University of Calgary

Summary

University of Calgary is located in Calgary, Alberta, Canada, and is the #6 top research university in Canada, focusing on six global priorities: energy innovations, human dynamics in a changing world, engineering solutions for health, Earth-space technologies, infections, inflammation and chronic diseases, and brain and mental health.

FTE: There are over 24,000 undergraduate and 6,000 graduate students, supported by over 5,000 staff and faculty. These students, staff and faculty study and work on four campuses in Calgary and one in Doha, Qatar.

Years Card Program Has Been in Existence: Over 15 years.

Organizational Division: Unicard falls under Ancillary Services.

IT Support: IT support comes from Application Support Services on campus and Blackboard. The Unicard full-time employees support users of Blackboard POS and transaction terminals, as well as the Residence Office for the assignment and charges related to the meal plan. There is not a dedicated IT resource in the office or within IT.

Program & Tech Specs

In the early days of the Unicard program, Unicard operated on General Meters, which evolved into Heartland 1Card. In 2016, it transitioned to Blackboard.

Card technologies supported:
Unicards have barcode, magstripe, and prox.

Access & Physical Security:
Access control: DSX and Genetec

POS:
Blackboard POS is used in campus food service retail locations as well as library circulation desks and other small stores on campus. Stored value accounts are provided, and there is an all-you-care-to-eat board plan. Uni Dollars and Food Funds are accepted at nearly all vendors on campus for everything from printing and copying to the bookstore to over thirty restaurants including chains like DQ, Starbucks and Jugo Juice, as well as independent concepts like Brew & Blendz and Korean BBQ.

In 2017, vendor count was more than doubled through a joint project with the Students' Union. Unicard was provided funds through a Quality Money project to purchase hardware and install networks at food court vendors at no charge to the vendor in exchange for a reduction in the transaction rate charged to vendors.

Card Production

IDWorks is used for card production. Unicard issues cards at one office, on the main campus. There are two full time ID stations, running DataCard CD800 printers, with a third station deployed during peak times.

Equitrac is used for printing.

The office is staffed with three full time employees and several student staff who are used primarily to cover lunches and vacations. Outside of card production, the main tasks involve financial administration of the stored value accounts on the program, meal plans, including creation, assignment and administration, and supporting the Blackboard program users including POS, reporting, and any other data feeds flowing out from card creation.

Services & Five-Year Plan

In five years, the Unicard should truly be "the only card you need on campus." Currently, the Unicard is used by many areas across campus for accessing membership at the library and gym, access control for several buildings and swipe to release printing in every area on campus. Other areas use their own credentials for things like laundry, building and parking access.

Current goals exist in two areas: improving processes to use software to semi-automate processes that are currently dominating workload that could be made more efficient using existing software or additional modules and then working with other areas to eliminate additional or duplicate credentials being used when the Unicard would meet their needs.

The three main projects toward these goals are to purchase and implement a new online photo submission program, implement modules providing a direct connection with StarRez to automate meal plan assignment and changes and to change the technology used in the card to some variant of NFC in a joint effort with electronic access to move away from prox.

There is currently a strong online photo submission rate which has outgrown the in-house written online photo form. A new piece of software would reduce administrative workload during this process, the time saved would allow promotion of the program and increase the submission rate.

Meal plan selection is completed in StarRez and then exported and batch assigned in Blackboard. There is not currently a module that would link the two pieces of software, making this a manual process which adds to the workload at the busiest time of year. Linking these two pieces of software to improve the administrative experience with this process is something that is being considered for Summer 2019.

Challenges

The biggest challenge is gaining support from other departments on campus and working together with them on a shared vision on campus. Many other departments use the Unicard or other cards/fobs and are satisfied with the experience. Those who are happy with the status quo can have a hard time seeing that there is a common goal between different areas and that the cardholder experience could be streamlined, if not improved by collaborating on decisions and making adaptations to future plans. The changes may not be easy or inexpensive, but may pay for themselves down the line through reducing redundant systems, lowering the risk of error by eliminating manual processes or freeing up staff to perform other duties.

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