

window open on this cold November morning, and proceeds to the shower. The only other sign of life in his house is the faint, distant sound of deep snores.

He comes back 20 minutes later dressed in dark gray sweatpants, a white tee, a black zip-up hoodie and a black backpack.

The question is, now what? He has class at 8 a.m., but he is currently stuck at his house in Manayunk — stuck with no car and no prospects for a ride.

Such is the norm for Charmont. He moved to Manayunk the summer before entering his senior year at La Salle. He didn’t, however, decide to live off campus without a car. “I’ve lived on campus for three years. It’s my senior year; I decided I wanted a change. I didn’t really think I wouldn’t have a car.”

Unfortunate circumstances led to this fact. Charmont’s



father, Willie, an auto body worker, was promised a car instead of monetary payment by a customer who was unable to pay for his services. When Willie received his “payment” at the end of September, already a month later than expected, it was not in good enough shape for Charmont to drive.

“Iyarn is an efficient boy. He has assured me constantly that he’s just fine and can make his way to classes. And he better be — going to classes that is,” Willie says with a large grin. “He desperately wanted to live in Manayunk this year. And so I agreed to let him.”

“I have friends who lived in Manayunk last year,” Charmont says. “When I visited them it seemed awesome. No signing people into townhouses; no signing in beer; no worries. I envied their freedom.” Freedom, however, comes with a price.

6:30 a.m.

Charmont has exactly 40 minutes to figure out how he will get to classes today. If he does not have a ride by 7:10, his chances of getting to class on time are slim to none. He needs at least 35 minutes for the commute with early-morning traffic, with 15 minutes to spare for finding a parking spot

and walking to his class.

Now he is on the phone with a “kid he talks to in the class.” This “kid” sometimes sleeps at his girlfriend’s house, a house only seven blocks away from Charmont’s. But today is one of the unfortunate days: the “kid” slept in his own room on campus and is at this moment enjoying at least another 15 minutes warm in his bed.

You would think Charmont would have a simple alternative option: the Manayunk Train Station.

Now, for many in Manayunk, this is an easy means to getting to a destination. But for Charmont, such is not the case.

“I live at the very beginning of Manayunk, back near Henry Avenue. Walking to the train station? I should just walk to La Salle; it’d be quicker. Quicker with less hills,” Charmont says in a defeated tone. “Not only that, I couldn’t tell you how to take the train, where to switch to the subway, and all that. I’m not from here; it’s harder than it seems, believe me.”

Charmont’s right. It probably would be difficult for someone not from Philadelphia to maneuver on the train, get off, and

then get back on the correct subway line. What he fails to add is that he is from a city nowhere near Philadelphia, nowhere near the United States, even.

Charmont was born and raised in the Caribbean in Castries, St. Lucia. Getting to school in Castries was easier for Charmont than getting to school today. “The school was extremely close to my house. Walking to and from was definitely a treat for me,” he says. “It’s not quite as easy to get to and from today.”

7:05 a.m.

He’s right. He has, according to the time he allots himself, five minutes to find a ride to his accounting class. He goes through his cell phone contact list, name by name.

His first call goes unanswered. So does the second. And the third. And, finally, on the fourth attempt: luck.

Casey Davidson, a friend of Charmont’s, lives on the other side of Manayunk. Charmont knows she doesn’t have class today, but, desperate, thought he’d take a chance. And, luckily for him, his chance-taking pays off. Casey has an adviser meeting at 8 a.m. and is getting ready to leave now.

7:30 a.m.

He runs out the door, beckoned by a car horn. “Today was one of those days I sometimes have, that start unlucky, but I eventually get lucky,” Charmont says after he adamantly expresses his gratitude to Davidson. “Luckily it’s preregistration

time, and Casey had to get to school today. I’ll be there on time, even.”

But Charmont isn’t always the avid class-goer. Living in Manayunk, not living a three-minute walk away from his classes, causes skipping class to be a major temptation. “I have skipped my fair share of classes. But, you know, that’s really not because I don’t have a car yet. I mean, I’m a senior; I’m not right on campus, and I love, love sleep. And my bed. I definitely love my bed,” Charmont says.

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For Charmont, it’s just a matter of how much will he has to get there. “If I want to, I’ll find a way. There’s, again, the train. If I got someone to show me how, I’d use it. There’s cabs, I guess. But I’m paying rent, so I don’t wanna pay to get to school on top of that. There’s options. I just have to find them.”

And find them he does. Fortunately he has only been desperate for rides a few times. “I have great friends, great friends who help me out a lot,” he says.

You might think this would be a burden on people, having to go out of their way for another student. But such is not the case as far as Charmont knows. “If I am any trouble and causing my friends trouble, I don’t know it. They’ve been awesome.”

And Davidson, now, is an example of this. “He

needed a ride. He’s on my way. He’s a friend. It’s no problem,” she says.

7:50 a.m.

Charmont grabs his black school bag and grudgingly gets out of the car to make his way to class. He has 10 minutes to spare. He begins to walk but abruptly stops like someone who just realized he forgot something: Food.

He hits the vending machine since he never got a chance to eat breakfast during his morning desperation. With Pop-Tart and water bottle in hand, he enters his classroom. He sits in the front seat of the front row and gets ready for yet another accounting class.

8:50 a.m.

