

Case in Point

Mississippi State Goes Wireless

Reader Locks are among Security Features of New Residence Hall

Students lucky enough to live in the new 400-bed Ruby Hall on Mississippi State University's (MSU) 4,200 acre campus in Starkville, enjoy the some of the finest residential housing available at any college in the United States. The residence hall was completed in 2005 and features large, fully furnished single or double rooms with conveniences including private bathrooms, wireless Internet coverage, Ethernet access, individual room temperature control, free super basic cable television, refrigerators and microwave ovens.

In addition to the comfort features, university administrators determined that student safety is also a very important feature. To achieve their goal of keeping their students safe, Wireless Integrated Locks from Ingersoll Rand Security Technologies were installed on all 223 interior doors leading into students rooms.

Ruby Hall is a three-story, 160,000 square foot building and is the first residence hall to be built on campus in 36 years. MSU has 13 existing residence halls that house approximately 3,500 students on campus; three other halls are currently under construction.

Students needed change, said Ann Bailey, Ph.D., director of housing and residence life. In particular, they wanted more space, privacy and convenience. Constructing new facilities is more cost-effective than trying to reconfigure and upgrade existing spaces.

University administrators used the construction project as an opportunity to upgrade security measures in the residences. In terms of existing measures, the campus is served by a large university police force whose officers undergo the same rigorous training as municipal officers, in addition to learning how to apply their training to a university environment.

MSU's Police Department is a 24/7 operation with three campus substations. Officers are authorized to carry firearms, enforce laws and make arrests on university property and adjacent roadways. The department works closely with local law enforcement, as well as MSU's dean of students and the housing department, to enforce the student code of conduct and ensure the safety of the university community and surrounding area.

In addition to protection provided by the campus police force, all residence halls have fire extinguishers and a fire security system, controlled card reader access at the buildings entrances and digital surveillance systems at all perimeter doors and common areas. However, the older residences still use standard lock-and-key access for interior doors.

To increase security, housing staff does not carry master keys to the student rooms. Instead, electronic

key cabinets control access to the master keys. Through card reader access control, housing officials are able to control who has access to the master keys as well as record time and date of their use. Surveillance cameras monitor the cabinets.

Our housing department wanted to get out of the business of reissuing keys, says Richard Tollison, MSU's manager of data services. If you give out a master key to a building and that key is lost, you have to re-key everything.

After finding it would be too expensive to wire every door for card reader access, Tollison contacted Ingersoll Rand Security Technologies at the recommendation of Jerry Acy of Software Data Systems in Jackson, MS. Acy had developed the school's card access system to include POS, vending and copy machines. Because Wireless door locks do not need to be hardwired, the cost is considerably less than a standard card access reader, and installation is much faster—about 60 to 90 minutes per door compared to one or two days for a wired system.

Wireless locks work by communicating via radio frequency with a panel interface module, which is hardwired to the university's PC network. Powered by eight AA batteries, the locks continue to operate in a disaster because their cache memory can store IDs for seven days. The system is online and works in real time, making it easier to retrieve data.

If we get a call from campus police asking us if we can give them information on who went into a certain door in a dormitory, we have that at our fingertips, Tollison said. It's not a matter of having to go to that door and download some transactions from a standalone reader.

Each of these transactions comes back to a central system.

Students use their university ID card, programmed by Software Data Systems, for access. The fact that the Wireless system could be customized to integrate with the existing system is a huge advantage, added Tollison. MSU is now planning to use Wireless locks in the three new residence halls currently under construction.



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