

Liberty University Upgrades to Contactless to Keep Pace with Evolving Campus



Flames Pass Campus Card Program

- › 13,500 resident students
- › 7,000-acre sprawling campus to serve
- › \$500-million rebuilding campaign resulted in new buildings, enhanced facilities, and a high-tech infrastructure

Primary Technology Upgrade Objective

- › Keep pace with the evolving campus and enhance student experience in dining facilities

When visiting Liberty University for the first time, it quickly becomes apparent this is a campus undergoing rapid change. Founded in 1971, the Lynchburg, VA-based university is in the midst of a \$500-million rebuilding campaign that has resulted in sparkling new buildings.

An expansive welcome center, new residence halls, and pristine NCAA Division I athletic facilities dot the campus. And a high-tech infrastructure is readily apparent both inside and outside the classroom.

To keep pace with the evolving campus, Liberty administrators chose to upgrade their Flames Pass campus card program in lockstep, bringing advanced NFC-compatible technology to the school as a way to enhance the student experience in their dining facilities.

Having reviewed a number of technology options including biometrics, campus administrators discussed at length their future direction and desire to not be limited with their new ID technology. Blackboard helped as a trusted advisor guiding the campus through the decision-making process.

Eliminating Long Lines at Dining Facilities

Serving more than 13,500 resident students, Liberty ultimately chose to migrate to Mifare Classic contactless from proximity cards based

initially on a need to speed students through the dining facilities more quickly. “Mifare Classic was a great starting point and was very affordable,” said Liberty Card Director Deb Nightingale.

“We couldn’t get students through the lines quick enough by having them swipe. We needed a more efficient way of getting students in the dining hall and validating their meal plans. Speed was of the essence,” said Nightingale.

With students buzzing across campus keeping pace with the rapid change around them, they’ve come to appreciate quicker entry, according to Nightingale. Throughput in the

dining facilities alone was reduced to just one student per second and the long lines quickly disappeared.



“We see the campus card as a student service.”

Deb Nightingale
Liberty Card Director

NFC-Based Functionality Expansion

Other beneficial applications of the NFC technology became apparent once the dining facilities were live. Nestled in the Blue Ridge Mountains in southeastern Virginia, Liberty later applied the same authentication process to the campus fitness center, where huge expansion of the facility made using the technology there a perfect fit.

NFC-based functionality was easily migrated for use at the bookstore, post office, stadiums and athletic venues, laundry facilities, vending, and other locations where the Flames Pass is accepted. While student service was at the forefront, as the largest private nonprofit university in the nation, security of the students and the campus was also paramount. “Security is by far the most important factor,” Nightingale said. “All the financial data on our new Flames Pass cards is encrypted. We would not have made this change otherwise.”

Campus Card as a Student Service

“We see the campus card as a student service,” Nightingale said.

“At Liberty, we are very focused on the customer. Through the use of various assessment tools, we analyze data and look at business intelligence to help us make decisions on where to invest, what services are being used, and by whom. We want to choose a path and make decisions that get us there in the best way possible.”

Nightingale sees the campus card continuing to evolve to best serve the sprawling 7,000-acre campus. While payments

was the primary focus initially, Nightingale and the Liberty University team are beginning to look at other applications where the secure NFC credentials can be used. Adding contactless support for short-term use lockers is also underway.

“We like to think about the student and their convenience, and the contactless card works very well for that,” said Flames Pass Assistant Director Rhonda Annamunthodo.

Founded by Jerry Falwell in 1971, Liberty University today serves more than 100,000 total undergraduate and graduate students in a variety of residential and online studies.

Plans for Future Credential Services

The ultimate preference for Nightingale and the team at Liberty would be to migrate to a mobile credential that students could utilize from their smartphones, while eliminating the magnetic stripe from their existing Flames Pass cards. Having built a significant NFC-reader infrastructure on campus, implementing an NFC-based mobile credential is a natural fit as Liberty continues to seek new ways to best serve students.

“Students don’t want to carry a card,” Nightingale said. “We believe in the mobile credential and are strategically planning to move towards a mobile credential.”

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