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PantherCash now accepted beyond campus

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Starting this semester, several area businesses will now be taking PantherCash as a valid form of payment.

According to Auxiliary Services, PantherCash will now be accepted at CVS near Five Points MARTA station along with five other non-campus restaurants, including Greek Gyros and Pizza, Bell Street Burritos, Ruben's Deli, Ciao Bocca and Papa Johns.

According to James Dutton, president of the Student Government Association, the idea to extend PantherCash beyond the confines of campus to outside businesses came from studying similar programs at the University of Georgia and Georgia Tech.

"They have their own PantherCash idea, and they can use it anywhere in Athens or anywhere in midtown," Dutton said. "You know, they're doing this. Why aren't we doing this?"

According to Dutton, the SGA pushed the idea to Auxiliary Services last summer, who eventually laid the framework for area businesses to adopt the currency.

However, the efforts to expand PantherCash were originally stymied by somewhat high initial investment costs for businesses purchasing the hardware necessary to process PantherCards as well as higher usage fees from the managing company, Blackboard Inc.

Like a debit card, PantherCash uses a student's I.D. card to access stored funds when swiped through a special machine which processes the payment.

As with similar systems for companies like Visa, merchants must pay a transaction fee whenever a student elects to debit their account in this case from their student I.D.s loaded with PantherCash.

Depending on the rate negotiated with Blackboard, businesses pay anywhere from two to six percent, according to the Director of Information Systems and PantherCard Program, Russell Chiles.

However, while only five restaurants currently take PantherCash, both Dutton and Chiles expect more off-campus businesses to come to accept it, although potential businesses must go through a process of selection first.

"We do plan to expand the list of merchants in the program, but have not yet finalized the next group to be added," Russell said.

Some of these new businesses may include parking garages located around the campus but not affiliated with the university.



Chris Shattuck

Reuben's Deli is one of several locations off-campus now accepting PantherCash.



NOËL HAHN

Bell Street Burritos and Ciao Bocca (bottom), both located in the Sweet Auburn Curb Market (middle), are among several locations in Atlanta now accepting PantherCash.

1

2

Next »