

## University of Mobile: Improved student experience by replacing NuVision with Blackboard Transact SaaS Transaction System

### university of **mobile**

- › Students on campus: 1,600
- › Undergraduate & graduate programs: 89
- › Challenges
  - » Card system frequently went down, frustrating cashiers and students
  - » Cards would show no funds when students actually still had meal plans or money
  - » Food services revenue declined dramatically
  - » Student experience suffered as couldn't predict if their cards would work or not
- › Solution
  - » After replacing its NuVision proprietary card system with Blackboard Transact for student credentials, the university now enjoys a future-proofed, hosted solution that enhances student experience.

### **University of Mobile was able to improve student experience campus-wide and eliminate card “hurdles” that were reducing dining services revenue.**

The University of Mobile is a private, Christian institution near the Gulf Coast of Alabama. The university prides itself on delivering an outstanding and personal student experience, with a student to faculty ratio of just 14:1. It's the only private university in Alabama listed as one of “America's 100 Best College Buys,” and is considered one of the country's top Christian colleges.

Any issue that detracts from student experience is met with immediate concern by university staff, whether the problem is caused by processes, technology, facilities, or people. With its previous campus card system, the University of Mobile experienced problems in dining services delivery.

“Last year, we noticed quite a bit of financial loss with our food service provider because the card system wasn't functioning correctly,” recalled Kris Nelson, Vice President of Operations and Athletics. “The system went down frequently. NuVision was a proprietary system, so our IT office on campus was handcuffed when we ran into issues.”

University of Mobile offers students a two-part meal plan, using the campus cards to deliver services in the cafeteria and/or at the

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institution's retail dining location. Trouble with the card system meant students often headed to class with empty stomachs and plenty of frustration.

"In terms of student experience, on almost a daily basis, the cashiers had to tell students the system wasn't working. Meal swipes failed when students clearly had meals or dining dollars on their accounts. In a small, private university, the student experience definitely equates to both dollars and student retention rates."

## Rapid Implementation Between Semesters

Nelson and his frustrated team knew they couldn't wait until the end of the academic year to change to a new campus credential system. They would have to find a solution and implement it over the holiday break between

semesters. "We really didn't have the option to delay. We did some very quick but thorough research and tried to make the best decision we could."

After researching solutions, Nelson chose Blackboard Transact, opting for a hosted solution with an elegant interface and flexible options. Several factors drove his decision: "The overall cost for using the software was a big deal for us. The implementation services and support were equally important. We did our research and talked to other schools. Everyone was very complimentary about Blackboard. Their technical support is available at all hours of the day."

Nelson acknowledges that "implementation was a bit of a breakneck pace," but notes that "Blackboard's entire team took care of us extremely well and really took the heat off of us. If we could have done something differently, we'd have called Blackboard a few years ago."





**“Across the board, everyone has had a really positive experience, from our accounting office to IT, to our students and outside vendors, even our campus bookstore. It’s been a great partnership with Blackboard.”**

**Kris Nelson**  
Vice President of  
Operations & Athletics

## Flexible Open Architecture Helps Avoid Extra Capital Outlay

One decision point for University of Mobile was the flexibility to reuse existing hardware. Because of its open design principles, Blackboard Transact is able to partner with many hardware providers.

“We had made a pretty large capital investment in registers and card readers for both dining services and building access control,” said Nelson. “We didn’t want to have to turn around and reinvest in new hardware. Blackboard Transact was able to reuse our existing hardware.”

## Hosted Software Frees Staff to Focus on Other Priorities

“Ultimately, the hosted model was a big decision driver. Although we do have on-campus IT services, being a small, private institution, we don’t have a large IT staff,” Nelson said. He explained that a hosted model freed his team to focus on operational priorities and removed the hardware burden from the IT team.

“Having everything [software, hardware, and support personnel] hosted off site means there are no servers to come in and reboot in the middle of the night. All we have to provide here is internet connectivity. A hosted solution has worked out great for our campus.”

“One of the big benefits of it being hosted is we can pull reports from anywhere. We’re not locked into having to be on campus. We can log in and look at a card. If a student changes a meal plan, we can make that change and transaction anywhere.”

## Reports Enable Better Forecasting

With the previous system, the university had difficulty forecasting for food and stock because they were unsure how much was really sold.

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One of the many advantages of a hosted system is the ability to pull real-time transaction reports and share them easily. Now, forecasting is more precise because the team can study real transactions and hard numbers.

## Continual Innovation for a Unified Credential Future-Proofs the Student Experience

### Accomplishments

- › Higher revenue from food services
- › Improved student experience with their campus cards
- › IT and Operations teams save time to focus on other priorities
- › Hosted solution removes burden from the university for servers and support personnel

Blackboard Transact continually innovates features and services and leans heavily on their long experience in the international standard for Near Field Communication (NFC), contactless, and mobile arenas, and a broad partnership ecosystem. These capabilities help future-proof the university's campus credential technology strategy and enable the institution to keep up with the expectations of tech-savvy students.

“Blackboard helps us keep up with the Millennial generation—our customers. In this generation, they're early adopters of new technology. So we've got to evolve our technology in a very strategic, wise fashion—not just roll out without a strategy. Blackboard is forward thinking.”

Boosting the student experience was the overarching goal in switching to Blackboard Transact, and according to Nelson, the new system made an immediate impact. “Our goal was that the students not even know that we changed companies, but all of their hurdles, issues, frustrations, and glitches would just go away. The feedback we've gotten from students is that it's a much better experience.”

He continued, “Students are not wondering ‘is my card going to work today? Am I going to be able to eat lunch?’ Last semester, my office was overrun with students having issues. This semester, a lot of my time has been freed up. When students are not in our office, we know things are going well.”