Charmont comes out of class, one class closer to becoming an accountant, and heads to the La Salle Union. “I’ll be here for a while,” Charmont says. “I don’t have another class until 12. I mean, yeah, I wish I could just drive home, but that’s not an option. So I deal with it. I have homework to do, I have a laptop with Internet connection, and I have friends who pop in and out of here. Three hours in here isn’t so bad. Oh, and I love Union food,” he adds. “So here I’ll sit until it’s time for my next class.”

9:15 a.m.

And sit he does. But he is not alone for long. Charmont is soon joined by his first group of friends. Ten guys fill up a table meant for six. The table is filled with enough greasy food to feed at least 20. They chat about their beloved Phillies, sorority girls, and the “kegger” they plan to attend this weekend.

9:45 a.m.

Most of his friends leave to go to their 10 a.m. classes. The others go back to their dorm rooms to catch some more sleep. Charmont is once again left alone. This, he says, is the time for getting work done. He begins a paper that is due in three days. This work is quickly interrupted by three of his girl friends who spot him sitting alone and decide to join him for the next 45 minutes.

10:30 a.m.

Charmont returns to his paper. The “tap-tap-tap” sound of his fingers hitting his keyboard ceases within 10 minutes of typing. Charmont decides he needs more sleep and rests his now-silent laptop.

11:15 a.m.

“Yo, dude!”

Charmont is awakened by



a buddy who had been at the table earlier. They order more food and are joined by more “buddies.”

“It’s hard to get work done when you stay in the Union. Everyone I know eats



here,” Charmont says. “I’d much rather sit and laugh with the guys than write a paper on the differences between financial and management accounts.”

Charmont gives in to temptation and puts his work on hold once again to enjoy the company of his friends.”

11:50 a.m.

“I didn’t get enough done,” Charmont says. “You wanna know what one of the worst parts of living in Manayunk is? It’s not being stranded in Manayunk, car-less. It’s not having all the resources, the school resources, right at hand.”

Charmont’s grades haven’t suffered because he misses classes. They are, according to him, “pretty decent.” The problem is “I can’t go to the library whenever I need to. I can’t use the Writing Center when I need it. It can be tough.”

Charmont pauses and thinks about this. His dark eyes show the signs of realization.

A light bulb turns on.

“Maybe I would use all those things more often if I had a car, which would be nice. I don’t know, though. Maybe yes, maybe no. it still is difficult to get the will to drive back and forth for schoolwork

when you’re about 20 minutes away, comfortable in your own home.”

11:55 a.m.

Charmont gets up, grabs his schoolbag, stuffs his abandoned laptop under his arm, and heads out of the Union on his way to his next class. He continues to think about how different life would be had he chosen to live on campus.

“Yeah, it can be tough getting used to being a commuter. It was a lot easier living in North Dorms and walking out my door and then making a quick return back to relax,” Charmont says.

He thinks the biggest change when becoming a commuter after already living on campus is no longer having a designated spot to call his own. He can sit in the Union, somewhat content, but there is still a certain feeling of being out-of-place.

La Salle University does not ignore its commuter students. There are two designated locations for commuter students: a television room in room 121 and a game room on the lower level of the Union. Nevertheless, these don’t seem to be

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up to par for Charmont.

According to Charmont, “La Salle people should go check out the so-called ‘game room.’ It’s an old pool table you have to pay to use that’s pretty nasty, so I don’t know why you would want to. A TV and old lockers. There’s nothing comfortable about it, nothing homey about it.”

When he is told that the Commuter and Off-Campus Student Association also plans social and educational activities for commuters, he replies, “If they do, I don’t know anything about them. I don’t think it would matter if I did, though. I’m a senior. I have my friends. But if La Salle people are trying to help other students, then good for them.”

“I might not take advantage of the commuter offices, but I can’t only complain though,” Charmont says.

“Manayunk is a great town, and La Salle has been a great school and a great time. I was ready for something different, and what’s better than a young town with a great night life? But it would be better if I had a car,” he says with a laugh as he enters his second class of the day.

1:00 p.m.

Charmont rushes out of his class and sprints to the parking lot out front of St. Basil Court. “My friend, Dennis Diviney, is leaving now. He’s my roommate. Gotta hurry though,” Iyarn says. “He has to get to work by 1:30.”

In what seems like a minute, Charmont makes it to Diviney’s car.

“Charmont’s no trouble

at all. He’s my boy, so I get him where he needs to be,” Diviney says.

They make the drive in 18 minutes listening to what seems like the same deafening rap song the entire time, and arrive at their home. Charmont collapses onto their hand-me-down couch. He throws his schoolbag against the wall, aiming it under one of the many beer posters that decorate the living room. He closes his eyes, spreads his limbs, and exhales deeply, ready to rest.

2:00 p.m.

“It’s been a somewhat long day. I hate being up so early. Tomorrow will be my most difficult day, I guess. I have night class, but none of my roommates do. No worries though. I have a few girl friends who have night class too, who live in Manayunk.”

These girl friends, however, do not always finish their class around the same time as Charmont. Thankfully, though, Charmont has friends who live on Chew Street near campus. “I can chill out there until they’re ready. If they skip class? Well, let’s just hope they don’t.” At this, Charmont goes to call one of those “girl friends” about plans for the night.

“If you live in Manayunk, you’ll understand why it’s worth the hassle. There’s a bunch of college kids here, bunch of girls if you catch my drift,” Charmont says with a sly grin. “The nightlife is unbelievable. I’m in college, man: Nightlife is what it’s all about.”

Before his friend answers, an incoming call interrupts him. It’s his dad.

Charmont will have a car by next Monday.