Campus Mailroom Operations:
A Nexus of the Student Experience

Post-pandemic, mailroom operations challenges are shifting, but parcel and package delivery continue to represent an important piece in the student satisfaction puzzle.

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One would be hard-pressed to find a single aspect of the student experience that has remained unchanged since the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet as many facets of college campus operations return to "normal," some pandemic habits persist.

The 2020–2022 surge in online shopping and growing student reliance on receiving almost everything they need through shipping and delivery continue to push campus mailroom teams. While the massive influx of packages that hit college campuses during the pandemic years appears to have subsided, mailrooms still process and deliver large volumes of parcels and packages every day. Those teams also find themselves working through yet another challenge: too few staff to handle the load, and small hope of adding to their ranks anytime soon.

In a time when college students expect all of the creature comforts of home to follow them to their college campuses or 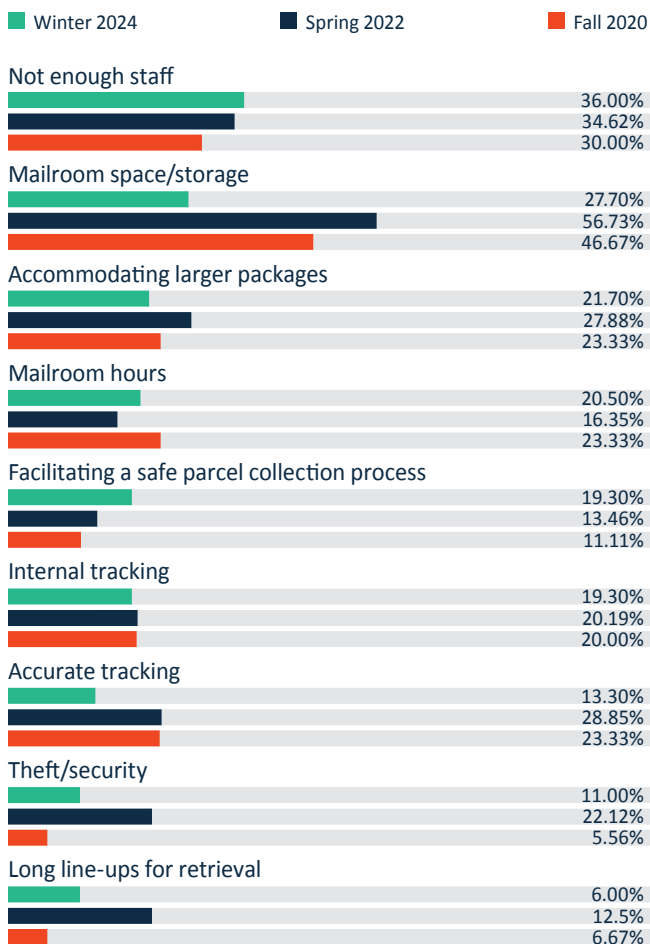dormitories, the mailroom sits at an import-ant intersection of maintaining student satisfaction and facilities safety and security. As a result, operations professionals in higher education are not only relied upon to keep buildings and occupants safe, they're also now viewed as another means of ensuring a positive student experience on campus, and ongoing student satisfaction.

Managed Chaos

Asked to name their biggest mailroom challenges today, college and university operations professionals who responded to a winter 2024 Spaces4Learning survey cited "too few staff" (36%) as the top issue. Asked later in the survey if they anticipate a need to add more staff to accommodate growing parcel volume in the near future, 26% said "yes" while 72% said "no."
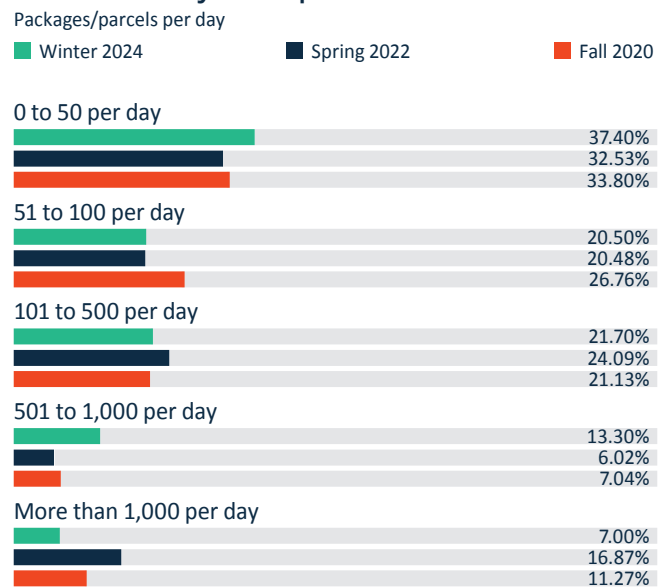
Finding room to place and store ceaseless mountains of package deliveries also appears to be less of an issue for campuses today: Mailroom space/storage topped only 28% of winter 2024 respondents' list of challenges, compared to almost 47% in 2020 and nearly 57% in 2022.

