

Blackboard & Grand Rapids Community College



Ease of Use

Grand Rapids Community College had a problem that significantly impacted its business operations and hindered its ability to delivery quality student services. With over 5,000 students commuting every day to the college's campus in Western Michigan, regulating access and accepting payment for parking facilities had become an enormous chore for school employees. Without an existing campus card in place, managing cash acceptance for any purchase on campus consumed staff members' time and constricted the campus ability to provide a positive experience to students.

In 2003, college officials conducted a feasibility study to find an ID card system that would meet their needs. Already a significant user of Blackboard's online teaching and learning technology, including the Blackboard Community System™, Grand Rapids selected Blackboard to help launch the RaiderCard program.

"Each year we were selling \$1.2 million worth of 75-cent parking tokens, which was arcane," says the college's director of student life, Eric Mullen. "Knowing parking and cash acceptance were top priorities, our evaluation of various vendors showed that Blackboard was best suited to meet our needs."

Goals for the Blackboard Platform

Grand Rapids benefited from performing a detailed analysis of its needs before it deployed Blackboard. The college needed a more sophisticated photo ID to help eliminate its existing student authentication process, which was entirely manual. Beyond that, Grand Rapids identified and prioritized specific areas in which staff members would deploy the system, and then followed a disciplined, phased approach to meet its aggressive installation timeline.

While accepting payment for parking created challenges specific to the college, overall cash handling

was beginning to weigh heavy on the campus, especially in areas such as food service operations, the library, copy machines and bookstore.

Security and facility access was also a significant need for Grand Rapids. "A main issue was controlling who had access to doors on campus over the weekends and off hours," explains RaiderCard Manager Paulo Teles. "There were people in the buildings that weren't supposed to be there. We also had a difficult time getting keys back from staff members who left the college."



A Phased Approach

Grand Rapids formed a cross-college team to work on the implementation of Blackboard and prioritize the various pieces. Included were representatives from student life, facilities, campus police, information technology, food service and the library, among others. This team immediately determined the best course of action, making a wish list of problems it wanted the Blackboard technology to solve.

“We sought input from campuses throughout the United States,” says Mullen. “We talked to schools about their systems, and specifically asked what had worked well and where they had challenges. Following honest discussions about how things went, we learned some valuable lessons from those schools. From these lessons, we determined that the best approach was to phase in applications, starting with the basics and then implementing more meaningful applications later.”

In the first phase of its implementation, Grand Rapids deployed Blackboard to manage its parking problem on campus. Due to the size of the growing student population and the relative lack of parking at the urban campus, Grand Rapids could not guarantee parking for all students. Since an annual parking fee was not a viable option, the campus was forced to utilize a pay-per-park system.

Using readers designed to work in a vending environment, students simply swipe their card to enter any of the seven campus garages and then swipe once again to exit the garage. Upon exit, their RaiderCard account is charged the daily \$2.50 rate.

“We have a downtown campus with many nearby businesses and other schools,” says Teles. “We previously had a system where anyone could simply purchase tokens in

“From an administrative point of view, Blackboard has allowed us to walk away from archaic systems and processes that were time consuming. As a result, we’ve been able to take on much more meaningful work that more directly serves our constituents.”

Eric Mullen
Director Of Student Life

order to use the garage. That led to a lot of non- GRCC students using our campus parking. Our Blackboard® system eliminates that problem, and guarantees that our parking is used exclusively by our students, staff and faculty.”

Using an anti-passback feature, each card can be used to enter the garage a single time, and to avoid fraud the card must be used to exit the garage before it can be used again to enter.

Grand Rapids also has been able to automate the assignment of parking privileges. By linking Blackboard technology with its registration system, the college is able to automatically assign parking privileges for any student enrolled for the current term. (Their PeopleSoft® system updates the Blackboard system with new students every 45 minutes.)

