

Blackboard & University of Toronto, Mississauga



Campus to Campus Shuttle Bus System

When you're part of a multiple campus system, finding the best ways to serve your students across all locations can be a challenge. The University of Toronto, Mississauga, as a way to improve the student experience, initiated a shuttle bus service to transport students to and from its St. George campus in downtown Toronto. Among the goals of the new program, the University wanted to positively impact the daily lives of the students by alleviating the travel burden between campuses, while also operating a sustainable campus service. In order to be successful, the University needed a system that enabled them to have real-time student authentication on each bus, while ensuring that UTM students were benefiting from the service.

In 2004, the University launched its shuttle bus program. When the service began, UTM buses were equipped with devices that could not effectively authenticate student travelers because they didn't synchronize data with the current student records from the Blackboard system. Students would swipe their campus ID card in the devices and then wait to see if the system could identify them. Despite their best efforts, the bus service began to lose money, primarily because the system could not properly identify which riders were actual Mississauga students versus other riders, resulting in non-students riding the bus for free, while students were improperly charged.

The service was also slow and required additional personnel on the bus, which led to cost over-runs.

Additionally, long lines to board the buses often formed and students often complained about the inefficiency of the system.

The University also sometimes had to reimburse students for their bus fare payments if the system did not properly identify them as a student when they boarded the bus.

Making the Switch to Blackboard

In 2005, the University made the switch to Blackboard, which includes offline synchronization capability. The University found the system very easy to use, and staff training was quick. Using the Blackboard system along with Sequoia wireless handheld devices, bus drivers were able to scan the ID cards themselves without additional personnel onboard, which



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The new shuttle bus system, using Blackboard's TIA agent (Transaction Integration Agent) with Sequoia Wireless Handheld devices, reduced the need to purchase bus tickets by the students and ticket handling by the bus drivers, as well as provided a more secure approach for determining who was getting on the UTM shuttle bus.



Blackboard

“We have really seen the difference that Blackboard has made for our shuttle bus service. The sync manager feature has made our service faster, more cost-effective and a better overall experience for our riders.”

Diane Mesch,
*UTM T-Card Transaction Coordinator
University of Toronto, Mississauga.*



enabled them to become very independent. The synchronization capability also made processing and response time to validate riders very fast, due to the offline database storage capabilities of the Sequoia handhelds. In addition, the reporting capabilities of the Blackboard system allow the administration to determine when the buses have their highest peaks and volume of riders, at what parts during the day, week, month and year, allowing the University to operate the system more efficiently.

The payment process is much easier and quicker now, saving the university time, money and resources. In addition, students have adopted the shuttle bus service as one of their primary transportation sources to the St. George campus. The university notes that there are shorter lines when waiting to board the busses, and fewer student complaints about the service. The university stated that this past year, the Blackboard system enabled them to reduce the amount of student bus fare refunds by 95%.

Goals For the Bus System

There are more than 10,000 students on the Mississauga campus but currently about 35% of the student body uses the bus service. With the continued success of the bus system, the University's primary goals are to broaden awareness of the service, expand the number of bus routes, and increase ridership in the near future to more than 60%.

About The University of Toronto, Mississauga

Established in 1967, the University of Toronto Mississauga has grown to become the second largest division of the University of Toronto, Canada's largest university. Situated on 225 acres of protected green belt along the Credit River, U of T Mississauga is home to about 10,300 undergraduate students, over 400 graduate students and more than 690 faculty and staff. U of T Mississauga has 14 distinct academic departments, as well as an Institute of Communication and Culture, offering 125 programs and 70 areas of study. U of T Mississauga is a leader in bioscience and biotechnology research through the Western GTA Convergence Centre, a non-profit centre designed to catalyze and accelerate growth of an internationally significant life science and technology cluster.

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www.blackboard.com/transact**