Biggest Mailroom Challenges

■ Winter 2024   ■ Spring 2022   ■ Fall 2020

Not enough staff
- 36.00%
- 34.62%
- 30.00%

Mailroom space/storage
- 27.70%
- 56.73%
- 46.67%

Accommodating larger packages
- 21.70%
- 27.88%
- 23.33%

Mailroom hours
- 20.50%
- 16.35%
- 23.33%

Facilitating a safe parcel collection process
- 19.30%
- 13.46%
- 11.11%

Internal tracking
- 19.30%
- 20.19%
- 20.00%

Accurate tracking
- 13.30%
- 28.85%
- 23.33%

Theft/security
- 11.00%
- 22.12%
- 5.56%

Long line-ups for retrieval
- 6.00%
- 12.5%
- 6.67%

Package volume has fallen compared to the rates seen at the height of the pandemic, with most respondents in winter 2024 saying their mailrooms manage 0 to 50 packages/parcels per day; 21.7% said they're managing 101 to 500 per day. While students and other on-campus teams continue to rely heavily on digital shopping and shipping/packages for everything from technology and books to clothing and groceries, daily package/parcel volume appears to be relaxing somewhat when compared to spring 2022 and fall 2020 surveys.
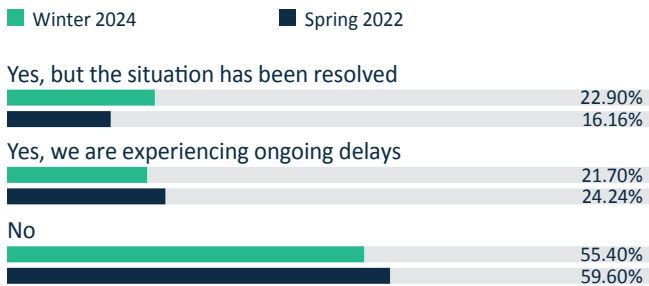
Overall Daily Campus Mailroom Volume

Packages/parcels per day

■ Winter 2024   ■ Spring 2022   ■ Fall 2020

0 to 50 per day
- 37.40%
- 32.53%
- 33.80%

51 to 100 per day
- 20.50%
- 20.48%
- 26.76%

101 to 500 per day
- 21.70%
- 24.09%
- 21.13%

501 to 1,000 per day
- 13.30%
- 6.02%
- 7.04%

More than 1,000 per day
- 7.00%
- 16.87%
- 11.27%

Frustrations Persist

Despite campus mailrooms' handling fewer packages than what was moved during the pandemic, students are expressing greater frustration with parcel delays today than what was noted in spring 2022.
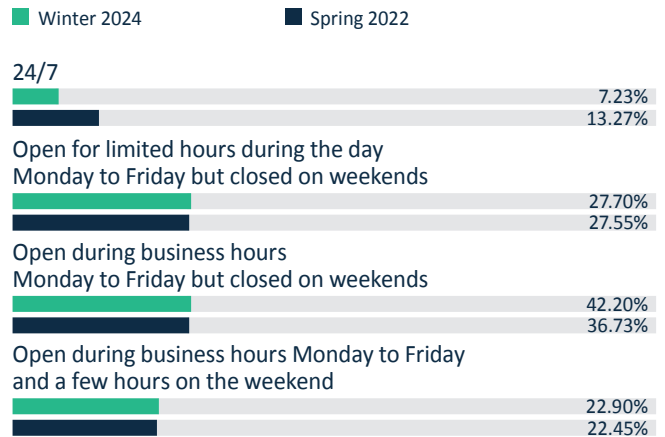
Resondents Whose Students Expressed Frustration with Parcel Delays in the Last Year

■ Winter 2024　　　■ Spring 2022

Yes, but the situation has been resolved
22.90%
16.16%

Yes, we are experiencing ongoing delays
21.70%
24.24%

No
55.40%
59.60%

One respondent noted that vendors' dropping off packages "when mail staff are not there to receive during off business hours" presents yet another significant challenge.

