Genetec™

Texas A&M University

From buses to buildings– unifying campus monitoring

Industry
Higher Education

Location
College Station, Texas, United States

Products
Security Center, Security Center Fleet Monitoring, Omnicast, Synergis, AutoVu, Federation

Partners
Preferred Technologies, Axis Communications, Gillig, ParkMobile, Proterra, T2 Systems

How Texas A&M University unifies onboard recording for buses and its 5,200-acre campus using Genetec Security Center

Texas A&M University opened its doors in 1876 as the first public university in Texas, United States. Today, Texas A&M has become an academic and athletic powerhouse with an annual enrollment of 70,000 students. One-fifth of the student body lives on the College Station main campus, which spans 5,200 acres. Other branch campuses are located in Galveston and Qatar and include the School of Law, Higher Education Center at McAllen, and a few Health Science Center locations.

Building a unified vision for campus monitoring

Providing a view across one of the largest university campuses in the United States requires a comprehensive approach. That's why Texas A&M has been a long-standing Genetec™ customer. Over a decade ago, the university began upgrading video surveillance across the campus to Genetec Security Center. This allowed them to consolidate many disjointed older technologies within one intuitive security solution.

The open-architecture platform also gave them the flexibility to keep growing and expanding operational surveillance across the campus. This eventually led to migrating older access control systems onto Security Center as well. Much of this was spearheaded by Transportation Services and another university department who understood the efficiencies of working from a single unified platform campus-wide.

Today, various teams across Texas A&M manage over 930 cameras and 150 doors using Genetec Security Center. They also have the AutoVu™ automatic license plate recognition system (ALPR) installed on six parking enforcement vehicles to detect scofflaws and wanted vehicles across campus lots.

Expanding visibility onboard university buses

The Transportation Services team wasn't ready to stop there. Working closely with their trusted integrator, Preferred Technologies (Pref-Tech), they had a broader, more progressive vision for unified campus camera management. It started with one big question: 'Can we unify onboard bus cameras within Security Center too?'

According to Doug Williams, Director of Transportation Services at Texas A&M University, "We were initiating bus replacement within our fleet, and at that time, we had about 100 buses with eight cameras per bus on a different camera system. We strongly preferred Genetec Security Center because of how intuitive the solution was for our team. Instead of spending time and money managing two separate monitoring systems, we pursued putting them all on the Genetec platform."

The problems with the old onboard transit solution were far-reaching. In the past, if there was an incident on the bus, the Transportation Services team would have to take the bus off its

route and get it back to the station to connect to WIFI. Then, they would need to find the video in question and offload it to long-term storage. If they needed another angle from that scene, they'd then have to log in to Security Center, or another system entirely, to pull more evidence from other campus cameras.

Maintenance was equally frustrating for the team. "There was nothing to alert technicians of a camera failure. It was only when the team went looking for video they would notice a device was not working properly and video footage was not available," said Doug Harrison, Information Technology Professional II at Texas A&M University.

Bringing it all together with Security Center Fleet Monitoring

Getting the buses outfitted with the Genetec platform was a team effort. Texas A&M worked closely with Pref-Tech and Genetec as well as two major bus suppliers, Gillig and Proterra, to install Security Center Fleet Monitoring on over 35 new buses. Today, with Security Center onboard the buses, the Transportation Services team is working faster and more efficiently than ever before.

"We have one unified camera system now. Our transit operators can remotely retrieve video onboard any bus and access other fixed cameras throughout the campus all using the Security Center platform. We no longer have to worry about bringing the bus back to the station for WIFI. We can easily access our onboard cameras in real-time using cellular connectivity," explained Dell Hamilton, Manager of Transportation Services at Texas A&M University.

Each bus today has five cameras instead of the original eight. That's because the Transportation Services team chose Axis Communications 360-degree cameras, which offer more expansive video coverage. Instead of two cameras in the middle and at the front of each bus, they only needed one. An additional two cameras view the outside of each bus and another one faces the roadway.

"Upgrading to Security Center Fleet Monitoring has been a smooth transition. Our Transportation Services team was already using the Genetec platform to access specific campus cameras near university roadways, entrances, and gated areas. Since they are familiar with the platform, there was no training needed. Now, they have a very standardized experience, meaning they do not need to remember multiple logins and passwords or wonder which system has which cameras—they are all in one," said Williams.

Since over 10 Transportation Services technicians are Genetec-certified users, the team handled a lot of the setup and configuration themselves. And because the system is so intuitive, they are managing all maintenance in-house too.

"With Genetec Security Center onboard our buses, we know exactly when a camera is no longer working. The platform immediately alerts us when something is wrong with a camera or input signal. We are able to respond quickly and get issues fixed much faster. This means we can ensure our cameras are up and running and we get more reliable campus surveillance," explained Harrison.

