

# Blackboard & the University of Alabama

## MY FOOTBALL TICKET PROGRAM

Football tickets at the University of Alabama are the hottest ticket on campus. With more than 30,000 students—a record-high enrollment—vying for 17,000 reserved seats in the student section at Bryant-Denny Stadium, scoring tickets to any home game is competitive. Because of the high demand and limited student seating, the University wants to ensure that as many students as possible have the opportunity to attend games, and to minimize lines and wait times at the stadium on game day.

To accomplish this, the University turned to Blackboard Transact, its existing provider of student ID card and e-commerce technology, leveraging a set of assets already in place to build My Football Ticket, a self-service e-ticket account management program for students. During the following season, Alabama officials built on the program's success, using the Blackboard Connect mass notification service to facilitate communication for game day exchanges of student tickets. This creative combination of Blackboard platforms has resulted in higher game day attendance and improved the overall student experience.

### **CHALLENGE:** Logistics of distributing football tickets to 15,000 students fairly and efficiently

Founded in 1831, the University of Alabama is a public institution located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. While certainly known for the caliber of its athletics program—the Crimson Tide team won the 2009 national football championship—the University also has a strong academic tradition. For ten years in a row, Alabama has been ranked among the nation's top 50 public universities by *U.S. News*

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*and World Report.* In addition, the University ranks among the top 10 public universities in the nation in the enrollment of National Merit Scholars.



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In addition to the logistical challenges of printing and distributing 17,000 season ticket packages, the University also found that expediting student traffic into the stadium was difficult: students had to present a paper ticket and swipe their Action Cards. In addition, some students regularly resold their game tickets to non-students.



"Football is a strong element of our student experience, and we wanted to provide the chance for every student to experience an Alabama football game day at the stadium," said Jeanine Brooks, Director of the Action Card office at the University of Alabama. "We realized we needed to provide a student-friendly system that encouraged usage and filled the student section for each game."

Alabama's robust academic and athletic offerings have led to record enrollment, which has intensified competition for student football tickets.

"With increased enrollment, we now had more students vying for 17,000 student tickets," Brooks noted. High demand also meant that tickets were sometimes sold online to non-students.

"The value of tickets on the open market was high, and students sometimes purchased tickets with the intent to sell, not to attend. And that's not what UA wanted to see when there are thousands of eligible students who want to attend a game," explains Brooks.

Complicating matters was the existing paper ticket system, which made tracking sales and student attendance challenging and also made the stadium entrance process cumbersome and slow.

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**SOLUTION:**  
**"My Football Ticket" program using Blackboard services**

Before the launch of My Football Ticket, the University of Alabama wanted to create a program that could be easily adopted by the students. The University knew the Blackboard Transact system was stable, reliable and already familiar to the students. The University's Student Government Association, which had envisioned the My Football Ticket program, sought out the Action Card Office to implement and manage the program. They worked with the Blackboard Transact team to customize the ticketing application using Blackboard's Commerce Management capabilities, which were already in use on campus. Once the My Football Ticket system was in place, students had

secure online self-service access to verify ticket balances, transfer tickets, donate to a ticket pool or, for those without tickets, request from the ticket pool all on a game-by-game basis with emailed transaction receipts and streamlined stadium entrance.

“Blackboard was essential in helping us launch the My Football Ticket program. They helped us customize the system so it could easily handle large volumes of transactions online,” said Brooks. “Students’ familiarity with Blackboard and the Action Card program was beneficial for our training purposes. They knew how the system worked, which made the program’s adoption across campus much easier.” And it was a team effort across multiple University departments, including the Action Card Office, Student Government Association, Student Affairs, Athletics and IT, combined with experts from multiple Blackboard platforms.

Blackboard Transact and My Football Ticket were a success from the outset of the season, but it became clear the University still needed an efficient, timely way to reach students who had received a donated ticket on game day. Tickets were often donated right before a game, and reaching waitlisted students was difficult. “People make last-minute decisions not to attend, so a lot of students do not know until the morning of game day they’ve received a ticket,” said Brooks. “We were sending emails to notify them, but students weren’t always near a computer.” Administrators decided to integrate use of their existing Blackboard Connect service to facilitate outreach regarding available tickets. “We were looking to identify other ways to use the Connect system because it’s such a wonderful product,” said Brooks. “We now use the Connect system to quickly reach waitlisted students before a game. If you received a donated ticket, you still receive an email but you also get a phone call.”

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**RESULT:**  
**Improved attendance and happier students**

Alabama’s creative integration of the Blackboard Transact and Connect platforms has resulted in a more efficient game

day process, improved student attendance and happier students. Since the program started, there have been more than 506,000 hits to the system with over 31,000 tickets donated to other students electronically. And after the Blackboard Connect platform was added, Brooks notes: “Students have actually called thanking us. We get calls saying, ‘I just got this call about a ticket. Is it true? Is it real?’ Students are excited. And it’s exactly what they were telling us: without the phone call, they might not have known they had received a ticket.”

Taking the ticket process online, then adding real-time notification, also conformed to how students use technology today. According to Brooks, “Students actually view email as an older form of communication. They consider a phone call or text more instantaneous than email. As far as students are concerned, email is not their primary mode of communication. Phone calls and texts are.”

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