Parcel and package pickup times are frequently offered only during normal business hours, and remain little changed since spring 2022, adding to the complexity of maintaining student satisfaction with less mailroom staff and fewer in-person hours of customer service.

Mailroom Hours for Pickup

■ Winter 2024　　　■ Spring 2022

24/7
7.23%
13.27%

Open for limited hours during the day Monday to Friday but closed on weekends
27.70%
27.55%

Open during business hours Monday to Friday but closed on weekends
42.20%
36.73%

Open during business hours Monday to Friday and a few hours on the weekend
22.90%
22.45%

Offering students the chance to pick up packages outside of normal mailroom hours enhances their experience and reduces staff time, according to Esmeralda Valdez, executive director of university services at the University of Houston. Since installing smart lockers on campus, the university saw that 33% of packages were retrieved outside of normal business hours.

"The locker system itself has been a complete game-changer for our operations," Valdez said.

While mailroom teams appear to be doing more with less, it also appears that they're doing the job well, despite student complaints: More respondents reported receiving packages, notifying recipients and delivery/pickup within a day (nearly 35%) in winter 2024 than in spring 2022 (32%).

Opportunities for Change

New dormitories and other campus facilities coming online post-pandemic increasingly include redesigned, updated, or expanded spaces as opposed to one solitary mail drop/pickup location in an older forgotten building on campus. The Board of Regents for the University of Hawai'i at Manoa in 2023 announced the planned construction of $156.9 million student housing facility, to include 558 beds in two high-rises alongside amenities like a childcare facility, café and retail space, a new mailroom, and more.
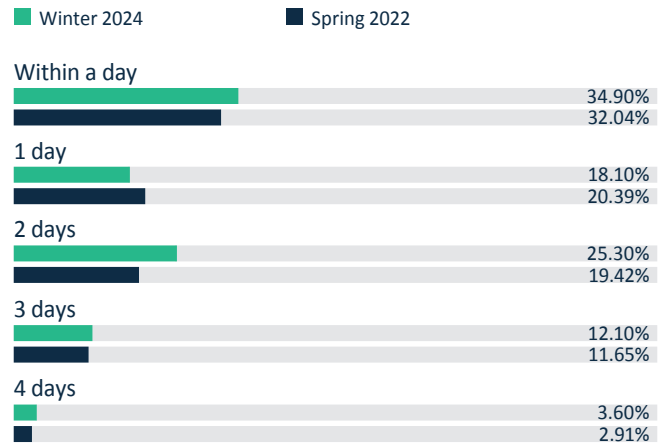
SUNY Purchase is overhauling its mailroom and central receiving facilities as part of a larger, $42 million construction project that will add a new theater, film, and media center. The university is taking advantage of renovation's opportunity to combine mailroom and receiving functions that previously operated out of two separate spaces.

The new space houses more mailboxes, an open concept work area for greater visibility and service, and a new warehouse area, allowing for one-stop pickup for the community, a release from Capital Facilities Planning at SUNY Purchase stated.
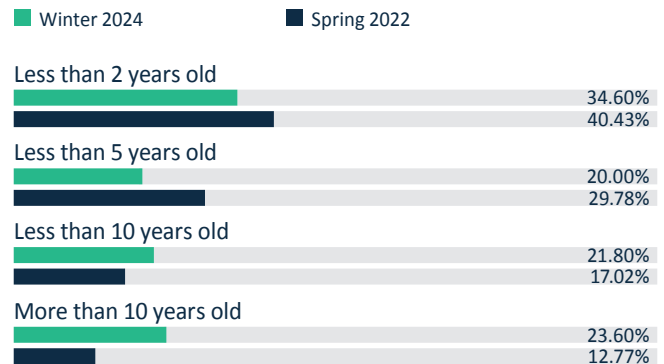
New or improved facilities also bring opportunities for campuses to invest in new technologies that enhance efficiency in mail and parcel handling, tracking and delivery, but according to the winter 2024 survey, adoption on college campuses today appears sporadic.