If the team does need extra assistance, support from Pref-Tech and Genetec is readily available. "Pref-Tech has been an instrumental partner in growing our campus coverage. With the Genetec Advantage Maintenance Agreement, expert advice is never too far away. When we ran into a little trouble during an upgrade, a Genetec support technician quickly helped us get back on track to complete the project. I can not say enough about the efficiency and knowledge of the Pref-Tech and Genetec teams," said Hamilton.

Speeding up incident response and investigations

Unifying systems across campus has boosted collaboration at Texas A&M. Not only can they support local authorities when something happens in the surrounding community, but they are also working more closely with other departments on campus to keep students, staff, and visitors safe.

"We have built a reputation that if something is needed to aid an investigation, we're able to produce an image of the area. For instance, our buses drive by a specific bank location every four or five minutes. When a robbery occurred at that bank, the police quickly reached out to us about video footage. It is situations like this that make our onboard transit solution very powerful. We can gather tremendous amounts of information and when something serious happens, we are likely to have useful evidence," said Williams.

The University Police Department (UPD) has also been taking advantage of the platform, with little training needed. "Security Center is so easy-to-use that our UPD detectives no longer have to call someone on our team for help during investigations. They can work independently and find the video they need when they need it. They use five or six different video systems, but the only one I know they really love is Security Center," continued Williams.

Using the Genetec Federation™ feature, various departments at Texas A&M can share video access with other authorized departments and individuals. During big events, this means the Transportation Services team can access cameras from the Athletics department to assist with parking and traffic operations. The team also frequently sets up temporary mobile cameras to broaden visibility when various athletic and social activities are hosted in more out-of-the-way areas on campus.

"Our mobile camera units have become very useful to expand our coverage across our campus. Whether a football game or social gathering, we can easily set up mobile camera units where we need them and access the video within Security Center via a cellular connection. These units help us monitor our operations and collect valuable information to review later," said Williams.

As Texas A&M keeps expanding initiatives, they make a point to uphold policies that support individual privacy rights. "I sit on the Audiovisual Surveillance Technology (AVST) committee. We are responsible for setting up guidelines for authorized camera locations, who may view them, and reasons cameras may be authorized for use. Security Center provides granular user privileges, access rights, and authorizations. It delivers many built-in tools that support our privacy efforts, allowing us to easily maintain checks and balances on our operations," explained Hamilton.
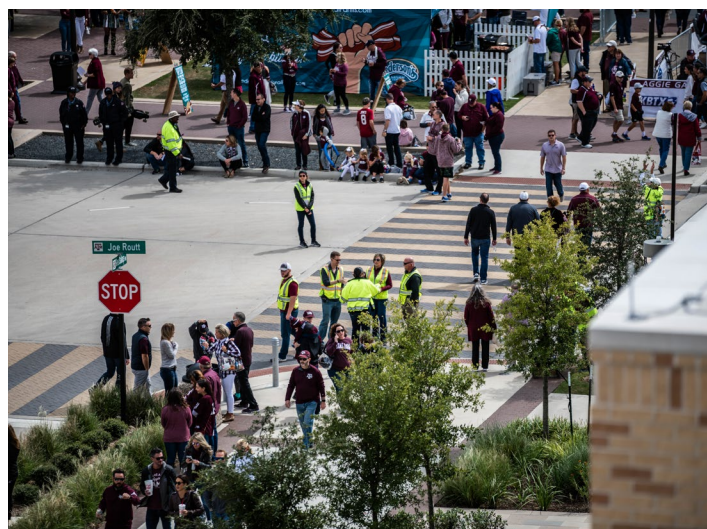
Moving the vision for unification forward

Looking ahead, Texas A&M has big plans to expand its ability to view the business. Much of this is driven by the Transportation Services team's vision for a fully unified camera experience across campus. The team is leading the way towards more centralized infrastructure, unburdening IT from those responsibilities, and supporting other departments in migrating systems onto the Genetec platform.

Alongside this, the Transportation Services team is converting another 30+ buses onto the Security Center Fleet Monitoring solution. They are also moving to a License-Plate-Enabled (LEP) parking enforcement system using their AutoVu ALPR investments. This includes adding another four mobile ALPR enforcement units and integrating the AutoVu solution with existing T2 Systems database management and ParkMobile payment systems.

"Right now, we are striving for even more synergy. We still have siloed systems and departments but we are working toward consolidating all our systems into Genetec Security Center. Security Center gives us one user experience, more streamlined maintenance tasks, and standardization across the campus. The platform is not only easier for our teams to use, but it also requires much less time and budget to keep systems up-to-date and optimized. We are fully confident unification is the best way for us to amplify our ability to monitor our operations across Texas A&M University," concluded Williams.

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UPDATED:05-MAY-21