With Mason Mobile ID, George Mason University Upgrades Security and the Campus Experience

Named one of Money magazine's Best Colleges in America 2023, Fairfax-based Geoge Mason University (Mason) is the largest public research university in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Its 10,000 faculty and staff provide classes and support services across three regional campuses, an international branch campus in Songdo, South Korea, and five instructional sites. With more than 40,000 students hailing from all 50 states and 130 countries and a six-year graduation rate that is well above the national average, Mason continues a rapid upward enrollment trajectory that saw headcount and credit hours increase by nearly 2 percent in Spring 2022 and Fall 2023 applications rise by 11 percent.

In addition to a heavy emphasis on diversity – U.S. News and World Report named it the state's best public university for diversity and innovation – Mason is a leader in technology and research with 40 percent of its students majoring in STEM fields. It is also the youngest nationally ranked R1 research university, a top 10 public university for cybersecurity programs, and a top 20 public university for five different engineering and education online programs.

CHALLENGE

Mason's rapid growth requires it to embrace system-wide innovation, particularly when it comes to providing a safe, secure university environment for students, faculty and staff. Providing an exceptional experience had to balance with the need to maintain public access to appropriate services, as well as the convenience of contactless entry and the ability to act quickly when credentials were lost, stolen or the user's status with the university changed.

"We have a very open campus. Most of our doors are unlocked from 7 AM until 11 PM and we have a public library, so we need to make sure access control isn't in the way. On the other side, we need to make sure that if something does happen, we can react quickly to unfolding scenarios," said Daniel W. Anthes, Director of Technology Services, George Mason University. "The goal is to make it safe, easy, and seamless for people to navigate their way around campus."

HID

Mason had already implemented a card-based access control solution featuring HID® Seos credentialling technology, HID OMNIKEY® chips, HID Asure ID card printing software, HID FARGO® printers, and HID Signo™ card readers. Photo identification cards were encoded with appropriate credentials allowing the holder to gain access to everything from parking to residence and dining halls to facilities and services, including data centers, libraries, and shops by simply tapping or swiping.

"Eventually, we reached the point that the switch to mobile credentialling was a straightforward next phase. This would make it easier for staff and students to get where they needed to be without having to fumble with a set of keys," said Anthes.

SOLUTION

Mason again turned to HID and Atrium, deploying the HID Mobile Access® solution with Seos as the underlying credential technology. Atrium provisions and manages the lifecycle of the HID Mobile Access credentials. HID Mobile Access lets any compatible mobile device – smartphones, tablets, or wearables – be used as a credential to securely access doors, gates, networks and more. It significantly increases convenience and boosts operational efficiency without compromising security.

Because Mason had Signo readers already in place, deployment of HID Mobile Access required just a simple upgrade. Importantly, while mobile access eliminates the need for physical access cards, the highly versatile Signo readers support the widest range of credential technologies via native Bluetooth, Near Field Communication (NFC) and Apple Wallet – meaning those who choose to can continue using their physical ID cards until they are ready to transition to mobile access.

"Once you get them using the technology, at that point the realization hits that this phone access is awesome. Or you can use your Apple watch and never even pull your phone from your pocket. The seamlessness of the mobile credential and how quickly they can get where they need to be with their phone or wearable is cool to see in action," said Anthes.

RESULT

In addition to access to approximately 7,000 doors across its campus locations, Mason's more than 50,000 students, faculty and staff can now leverage mobile credentials at any campus cash register, printer, copy machine and retail and recreational facility. Mobile access will increase the convenience factor exponentially for students, for example enabling express check-in for residence halls at the start 2024-25 school year which will let students bypass queues that in the past were hundreds deep and go straight to their dorm rooms.

Mason Mobile ID has also driven a significant drop in the issuance of temporary and replacement cards, saving both the university and students time, money, and frustration. Students can also easily switch credentials to a new wearable or mobile device, eliminating the need to have this done in-person – a significant convenience when Apple released its iPhone 15 shortly after Mason transitioned to mobile access.

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HID

"We are only two months in, so there are a lot of benefits we have yet to see with Mason Mobile ID, but I'm excited about what we've already started noticing in terms of students engaging faster with their peers and community. The police department also absolutely loves the wearables from a public safety standpoint, because they can get through the doors a whole lot faster than they could with the traditional cards or when they had to fumble with keys," said Anthes.

Going forward, Mason is exploring expanding mobile access to shuttle buses, which would also allow them to track utilization data, and for more special events access.

"New technology like mobile access is how Mason improves operations, so if there is an opportunity, I'm certainly going to push to have HID involved. There are a lot of things you have to navigate when considering credentials. Fortunately, the HID and Atrium Campus partnership offers the complete solution, bundled together and working seamlessly in the way I expected," said Anthes.