While one respondent noted that their campus was "working to incorporate biometric security features, like fingerprint or facial recognition, for added security and personalized access," nearly 24% of winter 2024 respondents said they're working with parcel or mail tracking systems that are more than 10 years old, compared to spring 2022 respondents (12.8%).

What is the Average Amount of Time Between Receiving the Package, Alerting the Recipient, and the Recipient Picking it Up?

Winter 2024 / Spring 2022

Within a day 34.90% / 32.04%
1 day 18.10% / 20.39%
2 days 25.30% / 19.42%
3 days 12.10% / 11.65%
4 days 3.60% / 2.91%

Age of Parcel/Mail Tracking System

Winter 2024 / Spring 2022

Less than 2 years old 34.60% / 40.43%
Less than 5 years old 20.00% / 29.78%
Less than 10 years old 21.80% / 17.02%
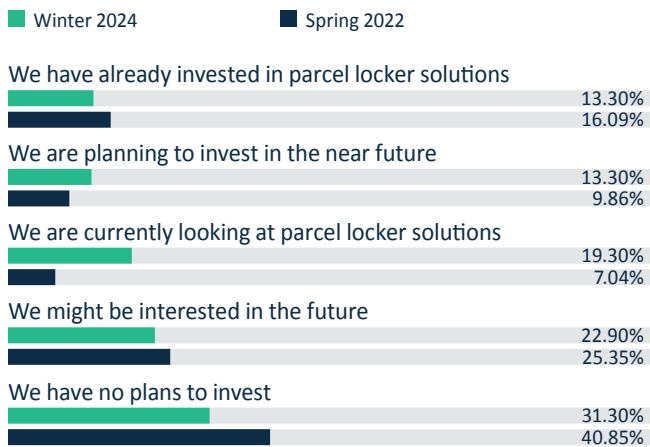**More than 10 years old** 23.60% / 12.77%

Where Parcel Locker Solutions Fit In

Parcel locker solutions offer campuses a smarter way to navigate mailroom pickup hours, removing obstacles to student access to mail or packages while maintaining safe and secure delivery to the intended recipient. Lockers not only enable contactless handoff of student packages and deliveries, they can also enhance delivery of other sensitive or protected equipment, such as expensive technology delivered by IT or sensitive laboratory tools within a medical setting or department, when paired with asset tracking software.

In the winter 2024 survey, more respondents noted that their campuses are exploring parcel locker solutions (19.3%) or planning to invest in the near future (13.3%) than in spring 2022. Of those now planning or considering locker solutions, 27.6% said they plan to implement lockers within the next 1 to 2 years; 17.2% plan to implement them with the next six months to a year.

Has Your Instution Considered Investing in Parcel Locker Solutions to Optimize Your Delivery Process?

🟩 Winter 2024   ⬛ Spring 2022

We have already invested in parcel locker solutions
13.30%
16.09%

We are planning to invest in the near future
13.30%
9.86%

We are currently looking at parcel locker solutions
19.30%
7.04%

We might be interested in the future
22.90%
25.35%

We have no plans to invest
31.30%
40.85%

Budget constraints topped the list of barriers to campuses implementing parcel locker solutions (66%) followed by physical space constraints (55.4%), which comes as little surprise to campuses now navigating the competing challenges of managing aging facilities and smaller mailroom capacity. Of those winter 2024 survey respondents now offering parcel locker solutions, most do not maintain them at or around the main campus mailroom. Instead, they tend to be sited in the places students frequent most: in the student union or similar campus hub (29.7%), within select dormitories or student housing (25%), administrative buildings (25.4%), or a campus library (19%).

About Parcel Pending
by Quadient

Quadient is the leading provider of innovative parcel management solutions for higher education institutions worldwide. With more than 100 years' experience supporting clients' mail and parcel needs, Parcel Pending by Quadient offers a wide range of solutions that ensure secure, convenient student parcel deliveries and on-campus asset exchanges.

Parcel Pending's Campus Hub™ streamlines delivery and tracking for a safer and smarter campus experience, and can be used for a variety of purposes, including: package management and delivery; bookstore merchandise; class and IT equipment; on-campus dining; moving materials; food pantry and school events.

For more information about how Parcel Pending® and Campus Hub can work for your institution, visit parcelpending.com/markets/university-parcel-lockers/.

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