One Card I.D. System

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Austin Peay State University's goal was to turn the basic identification (I.D.) card into more than just a form of identification. The University sought to bring convenience and function to the campus community with a multifunctional I.D. card that would meet the various needs and desires of students, staff and faculty. These I.D. card functions would include the ability to access secure campus buildings with card readers, make cash-free transactions on and off campus and attend campus and athletic events. The benefit to students and the University is the increased safety by eliminating the need to carry cash or keys. The implementation process came at an opportune time when other service contracts that would directly impact system installment and services were up for renewal.

Austin Peay State University

Austin Peay State University is a comprehensive university located 45 minutes northwest of Nashville, Tennessee. Named for former Tennessee governor and Clarksvillian Austin Peay, Austin Peay State University was established in 1927 with 158 students enrolled the first term. It now has a current population of over 9,000 students on two campuses. The main campus is located in Clarksville, Tennessee, and a satellite campus at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.

In Fall 2008, APSU recorded a total enrollment of 9,401. For the first time in the school's history, the university broke the 9,000 mark in Fall 2006. Between 2000-2006, APSU's enrollment increased 30 percent, making it one of Tennessee's fastest-growing universities. APSU is part of the Tennessee Board of Regents system.

Statement of the Problem/Initiative

The University desired to consolidate and enhance the services offered to students, faculty and staff through a multipurpose identification (I.D.) card system. The contract for the existing I.D. card system was set to expire. The hardware and peripherals used for producing I.D. cards were nearing end of life, and updates and changes would improve the efficiency of the system and the delivery of services to the campus community. In addition, the University was going through a system-wide implementation of new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system software. As a state institution, service contracts are regularly bid every five years. It was an opportune time for the University to provide additional convenience and security to the campus community by consolidating and enhancing services with a multipurpose identification card.

Design

In order for the I.D. card system to be enhanced and upgraded successfully, the University first sought input from students about what they thought were important features to consider. This information, along with administrative goals, would be vital for a new comprehensive I.D. card system. Criteria were generated through informal conversations with students and through meetings with student leaders. The discussions focused on a multipurpose card that would provide students with the ability to accomplish a variety of tasks or functions and also serve as a secure device for facilities access. I.D. card features would include the ability to access residence halls and other campus buildings equipped with card readers, purchase various meal plans, borrow library books, attend athletic and student events, vend products from machines and purchase bookstore materials. In addition, the students could use the I.D.s off campus as ~~a~~ debit cards at local businesses.

The goals of campus administration were to enhance delivery of services through the additional features of the I.D. card while at the same time increasing campus security. Enhancing the I.D. card function would make it convenient and increase the probability that students, faculty and staff would carry or wear their I.D. cards while on campus. Keyless entry to residence halls and other university facilities also enhances safety and security. The 24-hour locks on residence halls and after-hours access to university buildings are limited by the card reader system to only those individuals with I.D. cards programmed for access.

The I.D. card can be used for making purchases off campus because of its debit feature. There is also a declining balance capability on the card when used for vending machines, food services and other on-campus purchases. Because the I.D. card reduces the need for the handling of cash, it also eliminates management issues that accompany cash handling.

Timing was right for implementation of a new system. One-time funds were made available to cover the cost of hardware. In addition, several other contracted services that would directly affect the I.D. card system services, including dining services, bank partnership, card readers for door entrances and a new ERP system, were in the bid process during this time.

A request for proposal was developed specifying several components and requirements. The components included point-of-sale devices for swiping the I.D. cards for purchases and IP readers~~,~~ which are electronic security devices that scan the I.D. card and control access to areas or buildings. The requirements specified for the system were ~~W~~windows-based software and hardware with the ability to interface with third-party, access-control vendors and outsourced-bookstore operations, handle multiple food service dining options, interface with the ERP system and expansion features for the future as funds or technology became available.

Implementation

The implementation phase focused on two main areas of concern—coordination of the project between on and off campus entities involved in its implementation and marketing the card to the campus community.

Coordination was a top priority. Communication between departments and contracted vendors was essential to the success of the project. Regularly scheduled meetings were held to establish a timeline, develop a task list, allocate specific duties and designate individuals responsible for following up on all tasks and deadlines.

