

# Connecting and Keeping Students Safe on a Contactless Campus

OneCard by TouchNet allows the University of Alberta to provide student ID functionality for online students, facility access remotely and safe dining experiences

**W**hen COVID-19 hit, the province of Alberta in Canada released public health orders that forced University of Alberta leaders to move most of their fall courses online to ensure students and staff remained safe. The university limits on-campus learning to courses that require in-person instruction, such as fine arts, dentistry, and physical therapy.

“Our initial question was, ‘How do we make our students feel part of the university community when they may never even set foot on campus?’” says Jennifer McNeill, who manages the system’s use of TouchNet OneCard, a mobile-based technology that combines student ID functionality, electronic payment processing, and access control.

The university quickly added the OneCard app so students could have virtual student ID credentials. “We would not have been able to develop something like that ourselves within a short period of time,” says McNeill. “But TouchNet has their own mobile app that we could brand to help our students who are studying remotely identify with the campus, get access to student discounts, and prove their identification when they’re writing exams.”

## Providing facility access remotely

Even though a majority of courses are online, students, staff, and researchers still need access to campus buildings that remain locked due to inactivity. Through OneCard, the university was able to quickly produce credentials which helped control and change access to campus buildings, even from a remote location.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

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“We weren’t taking photos in our office so we needed to ensure that we had a system where we could securely receive our visitors’ photos,” says McNeill. “ID verification allows us to confirm online that visitors are who they say they are.”

## Minimizing food waste and reducing interaction

OneCard provides hourly and daily reports of students who make plans to eat at particular dining halls so staff can prepare enough food without being wasteful. Staff also use this data to limit how many students can enter certain facilities to comply with safety and social distancing standards.

“Students can buy meal plans on our website, and they’re immediately added to their card,” says McNeill. “It’s very convenient and reduces that in-person interaction with cashiers. It’s just tap and enter.”

## Making informed decisions

While currently used in response to COVID, the data that OneCard receives and generates could be later utilized to increase student retention and success. “We are receiving a ton of information from OneCard,” says McNeill. “It would be a tremendous value if we could later process and see how we can use this data to improve the student experience and institutional success overall.”