Case Study

genea +

MERCER UNIVERSITY

A Seamless Solution for Centralized Campus Security

About Mercer University

Mercer University is a beautiful, multi-location university operating across four major campuses throughout Georgia. Offering more than 165 academic and professional programs in fields such as medicine, nursing, business, engineering, and the liberal arts, Mercer relies on modern campus infrastructure and trusted technology to support safe, seamless operations for students, faculty, and staff.

The Challenges

Mercer University relied on a 30-year-old on-premise TSE Door Access system across 15 campus locations and 4,000 doors statewide.

When Illumia announced it was evolving away from the software, the university faced a need to migrate to a modern platform--without blowing the budget in a single fiscal year; without trashing existing hardware investments; and without disrupting a campus that operates 365 days a year.

The sheer scale--154 buildings on the Macon campus alone, plus medical schools, clinics, and regional centers across Georgia--made a rip-and-replace approach a non-starter.

Genea's Solution

- Genea cloud-native access control platform deployed across 15 campus locations and approximately 4,000 doors statewide, replacing the existing on-premise Illumia system.
- Mercury board integration with existing Allegion and HID hardware, allowing legacy readers and wireless locks to carry forward into the new platform without replacement.
- Clean-data migration approach that allowed the Mercer team to audit every building and access plan rather than bulk-importing 30 years of legacy data, ensuring accurate configurations from launch.
- Phased three-fiscal-year rollout jointly scoped by Genea, Illumia, and Mercer's internal team, targeting full migration by end of summer with sub-two-minute per-door downtime.

The Benefits

- Virtually zero disruption
- Phased implementation that preserved budget without sacrificing speed
- Preserved existing hardware, avoiding a full hardware rip-and-replace across 15 campuses
- Response time reduced with Genea Emergency Plans functionality

THE BEFORE

Mercer University is not a single building with a single set of keys. It is a living, breathing institution spread across 15 campus locations throughout the state of Georgia, a sprawling network of medical schools, clinics, engineering centers, and regional academic facilities that collectively never close. With 154 buildings in Macon alone and roughly 4,000 doors to manage statewide, keeping students and staff safe and spaces secure is not a background task. It is, in every practical sense, an operational imperative that runs 364 days a year, around the clock, without pause.

For more than three decades, Mercer relied on a trusted access control system to carry that responsibility. Since 1993, the university's infrastructure had been built on Illumia's (formerly Transact + CBORD) TSE Door Access system, an on-premise platform, that became deeply embedded in the security strategy of the campus and supported years of growth and expansion.

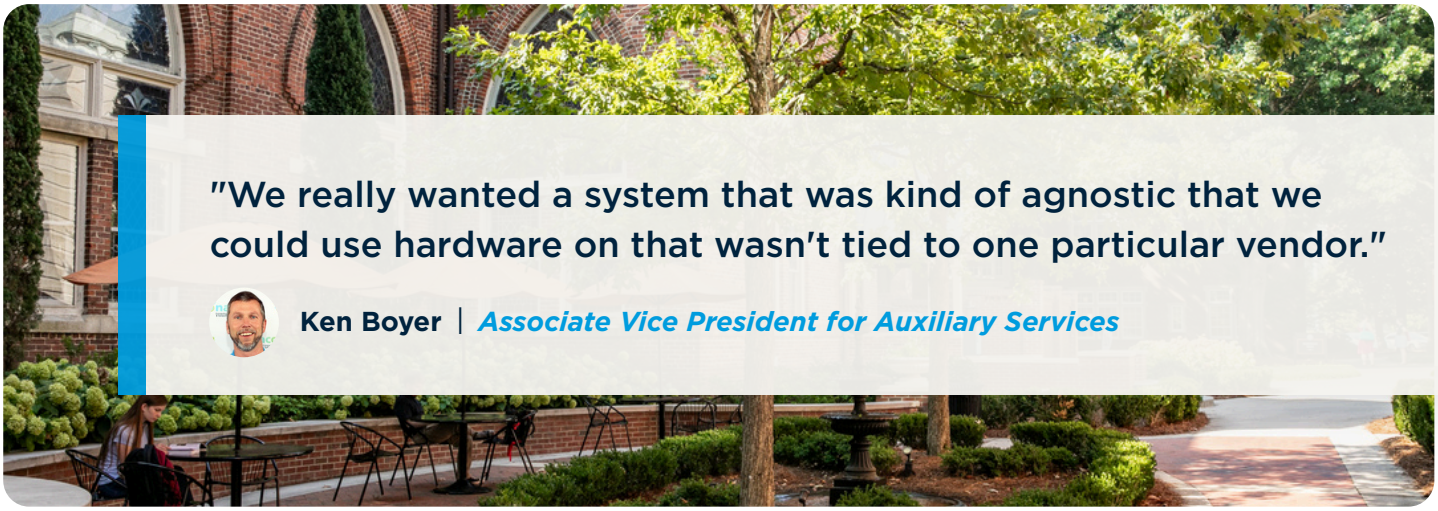
Over time, however, as the university continued to evolve, so did its operational needs. Hardware was aging, support requirements were becoming more complex, and decades of system customization had created layers of processes that were increasingly difficult to manage at scale.

