

THE KEY TO CAMPUS LIFE

Newfoundland's Memorial University gives students access to buildings and services with one card.

By Vawn Himmelsbach

Providing campus security was the main reason why Memorial University in Newfoundland developed a campus card program more than 10 years ago. The university added an electronic door access application in 1999 and moved to a second campus card system in April 2003, when the original technology became obsolete. Every student at the university is issued a card, as are faculty and staff. There are more than 17,000 students, 950 faculty members, 850 sessional instructors and 2,300 administrative and support staff spread over three campuses, including the main campus and Marine Institute in St. John's and Sir Wilfred Grenfell College in Corner Brook. The multifunction card acts as a student ID card, library card and photocopier/printer card. It has a magnetic stripe on the back for electronic door access, which is used in three residence buildings, six academic buildings and three administrative buildings. The mag-stripe is also used for access to The Works, the university's sports complex.

The campus cards and electronic door access are two separate systems; the campus card database supplies information to the electronic door access system so campus enforcement can grant access to faculty, staff and students to various buildings on campus. When looking for the current campus card system, the university had to ensure that the information encoded on the magnetic stripe of the card was compatible with the information that is required for the electronic door access system.

Previously, students, faculty and staff used keys to access buildings after hours, but keys were easy to lose and anybody could pick them up and use them, says Alvin Kenny, coordinator of the Memorial University campus card program. However, the university still needed to provide after-hours access to campus buildings. "Our buildings are open from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. so we needed something that any faculty, staff or student who was doing research could get into any of those buildings after hours to continue on with their work," he says. The campus cards have a number on the back of each card that is unique to the cardholder; that means even if a card is lost, no one else can use it if the student reports it missing.

"This gives us more control if someone loses a card — if anyone picks it up and tries to use it, they can't gain access to the buildings," he says. "In this day and age where you have so many problems on campuses it makes the buildings more secure for everyone. It does make the students, faculty and staff working late feel more secure

because someone can't tamper with the doors and get in."

The card is also used by students in three residence buildings to access public areas such as laundry rooms and computer labs. "To my knowledge they're looking at expanding the system to all residences," he says. "Students that I've talked to in the residences using the card system really like it — they feel much more secure."

Electronic door access is expanding to include other buildings on the main campus and possibly the Corner Brook campus.

"It's been slow to expand certainly because of budget constraints at the university over the last two years, [but] it's expanding every year and they are now getting into more individual offices and our cashier's office," Kenny says, adding employees in the cashier's office, for example, have to swipe their card to get in and out of the office.

The cards cost \$2 per student (the university pays for the cards), while it costs \$1,200 per door to set it up for electronic access.

The card can provide secure applications via a barcode on the back of the card, which is tied directly to that particular student, says Virginia Doidge, senior systems integrator with IDenticam Systems in Markham, Ont., which provided the technology behind the new campus card system. This means that when a student checks out books or lab equipment, the university is able to keep track of who that student is.

The university recently implemented a membership system at its sports complex and uses the mag-stripe on the back of the card to allow staff to verify if the membership is valid and if the image on the card matches the person standing in front of them.

"This is really how a lot of schools handle this," Doidge says. "The University of Saskatchewan does this, Laurentian [University] is planning on doing this and a lot of veterinary schools do this because they have to limit accessibility [to chemicals]."

But one of the biggest benefits is that a student doesn't have to carry around money if they want to go to the gym or the aqua centre, she says, because pre-paid applications can be encoded on the card. This provides an added level of security since students don't have to carry cash around at night.

"Most mag-stripes have three tracks and usually it's only one track that's being used," she says, adding that the University of PEI is using an additional track on their campus cards for pre-paid parking. She says it's also a good dorm room application to prevent unauthorized access to student residence buildings. 🍁

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