

Case Study:

Tulane University

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Since the '90s, Tulane University Has Identified PERSONA Campus Software as Key to Residence Hall Security

Tulane University in New Orleans, LA is one of the preeminent research institutions in the nation, rated by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching as one of the top 2 percent in terms of “very high research activity” nationwide. So it should come as no surprise that Tulane would be one of the first universities to research and find alternatives to traditional residence hall security systems.

It was in the mid-nineties, in fact, that Tulane first sought an alternative to its traditional residence hall keys and locks with a multipurpose I.D. card system. Doug Olson, Tulane’s Director of Card Services, recalls that the school did regularly issue multiple cards for different purposes.

“Students had meal plan cards, copier machine cards, library cards and regular photo I.D.’s,” Olson recalled. “Students were also carrying traditional metal keys for their dorm rooms. Around 1995, in a newly renovated residence hall, we began testing a variety of alternative card-based security systems and offline locks. The manager of our key shop had a standing relationship with PERSONA Campus™ software, so we decided to go with his recommendation.”

Today, the PERSONA Campus software is used to manage Passport 1000 PG locks manufactured by Sargent Manufacturing Company of New Haven, CT, an ASSA ABLOY Group company. These ADA-compliant, battery-operated, stand-alone locks can be



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found throughout the university: about 1200 locks in eight different residence halls, to be exact. These locks interface with the school's student I.D. system, sending Track 3 encoded data to the students' magnetic strip I.D. cards, which Tulane calls "Splash" cards. For maximum security, the SARGENT offline system powered by PERSONA not only provides four-digit, pin code-protected access to dorm rooms but can also deliver an audit trail of the last 700 transactions.

The SARGENT offline system with PERSONA is a natural fit for Tulane's multi-functional "Splash" cards, which feature "tap 'n' go" microchip technology to allow secure access to residences as well as dining, libraries, computer labs, copiers and printers. The "Splash" cards even allow use of student debit accounts to make purchases on campus and at select area retailers.

According to Olson, the SARGENT offline system powered by PERSONA offers benefits appreciated by Tulane students and administration alike. He said, "The students love the fast and simple operation of the system, and the pin-protected security. But they also enjoy the minimal hassle and low cost of replacing the cards, as opposed to a room key. Lost or stolen cards can be replaced instantly without changing locks. The nominal cost for replacing one of the Splash cards is certainly preferable to the expense of replacing a lock and key.

"School administrators and the public safety office appreciate the system's audit trail capability," Olson continued. "The PERSONA campus software system provides a record of when a door has been opened and closed; it even tells us when a door has been left propped open. It's a major upgrade in residence hall security."

Along with the offline systems in Tulane's residence halls, the university is also utilizing the PERSONA software online locking system, also in conjunction with SARGENT Passport 1000 locks, in 11 music department practice rooms. This application features an interface between Tulane's I.D. card system and the PERSONA Campus 1000 software that tracks valid issue codes, with data immediately viewable on a PC, and grants access privileges to hundreds of approved music students.

"The music department previously paid a student monitor to sit at a table in the hall and pass out music room keys," Olson said. "Now they don't need a student worker, and don't need to hold and track keys. The online card reader system gives greater flexibility and eliminates the problem of students holding onto practice room keys and misusing the rooms as lockers."

Olson said that plans are in the works for additional PERSONA online applications in the future, including the Fall 2011 installation of an online security system in the school's new athletic practice facility. The new building will feature six Sargent Passport 1000 P2 WiFi battery-operated locks on locker rooms and bathrooms.

These online systems will allow access using student ID cards, but also provide athletes, who may not have their cards with them when they're coming off the gym floor, with the flexibility to just punch in personal, four-digit pin codes to gain access.

All universities face unexpected challenges, but most don't have to address the type of challenges that Tulane faced in the fall of 2005. After Hurricane Katrina hit, the University was shut down for the entire fall semester. Olson vividly recalls that his own office was besieged by two feet of water. All paper records were lost. However, most of the card readers survived.

Throughout the fall, residence halls were transformed into temporary living quarters for groups of recovery workers. Olson said, "We now had temporary workers living in the residences. PERSONA and SARGENT made two or three access cards for every room, allowing us to issue cards to every worker. It was really a nice gesture on their part and at that tough time, it was very welcome and greatly appreciated."

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