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Campus Cards: Time for a New Business Model



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Most Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) have issued plastic Campus Cards for decades,

based on a 30-year business model. Perhaps it is time for administrators to review this process in light of current technology and dramatic shifts in generational expectations. Development of a contemporary business model, which may include migration to a virtual Campus Card, should include greater customer focus, advanced technology, and closer alignment with evolving institutional priorities. This strategic process has the potential to save your institution millions of dollars, as well as provide significantly increased student satisfaction.

Thirty years ago, fall registration was more reminiscent of an annual scavenger hunt.

- Most institutions issued 50 to 150 forms of campus identification—most of which were valid only for a semester or an academic year.
- Antiquated technologies: OCR, bar codes, punch cards, paper tickets, labels, stickers, single-track magnetic stripes, proximity fobs, and metal keys.
- Single-application systems

and databases were managed by a variety of non-affiliated departments and all updated manually on a daily basis.

- Students were required to stand in endless department lines, which often closed during lunch hours.
- Some Institutions issued generic campus cards, but then required students to go to each office to have their department privileges individually activated (e.g., Dining, Library, Athletics, Housing).
- Cumulative costs of these parallel processes were often hundreds of thousands of dollars per year (for labor, materials, equipment, support, utilities, warranties, etc.).

The overall effect of these decentralized practices generated frequent student complaints—provoked by inefficient, costly and, often, indifferent customer-service attitudes.

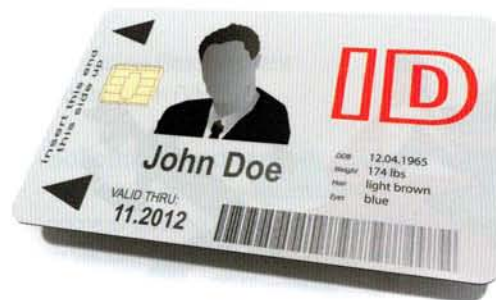
The introduction of the All-Campus Card concept, Campus Card Service Centers (One-Stop Shopping), immediate applications activation, flexible spending accounts, and eventually online debit account deposits all revolutionized Campus Card programs.

Within a decade, thousands of IHE's introduced a Campus Card program, eliminated many student lines, greatly reduced overall institutional direct and indirect costs, and increased student service, convenience and customer satisfaction.

Campus Card Factory

Over the past 30 years, the centralized issuance of a single plastic Campus Card has become a cultural membership card of a college or university, especially on residential campuses.

Technology has experienced



seismic advances. During this period, campus card operations changed as well, but primarily technologically.

Mainframe refrigerator cabinets and, later, microcomputers were replaced by PC-based card systems.

Miles of card-reader data cables and rented telephone lines were replaced by plug-in Ethernet networks.

Manual floppy discs were replaced by automatic backup systems with infinite storage. System manuals were replaced with Help Screens.

Suitcase Polaroid® cameras, photo die cutters, and hot laminators were replaced with portable card printers. Large microwave size readers have been replaced by small, credit-card readers and downloadable applications to iPads®.

Traditional keyed residence hall doors are now being systematically upgraded with hotel-type electronic locks.

Even the business model for campus card system-providers has essentially shifted 180 degrees from past decades.

Campus card system providers designed installed and supported (only) their own brand of proprietary equipment. Today, system integrators specify or resell brand computers, and generic financial and door-access readers. Most providers no longer manufacture plastic cards (in-house), but broker them to large card service bureaus.

As campuses centralize IT administration, more “stealth” door-access systems have surfaced, independently purchased by decentralized housing offices. These systems often utilize antiquated technology, require proprietary and separate credentials, and cannot be accessed by University Police in case of a major emergency (e.g., active shooter, campus lockdown). Clearly,

these non-sanctioned systems do not support global, institutional, strategic safety directives, are not cost-effective to an institution, and do not conform to Best Practices.

Although card production has been reduced from 20 minutes to 20 seconds, most campus cards still use 70-year-old antiquated technology (i.e., bar codes, magnetic stripes). Many contemporary smart-chip technologies continue to be plagued by ongoing technological, proprietary, security and high cost issues.

More than 500 colleges and universities, as well as campus dining contractors, are now using some type of smartphone apps for Campus Dining venues—most with no business or customer-service issues. Most importantly, there has been enthusiastic acceptance of these campus card apps by “mobile” Millennial students.

Most students quickly upload their ID photos, select/change meal plans, add funds online, and correspond with the campus card office electronically (e.g., email, text, Facebook®, Twitter®).

So why do most colleges and universities continue to produce campus cards—plastic and in-house?

New Business Model

The consolidation of diverse forms of campus identification and elimination of multiple department ID systems was revolutionary and was the basis for a very successful business model—for the past 30 years.

Decades ago, all campus card questions had to be answered by employees in-person (or telephone). Now responses to most questions are available 24/7 via the Internet or campus card program website.

Higher education has been revolutionized with online college catalogs, online registration, online password changes, online classes and distance learning.

However, other than standard campus card systems upgrades, most institutions have not formally assessed their campus card operations, including how to best serve their “mobile” Millennial customers.

Major generational shifts and technological advances have set the stage for a paradigm shift by administrators focused on increased campus safety, enrollment, retention, marketing and financial resources.

Hotels nationwide are now replacing hotel room cards with hotel smartphone apps which no longer allow guests to bypass the front desk and no longer require standing in a line to be issued a plastic hotel card.

If the federal Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has been accepting smartphone credentials from millions of airline passengers safely for over 5 years, perhaps is it time to consider extending that convenience to your students and employees.

We would suggest that IHE administrators assess their current infrastructure (i.e., policies, technologies, material/labor costs) and begin the migration to offering their “mobile” Millennial students and employees a new, virtual campus card for access and user privileges throughout all your facilities in a timely and phased-in plan.

With a virtual campus card, lost cards are no longer subject to fee complaints, extended office hours requests, or university expenses (direct/indirect). Replacing a smartphone becomes the total responsibility of the student or employee, regardless of time of day or how often.

For special groups, plastic badges can still be produced (off-site) via card service bureaus, saving considerable overhead, training, equipment, inventory, card stock, and in-house card production expenses.

Administrators need to consider a new business model, especially in an era of tighter budgets and increased customer satisfaction. Straightforward analysis should confirm that migration from a 30-year-old, plastic-card factory to virtual credentials and a virtual Service Center should reduce overall campus card office expenses by thousands, and millions at large universities, over a 10-year period.

Is your institution well positioned

to respond to these business infrastructure challenges and new campus marketing opportunities?

We recognize that there are no cookie-cutter solutions. However, to begin the inquiry process for consideration of a new business model for your institution, we have included the following strategic questions, which every administrator should be asking.

The Baby Boom and Millennial generations dramatically changed overall campus cultures. Soon, incoming students of the Class of 2022 (Generation Z) may be deciding whether to attend class—or just send their drone.

Strategic Questions

Every administrator responsible, directly or indirectly, for a Campus Card program should be asking the following institutional strategic questions:

1. What if our campus card vendor is sold?
2. Is our campus card website contemporary and mobile-ready?
3. Why do we still need residence-hall student-laundry readers?
4. Why do we still need to purchase vending-machine readers?
5. Is proprietary vendor hardware (still) a wise investment?
6. Should we leapfrog over Contactless to mobile technology?
7. Why are we (still) making campus cards in-house?
8. When will we make plastic campus cards optional?
9. Why are we issuing plastic cards vs. virtual credentials?
10. What is our plan to convert all campus readers to mobile-ready? ▼

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