Case study:
Mercer University

Landscape

Mercer University—founded in 1833 in Penfield, Georgia—is a dynamic and comprehensive center of undergraduate, graduate and professional education. With 11 schools and colleges, and major campuses in Macon, Atlanta, Savannah and Columbus, the university has more than 8,600 students enrolled annually. Maintaining security and access control has long been a goal at Mercer. In fact, the university added its first access control systems in the early 1990s.

In 1993, the university began consolidating its multiple access control systems into one with the Blackboard Transact™ platform. The initial focus was to secure the perimeter of the campus housing units by installing locks on 52 exterior doors. While providing a more secure environment, the locks—similar to what is often used in a hotel environment—required students and staff to carry multiple credentials. The university sought a wireless security solution that could eventually upgrade to its vision of being a keyless/cashless environment.

Desired outcome

Enhanced security was the primary goal of the project, says Kenneth Boyer, Associate Vice President Director Auxiliary Services. "On a college campus, mechanical keys are easily lost or misplaced, and they don't allow us to track egress and access in the manner we'd like," he says. "Plus, mechanical keys make certain maintenance functions more labor intensive. For example, when a key is lost, we have to rekey the lock. The labor spent on each individual lock can be very time-consuming—as well as costly."

With a wireless solution, Mercer regained time and control. For example, when the campus shuts down for a holiday break, the university shut off access and made cards inactive for a specified period of time. "An electronic, wireless solution involves much less labor while providing a greater assurance of security," he explains.

Additionally, the university desired a system that integrated to its one card platform. "We wanted to integrate security and access control with other functions students and staff perform on campus, including purchasing meals, copying, checking out books, using vending machines and more." With Blackboard Transact already in place, the university needed a security solution that could work seamlessly to bring everything under one platform.
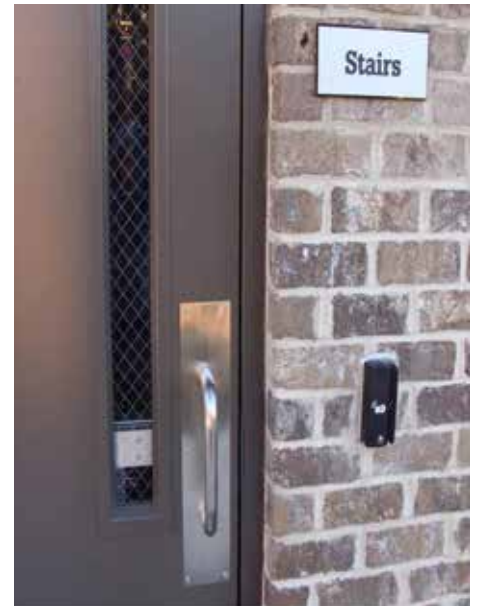
Solutions

Mercer chose the Schlage® AD Series as the central part of its total security solution. Boyer says that with the architectural limitations with older buildings, the wireless solution made the most sense: "The wireless locks allow us to provide service in areas we aren't able to provide wired access solutions without incurring substantial expense," Boyer explains.

Door Hardware: Schlage® AD-Series

- Boyer says these locks were an attractive option for many reasons. For starters, Boyer likes the open architecture of the AD-Series. "It can work with just about anyone's solution," he says, "giving organizations multiple options when it comes to integrating security with other electronic platforms."

- Installation was another key benefit for the Mercer team. "Installing the AD-400 and changing out components is very easy," Boyer explains. "Plus, it can be configured multiple ways, all depending on the need of the opening. We can switch components to suit our needs."

- Additionally, the electronic locks gave Mercer a new functionality: real-time tracking and monitoring. "We have real-time tracking access to every opening that is part of the network. Plus, we can lock down buildings or cut off access very quickly if the need arises," Boyer states.

- Finally, one of the most attractive features of the AD-400 is that is it NFC-ready. With the university looking ahead to adopt a NFC (near field communication) platform as its next generation system, the AD-Series is the ideal solution because it is already equipped to work with any NFC platform.

The migration from keys to cards is a multi-year process. Currently, four residential living units, one office building and one academic building are keyless. As the university renovates or constructs new buildings, it eliminates keys on campus. By the fall of 2013, Mercer will have more than 600 AD-400 locks installed on residential hall suites, labs/classrooms and offices.

In addition to the AD-Series, Mercer also installed **Falcon Exits** and **Von Duprin Electric Strikes** as part of its access and egress solution. The strikes are furnished standard in fail secure (FSE). Fail safe (FS) is optional. Boyer said the adjustable strike back box makes it easier to install because it compensates for any misalignment of the door or frame common in older buildings.

Result

Mercer University has once again advanced its security platform, moving to a wireless solution that provides a higher level of access control. The partnership between Blackboard Transact and Schlage allows the university to address current security needs across campus, positioning it for the next generation of access control when NFC (near field communication) becomes a viable option."Every door on the system is centrally managed and easily controlled. We may have spent more on the front end by choosing this option, but the long-term savings more than outweighs that initial investment," says Fruth. "Plus, we have the convenience and flexibility of being able to click one button to lock down all doors, or unlock a door remotely from home, which puts even more control and security in our hands."

About Allegion

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