At the same time, Illumia began evolving its own platform strategy, prompting Mercer to take a broader look at how its security infrastructure could continue to support the institution long into the future. For Ken Boyer, Associate Vice President for Auxiliary Services, the moment represented both a challenge and an opportunity. He was responsible for guiding an institution that operates every single day of the year, including active medical research facilities and clinics that cannot simply go offline for a weekend upgrade, through a transition that would position the university for its next phase of growth. The pressure was real; the stakes were higher than most people outside Boyer's office would ever fully appreciate.

THE TURNING POINT

Boyer knew almost immediately what he didn't want. He had watched other institutions lock themselves into proprietary systems only to find themselves constrained years later, limited in flexibility, dependent on a single vendor's roadmap, and unable to adapt quickly when operational needs changed. Whatever Mercer chose next, it had to provide long-term flexibility.

"We really wanted a system that was kind of agnostic that we could use hardware on that wasn't tied to one particular vendor," Boyer explained. "And if we went down the path with one vendor and we decided we didn't want to go that way, we wouldn't want to be handcuffed to have to stay with them for a long term."
That philosophy naturally pointed toward the cloud, which, for Boyer, required its own internal reckoning. He describes himself as a self-declared skeptic. On-premise infrastructure had always felt tangible to him, controllable in a way that cloud systems didn't.



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"I was probably the biggest naysayer along the way," he said. "I always wanted stuff to be on prem. I could feel it, touch it, see it. But over the years of having experience pushing other stuff to the cloud, that nervousness went away."

When Mercer began evaluating Genea's cloud-native access control platform, what ultimately stood out was not just the technology; it was the approach to partnership. Genea was actively looking to expand into higher education, and that willingness to collaborate mattered. "They were willing to adapt a product that met our needs," Boyer said. "We were not having to necessarily buy something off the shelf that was already sitting there. They were able to adapt to the needs of
Mercer University."

There was also a practical financial reality to navigate. A 4,000-door migration is not a line item; it is a capital undertaking that can strain budgets and test institutional patience. The ability to structure the transition in phases, spreading costs across multiple fiscal years, gave Boyer's team the breathing room they needed to do the work thoughtfully rather than rushing to meet an arbitrary deadline.

The decision was made. Mercer would move forward with Genea.

THE BUILD

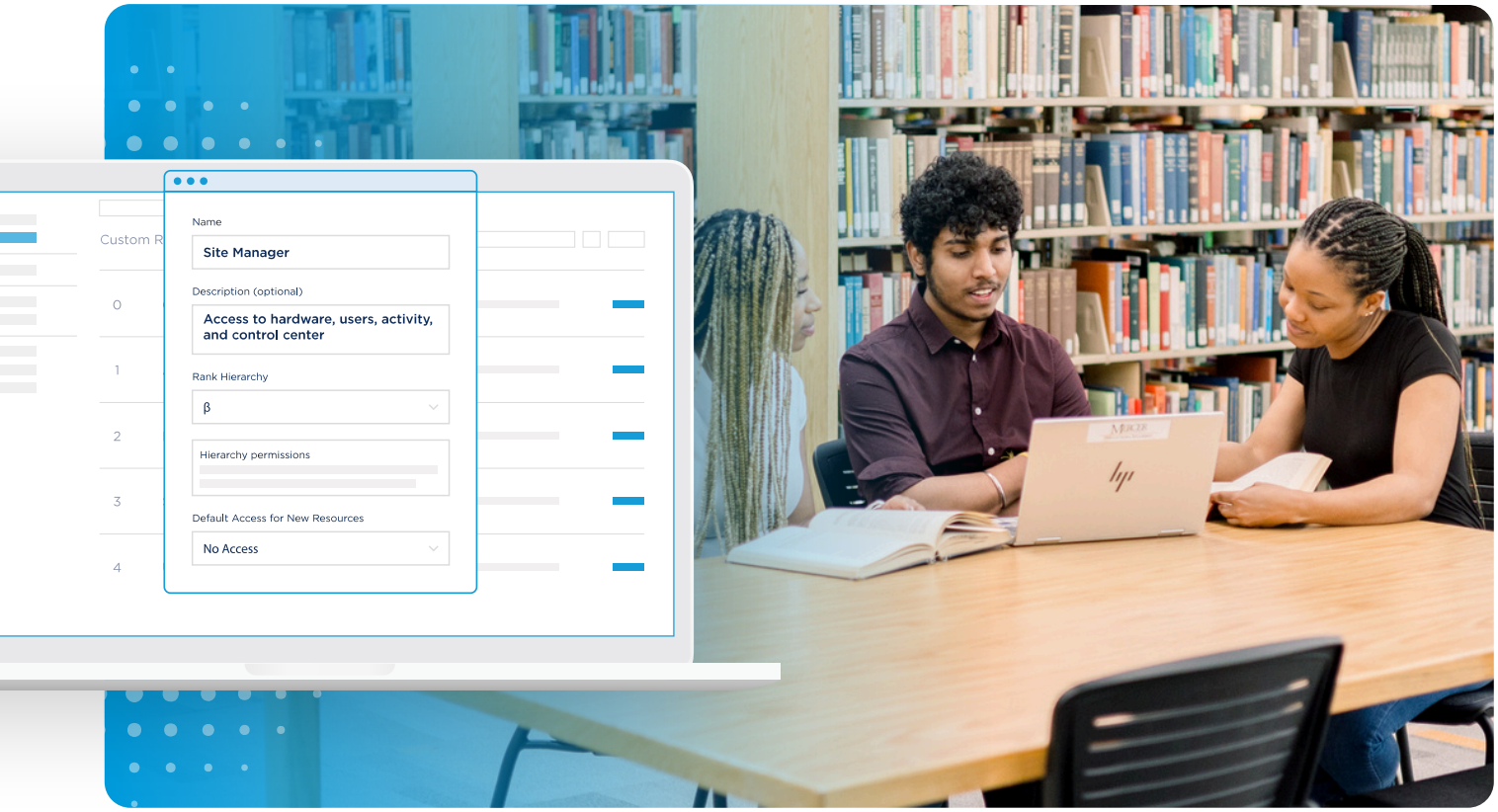
If the migration had a governing philosophy, Boyer articulated it with clarity.