Phase two of the college’s implementation included deploying point-of-sale devices for dining services and a couple quick-serve restaurants on campus. “The positive impact was faster lines and increased sales,” Teles says. “We went from accepting only cash to a cashless environment.” A Subway sandwich shop on campus saw a 15–20% increase in sales once it began accepting the RaiderCard.

The next phase of Grand Rapids’ initial deployment plan included Blackboard door access and vending. With campus safety as a driving factor, the college installed approximately 55 door access readers, including two exterior doors per building to help regulate traffic.

Vending was the final focus of deployment, and Grand Rapids targeted 80% of the approximately 120 vending machines on campus to accept the RaiderCard. Machines were prioritized based on sales volume.

Measuring Success

The RaiderCard program has helped increase parking availability on Grand Rapids' campus by automatically allowing access only to current students and also increased speed of service. The average time to exit the parking ramp using tokens was 15 seconds, whereas now, using the RaiderCard, it takes only 5 seconds.

Grand Rapids estimates that it has saved \$78,000 per year on the parking management solution alone, simply by eliminating the need to collect and process cash payments, while also reducing the staffing at the garage exits. Staff members who previously used to process the token system now are able to focus their time on other areas. Grand Rapids feels there is room for even more savings by modifying its existing business practices using the RaiderCard.

Blackboard Transact™ and the Raider Card

In 2004, Grand Rapids implemented Blackboard for campus commerce and access control, and activated the cardholder account management module in its implementation of the Blackboard Community System so that students could manage their RaiderCard online.

Students embraced the RaiderCard program immediately. In its first year, the RaiderCard program processed \$2.2 million in parking fees and now regularly takes in more than \$3 million in student deposits to the campus discretionary spending account.

Safety and Access

Campus safety at the college also has improved. Gym locker room access is now managed automatically based on student enrollment status. For example, student athletes, health club members, employees and students are all assigned access automatically to their respective locker rooms.

The expense of replacing lost keys also needed to be addressed at Grand Rapids. "If one person lost a key to an external door, we would have to re-key the lock and replace all of the keys issued for that door," explains Teles. Now, the campus simply turns off access privileges in its Blackboard system if someone is no longer employed by the college.

Process Improvements

Grand Rapids has eliminated the need for semester stickers, which they previously issued each term to 15,000

students, each of whom was required to visit the Student Life office to be verified as a current student. They also developed in-house a Web-based kiosk that enables students to print their class schedule after swiping their card. "The schedule kiosk program reduced the wait time for schedules from one minute to less than 15 seconds," says Mullen. Grand Rapids also uses Blackboard to help track student attendance and use of campus services. For example, the college has integrated a program with its system to track use of tutorial services, having students swipe in and out to log the time spent in the facility.

Student Satisfaction

Student reaction to the RaiderCard program has been extremely positive. In the year following installation, 84% of students made deposits to the RaiderCard. In a survey conducted, 91% of students were either "satisfied" or "extremely satisfied" with the RaiderCard program.

One area that has drawn positive student attention is financial aid refunds. With the Blackboard system, Grand Rapids has instituted a refund program that enables students to put up to \$200 in financial aid dollars on their RaiderCard.

Vending Sales

Grand Rapids has seen an increase in commissions generated by vending machine sales. Commission from drink vending locations has increased 29%, while snack and cold food vending commissions have increased 24%.

“Students expect to see technology on campus like the type of technology they have available everywhere else in the world. Serving students through technology helps validate the institution in their eyes.”

Eric Mullen
Director Of Student Life

About Grand Rapids Community College

Grand Rapids Junior College (GRJC) was founded in 1914. Today, the eight-block downtown campus of Grand Rapids Community College includes several classroom buildings, while an off-campus “Learning Corner” serves the greater Grand Rapids community. More than 15,000 students are enrolled in more than 1,600 liberal arts and occupational courses. In addition to traditional classroom environments, students may also receive instruction through community and distant learning offerings. Throughout its 90-year history, Grand Rapids has maintained a solid reputation as a premier transfer institution and is nationally for both its liberal arts and occupational programs.