After the request for proposal was sent out and a contract awarded to the successful bidder, the University proceeded quickly to implement all facets of the project in a very short timeframe. This required numerous meetings to address the concerns and challenges with the implementation of various phases and components. The University departments directly affected by the new system included the business office, public safety, information technology, student affairs, admissions, office of the registrar and physical plant. Meetings on implementation began as early as one year prior to the start date of the new contract because of the need to develop customized databases to import into the new system.

A key implementation component involved testing. Testing of data exchange was extensive and conducted often and early in the process. Testing and re-testing the system resulted in very few problems with data import into the new system.

Challenging issues involved how to integrate the new system with a new ERP system, completing the process in a limited period of time, allocating the necessary staff resources, processing of I.D. cards for all members of the campus community, establishing a partnership with a banking institution, and installing card readers on buildings across campus.

The I.D. card system needed to be operational in a short period of time. Implementation began in November and every component was completed before the first student orientation on the I.D. card system was conducted in May of the following year. In addition, the entire campus community had to have new I.D. cards issued. The issuing of new I.D. cards was conducted systematically during student orientations in the summer months and then again in the beginning of the academic semester with returning students and faculty and staff. To facilitate issuing of I.D. cards, the University developed a schedule where individuals would come at designated periods based on their last names to have I.D.s issued. However, that still left the issue of how to staff the I.D. card-processing event. In the banking partner contract agreement, the bank was required to supply personnel to assist in a five-day re-carding event at the beginning of the fall semester. Although the wait time to have an I.D. card made increased to 10 minutes a few times during the five-day event, the overall process was successful.

The banking partner had another key role in the I.D. card system. The banking institution had to integrate with the I.D. card system in order for the financial services to be available to the I.D. cardholder. The I.D. card could be linked with an optional bank account and then used on or off campus as a debit card when the individual obtained an issuer identification number (IIN) from the banking institution. In addition, the partner bank could provide checking accounts for students who would not normally qualify.

Many staff resources were necessary to ensure success and involved several departments across campus as well as contracted service vendors. The Office of Information Technology contributed many man-hours and made getting the system in place a priority. The Office of University Facilities was responsible for other facets of the plan, including the processing and distribution of I.D. cards campus wide. The newly contracted food service vendor had to

integrate its system with the I.D. card system so dining purchases could be made. In addition, the dining services vendor had to train its staff in the handling of I.D. card purchases.

Building access readers were a component for the success of the I.D. card transition. The readers had to be installed and integrated with the electrical and fire system of each building. Specific information had to be imported into each card reader to restrict access to each building. The summer and fall housing occupancy posed a challenge to get the readers installed while the residence halls were still in use. The staff of the residence halls had to receive training on the card readers and the various issues that may arise with their use. One particular challenge was the card readers in the new University recreation center. They were connected to turnstiles that restricted the entry to just one individual upon swiping his/her card. Another issue was to restrict the after hours access to the library to only members of the University to increase safety of the staff and students on campus.

The second main area of concern was the marketing of the new system to the campus community. Through the banking partner, the University was able to develop and distribute a new brochure highlighting the enhancements to the ID card. Other methods of marketing the changes and the need for a new I.D. card were initiated through the Office of Housing and Residence Life. They conducted orientation sessions for residence hall students, distributed information through campus wide e-mails, and posted information on the University ~~W~~web site regarding the many features and enhanced uses for the new I.D. and how the features benefited not only students, but the campus community as a whole.

Benefits

Benefits of the multifunctional I.D. card system were reflected in many areas of the University and were recognized across the campus community. The students benefited from the convenience of the enhanced features, and the University received cost savings and increased security benefits.

Students were able to use the I.D. cards in many ways as they walked around campus. The cards permitted access to meal plans, use of a declining balance similar to a debit card, secure access to residence halls, restricted access to recreation facilities, access to the library after normal hours, purchase of products from various vending machines and ability to make copies on copiers across campus.