"We wanted to have our new car and have it still smell like a new car," he said. "We didn't want to dump 30 years worth of old knowledge into a system that was brand new because things have changed over 30 years."

Rather than performing a bulk data export from the legacy system, a technically simple but operationally risky approach, Boyer and his team chose to do something far more deliberate. They audited every building and every access plan, one by one, alongside Genea's project team. Only clean, verified, current data entered the new platform. Everything accumulated over three decades that was outdated, redundant, or no longer relevant was left behind.

The phased rollout was designed to preserve what Mercer had already invested in hardware. Existing Allegion wireless locks and HID Mercury boards were retained and integrated into the Genea platform, allowing the university to protect prior investments while modernizing the software foundation that supported daily operations.

This wasn't a rip-and-replace operation. It was a careful, deliberate transition that respected both the institution's financial constraints and its operational realities.



LESSONS LEARNED

There was friction along the way; any migration of this scale across this many locations will surface unexpected issues. What defined the experience for Boyer, however, was how quickly those moments were resolved.

"As soon as we identified the problem, the team was quick and had a resolution to it within 24 to 48 hours and we were up and rolling," he said.

He also credited Genea's leadership directly: "Michael Wong's been tremendous as far as his commitment to making sure the right resources were in place, and he's lived up to everything he said."

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Perhaps the most remarkable measure of the implementation's success came not from a dashboard but from a conversation.

When a campus transition was completed, Boyer received exactly the kind of feedback that most IT and operations leaders can only dream about.

Senior administrators told him they hadn't even known the work had been done.

Per-door conversion downtime held to under two minutes. Entire campus transitions came and went without a single operational ripple.

THE AFTER

With roughly two-thirds of the transition complete at the time Boyer spoke about the project, Mercer is already operating in a different reality than it occupied just a few years ago.

The cloud-native architecture means that software updates no longer require system-wide downtime, a change that matters enormously for an institution running medical research operations through the night. When patches and improvements roll out, they do so seamlessly, without requiring anyone to schedule a maintenance window or hold their breath hoping nothing breaks.

For a university that operates 365 days a year, this is not a convenience; it is a fundamental shift in how the institution functions.

The mobile app has quietly transformed how Boyer's team responds to the moments that matter most. Where managing access once meant connecting through a VPN to an on-premise server, a process that introduced friction and delay at exactly the wrong moments, staff can now act directly from their phones.

"The mobile app that we're able to do things from our phone now is a lot easier than having to get on VPN into a client. It has been tremendous," Boyer said.

That capability was tested in ways no one would have chosen. During a single year, Mercer's campus experienced three separate swatting events, the kind of security incidents where every second of response time carries weight. Having instant, mobile access to door management meant Boyer's team could act immediately.

Looking forward, Mercer is planning to go further. Deeper integrations are already in development, including security camera feeds, building automation systems, and a direct data pipeline from Workday that would eliminate legacy middleware currently in use.

The phased financial structure that made this transition possible spread costs across three fiscal years, easing the budget burden enough that the work could be done with care rather than compromise.

Thirty years after installing a system that served them well for its time, Mercer University is no longer simply maintaining infrastructure; they are building toward a future that can grow with them. And with the flexibility to adapt as technology continues to evolve, they are positioned to make confident decisions about what comes next.

Case Study

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