More than 15,000 students attend the University of South Alabama (USA) in Mobile, AL. The university employs approximately 5,500 faculty and staff and consists of 10 schools and colleges. Its health system, including the College of Medicine, Mitchell Cancer Institute and two hospitals, provides state-of-the-art care for 250,000 patients annually.

The university is one of the fastest growing in the state and is undergoing a 10-year construction program valued in excess of $475 million. Because of that, David Blough, Associate Vice President, University Computer Sciences, wanted to take advantage of new VoIP technologies to improve communications.

“We wanted to replace our aging telephone system,” explained Mr. Blough. “It was installed in 1988, and we could no longer get parts for it and we couldn’t upgrade it. We wanted to install new systems before the old one crashed and we wouldn’t be able to get it back up.”

He sought proposals for a multi-year, phased-in replacement of the current telecommunications systems. They were to be considered a long-term solution and be capable of meeting the university’s current telecommunications and voice messaging needs and offer the potential for future enhancements and expansion.

What’s Your Best Solution?

Mr. Blough took a novel approach when bidding out the project. Instead of putting together a typical 100-page bid specification, he put together a 6-page request for proposal describing the university’s current voice and data environment and the desired solution. His goal was to deploy a cost-effective communications system that would minimize risk and appear seamless to end users during the multiphased migration.

The older campus communications infrastructure consists of an aging copper backbone. Mr. Blough wanted to upgrade it, but he didn’t have the budget to run new CAT6 cable and fiber throughout the campus. So Black Box devised a plan to use the existing infrastructure while migrating to the new system, one building at a time.

From the initial bid through the communications migration, Black Box has earned the trust of the university team. “We have a lot of confidence in Black Box,” said Mr. Blough. “Being familiar with the university and campus, they were able to meet our needs better than other vendors. They have a good understanding of what we need. And they give us very good technical help.”