The relationship with the banking partner provided the students and the University with several benefits. The students were able to securely put money on their I.D. cards thus eliminating the need to carry cash or other cards. Students could link their I.D. cards to the banking partner and use their I.D. cards to perform the same function as a debit card anywhere that debit cards are accepted with a PIN number, including off-campus venues.

During the process, the University moved from ~~to~~ a check distribution method to direct deposit for financial aid disbursements and student payroll. This change required all students to have bank accounts. Some students, for whatever reason, are not able to obtain accounts but the banking partner has the ability to provide those students with accounts. The University recognized a savings by not printing checks and reduced the staff hours and resources needed to supervise that particular operation. This staff-time reduction was seen in the printing phase as well as the reconciling phase. In addition, students did not have to stand in line to pick up checks from the university or to cash their checks at their banks.

With the addition of readers to vending machines and copiers, there was marked reduction in the handling of cash, reconciling of transactions and transporting cash across campus. The use of readers also allowed for the verification of the services, totaling of sales and elimination of cash refunds. Another benefit to this process was the reduction to the risk of theft of money from vending machines and copiers.

While the system and its operation still require staff to monitor the day-to-day activities connected to use of the I.D. card, the initiation of automatic updates, imports and various tasks has reduced the staff time needed to manually run programs and manipulate data.

In conjunction with the University's financial aid and information technology offices, the University's business office has partnered with the contractor of the campus bookstore to allow students to purchase books, study guides and supplies using the students' excess financial aid balance. Students' excess aid balances are transferred to the campus bookstore's system using a secure network protocol, thus allowing the students to use their I.D. cards to purchase materials. Using the I.D. cards ensure~~s~~ accurate coding of the students' I.D. cards. Each day a feed is sent from the campus bookstore to the University's business office prior to the balance refund process being run at night. Any new balances, as well as ~~a~~ zero balances, are transferred to the bookstore after refunds are processed. The new balances replace any balance in the bookstore system, continuously updating the available amount of funds for each student.

Students who register late or file late for financial aid may be given a preset amount on their accounts based on the financial aid application, the determination of need and the probable amount of aid to be awarded.

Campus safety and security have been enhanced with the implementation of the system. Lost keys, failure to return keys and the securing of outside doors are no longer issues. With

after-hours access to buildings controlled electronically and through card readers, buildings are more secure and the University has seen a 30 percent reduction in reports of lost property.

Finally, with the ability to track the type of student attending events, it is possible to analyze the attendance at events. These statistics would be useful in the directing the future allocation of scarce resources to increase student engagement.

Retrospect

There were several things learned in this process. More time than considered sufficient for implementing any process should be scheduled to allow extra time to resolve any problems that arise. Those involved in the implementation learned not to be surprised about what was missed in the planning. Even today, three years after the first import, we still find there were things that could have been done differently or were missed in the planning. All the scenarios used in preparation for the use of the system do not equate to the actual day-to-day operations. Despite the best efforts of everyone, things will be missed. When that happens, adjustments are made to the system and we wait until the next problem arises.

Coordinating all the major parties involved, internal and external, and completing all the tasks involved in the process required a massive amount of communication and coordination by everyone involved. This process was implemented from the basics all the way through to the finalized process so it required a great deal of scheduling and communication. Communication among all the parties involved was key in the success of the project.

While we would not recommend anyone to implement this process from the ground up as we did while at the same time adding all the other components including hardware and vendors, there are advantages. The main advantage to completing the process all at one time rather than adding enhancements and features in stages is that it made an immediate and recognizable

impact on the campus community with the greatest impact being on students. They were immediately able to utilize the features and improvements.

Another challenge was the resistance to change. Adjusting to changes on campus usually takes about six months to a year. New students easily adapt to the system because it is new to them. They tend to be the most active users of system features. It is important to provide information to the community as often as possible with updates and changes as miscommunication and assumptions can easily run rampant on the campus. It also helped to meet with different campus entities to clarify misconceptions about the system and promote the features. Marketing and communication efforts were made to inform the campus community about the changes that were being made and the impact it may have on campus operations. As in all plans, despite the communication efforts, some departments were still hesitant in adopting the system and integrated later than planned. However, now that the system is implemented and running, the multifunctional I.D. card system is considered favorably.