

## A Virginia campus outsources its card program, saving both time and money in the process

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Do you want a card program, but the money just isn't there? That was the dilemma facing Sweet Briar College, a 600-student, all women's institution in central Virginia.

"The college had studied installing a card system several years ago, but purchasing and maintaining our own system was cost prohibitive," said Paul Davies, Sweet Briar's vice president of finance and administration.

So instead, Sweet Briar turned to a company that promised to run the whole card program. That company was CardSmith, of Basking Ridge, NJ, that was founded by two campus card veterans, just more than one year ago. And Mr. Davies has only been with Sweet Briar since last July, coming from Duke University, which has one of the most mature campus card programs in the country.

Mr. Davies, a CPA, came to Sweet Briar last year after a 17-year career at Duke University. For the last five years at Duke, he was a part of the college's auxiliary services department, the area responsible for the campus card program. Mr. Davies worked with Joe Pietrantonio a man widely considered as one of the pioneers of campus card systems.

"Coming from Duke, I knew the power of the card system," he said. "When I arrived at Sweet Briar I knew the impact a card system would have."

The college had a simple ID card with a barcode used for checking out books. As he started investigating what was available, one of his staff returned from a meeting with information about a new company called CardSmith.

"It was at that time that I learned Brian Farley was involved," he added. "I had known Brian for many years through my association with NACAS South and Brian was with (Student Advantage's) SACash." He also knew two others at the fledgling company—Mr. Pietrantonio, who after leaving Duke had become a senior advisor to CardSmith, and Taran Lent, the company's vice president of product development and one of its co-founders. "I knew what Taran had done at Dartmouth (helping create a campus card program years earlier and then becoming a part of the SACash team)."

CardSmith's other founder and its CEO, Jay Summerall, was also a Student Advantage alumnus. He had helped lead both AT&T and Student Advantage in the campus card arena. When Blackboard purchased the SACash product from Student Advantage two years ago, Mr. Summerall and Mr. Lent left to form CardSmith.

"My decision was easy," said Mr. Davies. "I knew the players and just felt fortunate that I was able to work with them from the beginning."

CardSmith had the capability, he said, "to provide the same card functions that the DukeCard had at a fraction of the price. Schools are looking to provide better services to their students, faculty and staff, and at the same time, reduce IT expenses, and employee issues," he added. "Thus, to me CardSmith is a no-brainer. I believe this will be the wave of the future. Why invest in equipment, software and IT support, when you can achieve the same end result at a fraction of the cost?"

CardSmith's Jay Summerall said Sweet Briar "is consistent with our theme of empowering smaller schools that otherwise would not have a card program."

CardSmith provided a turnkey approach for Sweet Briar, said Mr. Davies. In addition, the company provided all the necessary marketing, a help line for users, and technical support for my staff. "They also receive checks on deposit from our customers," he said. "In addition they modified their system to accommodate our dining program."


Part of the "no brainer" for Mr. Davies was that the company's program is scalable


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part of the no-brainer for Mr. Davies was that the company's program is scalable. "It doesn't make any difference if you have 600 or 10,000 students; as schools continue to cut costs, I believe you will see more middle and even large schools move in this direction. Again, why would you want to invest in hardware, software, multiple IT employees, and employee issues when you can contract out this service?"

The college's magnetic stripe card (it still includes, for the time being anyway, a barcode for library usage) is currently used in the college's two dining facilities, in the laundry, and for debit transactions. He hopes to have vending capabilities added by this fall. He is also looking at limited building access, such as the gym, in the next year, as well as wireless capabilities using a handheld scanner to read student cards.

"Our students will drive this program," he said. "They've already asked if we can expand the use of the card. As Sweet Briar grows, CardSmith will grow with the college. If I worked at a school with 10,000 kids I wouldn't hesitate to do the same thing."

One of the extraordinary aspects of the Sweet Briar Card project was the compressed timeframe in which it was deployed. From inception to the card's first use by a student took less than two months, according to Mr. Davies.

"To be quite honest, my staff was not too thrilled when I told them (last fall) we were going to implement the card by the start of the spring semester," he said. "We actually got the card up and running in less than 60 days when you consider the Christmas break. I was fortunate in the fact that I knew what I was looking for in a card system from my five years in Auxiliary Services (at Duke). But once my staff knew I was serious, they all jumped in to see that we had a successful launch."

Two-hour conference calls were held weekly with CardSmith. The company "would ask us questions, work with their team, come back with more questions until we were all satisfied," explained Mr. Davies. "What my staff appreciated was that CardSmith was thorough and did all the leg work for us. We only had to provide overall guidance and answer questions."

He said the college's laundry provider, Caldwell and Gregory, "worked with us as we upgraded from a coin only to coin and card system. Taran also did a great job training our cashiers and staff. By the time he left, our staff had made Taran an honoree employee at Sweet Briar."

Sweet Briar did opt to produce its own cards, at "about a buck a card" using the IDMS card production system from Vision Database Systems and an Olympus digital camera. The reader is by ExaDigm, which has wireless capability, said Mr. Davies. When the card program was ready for prime time, "we recarded everybody, the 600 students, and 70 faculty and 280 staff members."

The card can be used just like a debit card. "You can use a credit card to put money on the card. The debit portion can be loaded via the web or by check or, if a Sweet Briar employee, by payroll deduction."

All stores on campus take the card—the café, the Bistro (a mini-pub), library, laundry. "We wanted an efficient system to grow into," he added. "Overall we have been very pleased with our card system."

He knows that Sweet Briar will never come close to handling the more than 300,000 daily transactions (financial and access) that a college like Duke processes. "However," he said, "our students, faculty and staff enjoy the same services that were provided at Duke. The only difference is that I don't have to pay for a staff to work 24 hours a day, seven days a week and I don't worry about hardware and software failures or employee issues."

Mr. Davies concludes, "the service has been great from CardSmith, so from my perspective I haven't lost anything moving from the DukeCard to the Sweet Briar Card."