

Case Study

Grambling State University

A Louisiana-based University sets a nationwide example by pro-actively addressing campus safety with state-of-the-art technology.



Founded in 1901 by local African-American farmers, Grambling State University (GSU) is located in the heart of Lincoln Parish, in northern Louisiana. With a selection of over 800 courses and 68 degree programs, this historical black university boasts an enrollment of 5200 students and 250 faculty members each year. On a daily basis, students, teachers, guests and an array of other staff members roam the beautiful 375-acre campus grounds and numerous buildings.

The business challenge

With five colleges, 19 residence halls, a dining hall, library, intramural center, bookstore, and health center spread throughout GSU, constant video surveillance of all buildings is necessary to ensure student and faculty safety. Although GSU security staff did employ a technologically advanced security system, they were soon faced with its limitations. This small scale IP-based system restricted GSU to incremental implementations of 60 cameras each, without campus-wide unified monitoring capabilities. Thus, even though the functionalities of the system gave GSU a glimpse of what the latest technology could offer them, they soon realized that a more robust enterprise solution would better encompass their needs.

Similarly, getting an eye opener to the technology that was available, GSU also wanted to have the ability to eventually integrate other network-based security functionalities such as IP access control into their IP video surveillance system. Currently, the manual card system that they have in place is very impractical since it forces security personnel to physically retrieve information directly from the reader. Thus, in order to know who has actually accessed a room, they must take the time to leave the work station, pull data from the reader in question, filter through the data collected and then compare it to the video surveillance footage. Knowing full well that their current surveillance solution was already not capable of meeting the extent of their needs, GSU reserved doubts that a successful integration would be possible when they would be ready for IP access control in the future.

It was at this point, that GSU consulted Mr. Jim Walker of Camera Watch in Jackson, Mississippi, for the possibility to fulfill their greatest security aspirations: an integrated campus-wide security system deployed on a much wider scale.

University security needs

Today, it is evident that campus violence is becoming much more prevalent in the media, and thus in the minds of students and their

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parents when ultimately selecting a college. This mind share is creating a significant precedence on universities since faculty and new freshmen are demanding more from a security stand point.

Mr. Winfred R. Jones stands amongst the servers from which video data is retrieved in case of security breach.

As Associate Vice President of Information Technology at GSU, Mr. Winfred R. Jones is responsible for all areas of information technology including networking, telecommunication, IT and much more. His role and responsibilities made him the leader in charge of selecting the new system. With a mission and goals in place for his team, Mr. Jones knew exactly what he was looking for: “We wanted a system which would allow us to take advantage of the latest technology and which could also provide us with a universal solution across the entire university.”

Mr. Jones was fully aware that with the implementation of a campus-wide security system meant storage, network capacity and anywhere-anytime access to any building on campus, without limitations. Additionally, having the ability to eventually integrate the system with a network-based access control solution reassured Mr. Jones that his video surveillance investment would offer long-term flexibility and would not become obsolete as the university’s future security needs expanded beyond video surveillance. This was an argument he could very well bring to the university executive board.

As soon as he heard about Genetec’s advanced IP security surveillance solution, Omnicast, his excitement rose, as he knew this system was the perfect fit to meet all of his pre-determined security objectives.

The perfect solution

The new residence halls have been equipped with over 40 cameras each for increased student safety.

Not only was the system itself on target with all of their needs, the timing couldn’t have been better. “Right when we decided to deploy [Omnicast], we were in the process of building 1200 beds for the university residential living space and there was a need to place cameras inside the residence house,” stated Mr. Jones. Initially, the installation started in the new residence halls which received approximately 40 cameras each, and it spread throughout the property to other facilities on campus such as receiving docks and the information center, where all student records are kept. Today, GSU has over 260 cameras functioning on the system which are positioned throughout the entire campus, a striking increase from the original 60 that they were limited to with their older system. In addition, GSU kept campus growth in mind, as they put in place expansion plans to increase current installation to over 500 cameras.

It is the university’s security administrator and system’s administrator that monitor the property with Omnicast on a daily basis. Although there has been a learning curve to use the new software application, everyday both security members find new features which re-affirm that GSU has made the right choice. One of their favorite applications of the Omnicast system is the web client which allows unrestricted remote access to live or stored video recordings right from an authorized client’s desktop. Similarly, they have fully taken advantage of Omnicast’s archiver. With the storage of three archive servers in place, security personnel are constantly reviewing archived video to identify culprits or security breaches.

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Additionally, since Mr. Jones and his team were convinced that Genetec’s Omnicast was the perfect campus-wide solution, it came as no surprise that they were just as contented to hear about Genetec’s enterprise-class IP access control solution, Synergis. Right from the beginning, Synergis was designed to seamlessly integrate with Omnicast. Therefore, in the future, the GSU team would be able to take advantage of all the benefits that a single unified security interface would propose, such as improved operational efficiency and facilitating day-to-day decision making.

With the implementation described as “excellent” and with all the added benefits that Genetec’s highly scalable and integrated solution provides, Mr. Jones is confident in the choice that was made for GSU. “The system is growing on us each day. The more and more we use it, the more we are finding features that we really like. [Omnicast] has so many advantages that we are only beginning to scratch the surface,” asserts Mr. Jones.





The benefits

At Woodson Hall, one of GSU's many campus buildings, students meet and roam safely around university grounds.

Today, many different users situated throughout the campus take advantage of Omnicast's benefits on a daily basis. Besides GSU's security personnel, the residence management company has also been given access to the archive video recordings in case they need to conduct their own verification or investigations within the dormitories. Eventually, Mr. Jones is planning on giving the University Police the same capabilities as the residence management company. In the mean time, he states that they "have had several incidences on campus, and have been able to be a resource to the University Police in providing them with critical information from the system."

Already, Omnicast has helped the security staff catch students breaking into other students' rooms, find offenders who have set fires on school property, and identify culprits who try to break into vending machines or pull fire alarms in buildings under false pretenses. Thus, not only has the system increased the efficiency of decision making at the GSU, but it has also contributed to the prevention of security breaches as well as increased the level of crucial evidence used in investigations.

Although currently, the system's main purpose is for video surveillance only, Mr. Jones has serious intentions of eventually incorporating Genetec's advanced IP access control solution, Synergis. The true benefit of integrating the two systems lies in the fact that operators can receive consolidated data from a single unified security interface. "Not only would we be able to see the person enter the room through Omnicast, we would also be able to access the room and cardholder credentials with Synergis in real time," added Mr. Jones. Although the university board still needs to make the final decision on this additional investment, Mr. Jones and his team are hoping to have Synergis up and running within the near future.

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Overall, Mr. Jones is convinced that the decision that he has made in choosing Genetec's Omnicast was the correct one: "I see [Genetec] as becoming the next imminent solution on university campuses." All users at GSU find the system to be reliable, effective in emergency response time, efficient when accessing real-time data and enjoy all the benefits of pulling up information from many access points on demand. In addition, being able to offer their students a safe learning environment is an advantage they can now leverage when recruiting qualified staff and prospective freshmen. This fact alone is enough to justify the investments GSU has made, since not only has the solution provided superior protection for its property and resources, but most importantly it has ensured the safety of its most significant assets, their students and staff members.

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