meraki

Warner Pacific College

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William Kirk, Director of Technology & Information Services, Warner Pacific College

Challenge

Four-year university needed WiFi for classrooms, cafeterias, dorms and student housing

Previous solutions proved unreliable, expensive and difficult to keep functional

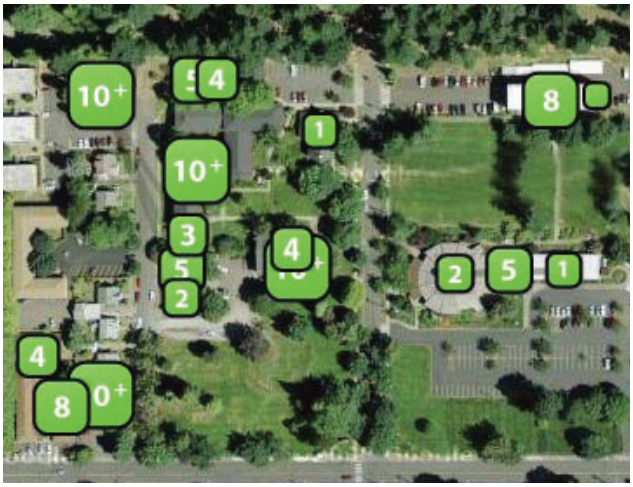
Demand for WiFi was growing, but the IT budget was extremely limited

Results

About 200-250 students use the network daily with more coming on as units are deployed

IT department spends almost no time managing the network

Deployment time is days, not weeks



Warner Pacific College in Portland, Oregon has been named one of America's Best Colleges by U.S. News & World Report. A small Christian liberal arts college, it has only 1,000 students, but a growing reputation. The college consists of one main campus and two satellite campuses, with college-owned student housing scattered in between.

The main campus was wired with a fiber network in the 1990s. As more and more students began bringing laptops to school, the demand for wireless ballooned. William A. Kirk, Director of Technology & Information Services at the college, initially responded by deploying several Linksys access points in common areas around campus.

"The older access points were giving us a lot of issues," Kirk said. "It was a lot of labor just getting them to stay up. And there was a lot of student frustration." Kirk and his IT team redeployed the firmware on all of the Linksys units in an attempt to make them more reliable, but to no avail.

Frustrated, and bound by a limited IT budget, Kirk went looking for a solution he wasn't sure existed. "We had to get as far as we could with the money we had available, and it wasn't going to be very far," he said.

"We looked at Nortel, but it was too expensive and required us having servers. We just weren't interested," he said. "With them it would have cost thousands and thousands of dollars, and it just wasn't an option."

One of Kirk's colleagues found Meraki by searching the Web. "We thought, we'll give it a try," Kirk says. "Worst-case scenario, we haven't lost too much money."

Kirk decided to do a test deployment in a new main campus building that housed the music department's classrooms, as well as a coffee shop and cafeteria. Using Power over Ethernet, he and his IT team deployed several Meraki Indoors in the ceiling. "As soon as we deployed them they came up and worked as advertised. They came up and stayed up. And it didn't take much labor on our parts. That was unique. That's what sold it."

Impressed, Kirk bought several more Meraki Indoors and started deploying them in other spots around campus, including a college-owned housing development. Word spread among the student body, and soon Kirk had students knocking on his office door begging for wireless in the apartments and dorms. When he complied, some of the students took to leaving fresh-baked goodies in his department to thank his team.

Kirk plans to deploy another 20 Merakis around campus, including the gym and in additional classrooms. "We realized that when we put one in a classroom, we've just turned that classroom into a laboratory. The professor can say, 'Everybody go to this site.' We hope it gets use in that way," Kirk said.