Members of the Public Safety department at the Univ. of Detroit Mercy, Detroit, MI, keep a watchful eye on various parts of the campuses with digital monitors that provide high-quality images.

University Secures Better Access Control

A flexible system allows campuses to expand security as budgets permit.

Most college administrators would agree that access control is a key element in making campus life as secure as possible. The Univ. of Detroit Mercy, Detroit, MI, is no exception. In 1990 the Univ. of Detroit merged with Mercy College to form UDM. Currently UDM has 300 full-time faculty members, a student population of about 5,600, and three urban campuses.

As with many institutions, security was added in layers as the university grew. Access control began in 1997 at the McNichols campus. Initially, external doors of the five residence halls were secured. Then another system was added for all of the labs in the engineering building. A third system followed to control the individual design studios and the exterior doors of the Loranger Architecture Building.

While most students commute, about 800 live in the dorms, and cards permit 24-hour access. Access control is also provided at two turnstile-type pedestrian gates on the east side of the campus to accommodate the fraternity houses. The turnstiles allow students living in the frat houses 24-hour campus access with their cards.

Security and convenience

A Pinnacle access-control system from Sielox, Runnemede, NJ, monitors entrance to and exit from campus buildings with a time stamp. As part of the system, students are issued a dual-proximity quad card. In addition to access, it also serves as a university ID, library card, and dining-services card. Enterprise-capable software provides total control of the entire access-control network, along with the ability to upgrade or reconfigure controllers, readers, and other hardware and proximity cards using agile methodology for software development.

A key reason that UDM officials selected the Pinnacle system is Sielox's firm policy of offering backward-compatible technology, in effect supporting its legacy products. The company allows its customers to update systems as new technology is introduced and tested. Access control can move forward while maintaining the value of the previous investment.

Designed for flexibility, power, and ease of use at multiple access points, the system also has a lock-down feature that locks doors or blocks

An employee demonstrates how new cards provide access control. The cards also serve as student IDs, eliminating the need for a separate card.

selected readers. Similarly, individual doors can be unlocked through activation of a hardwired input.

Before the Pinnacle upgrade, students had to carry separate cards: student ID and a proximity card for access control. Now one card performs both functions. The university's Public Safety department controls and monitors the system. Some branches of the university manage their own cards with a partitioned database as individual entities with guidance from Public Safety, allowing control and management under one campus database.

Going digital

The university's camera system was improved and renovated in phases from the fall of 2007 through the summer of 2008. Begun as an antiquated analog system, the system is now completely IP based and compatible with the building-alarm and access-control systems. During the upgrade, the College of Health Professions building and the College of Business received access control. Workstations were added to the architectural, engineering, residence, and public-safety buildings at the McNichols campus as well as the Public Safety venue at the remote Corktown campus.

Today 11 buildings and two gates have access control and are linked through the campus network. A twelfth building will soon be added. In the next 5 to 10 years, all 21 buildings on the McNichols campus will have access-control capabilities.

Currently, public-safety staff members have campus access everywhere 24/7. Faculty also has access to all areas. Individual departments or colleges manage access control for their own buildings. Residence halls are managed by the individual administration. All students have access to common buildings, but the Public Safety department establishes general parameters on all exterior doors for open, closed, or locked settings.

Public Safety and UDM administrators had a clear understanding of how they wanted access control to function: Start with the dorm area, then expand to individual colleges. All access control eventually will be linked, controlled by individual entities, but managed in oversight by Public Safety.

As UDM grows, additional layers of security will be added. Access control is working at UDM, keeping students, faculty, and staff safe in a big-city downtown environment. cbp