

Training Student Pilots with FDM at Southern Utah University



Overview

Last year, we met Richard Cannon, Director of Flight Operations at Southern Utah University (SUU). After a “mid-life crisis at 30,” Cannon switched from commercial construction lending to flying helicopters, and he’s loved it ever since.

Before joining the team at SUU, Cannon flew for EMS and firefighting, and has recently become a designated pilot examiner at SUU. This gives him the responsibility of signing off on pilot certificates and ratings.

In our [last article](#) with Cannon, we explored how the experience for student pilots at SUU is unlike any other. Students get the whole gamut of flight experience, with varying terrain, four seasons, and plenty of vast, remote spaces.

30+

AIRCRAFT

FLIGHT
SCHOOL

VERTICAL

300+

STUDENTS





Challenge

SUU is located in a valley surrounded by mountains, where a single ADS-B tower stands. Because of this, every time a pilot flies outside of the valley, they lose ADS-B tracking.

With 75-80% of flights leaving the valley, this poses a problem to Cannon and his team.

“A GPS solution is our only solution for anything outside of our valley until somebody gets up to say, Salt Lake or down to Vegas, where they can be back in ADS-B,” explains Cannon.

ADS-B could pick up aircraft at higher elevations, such as 10,000-13,000 feet, but Cannon says that student pilots are rarely up that high. Instead, most SUU helicopters go outside of the valley or fly down low to practice off-airport landings.

Cannon says that 2/3 of their flight hours would not show up in ADS-B.





Solution

Cannon knew of reputable aviation businesses who use Spidertracks, so he decided to try the technology. To test the tracking system, SUU sent out aircraft to land off-airport and instructed them not to come back at the right time.

Cannon says that they could quickly locate those individuals with the Spidertracks software. They figured out exactly where they were and could promptly get in contact with them.

Since then, SUU has had actual instances where students were late. Like the testing environment before, the team could pull up the aircraft on the Spidertracks system, verify if they were okay, and make contact.

“It helps me sleep better at night knowing that we’ve got somebody watching all of our aircraft at the same time,” says Cannon.

“We’ve got a full-time dispatcher that works. The one screen that is up on one of their computers all the time is Spidertracks, just keeping an eye on everybody’s whereabouts.”

Students have also utilised the Spidertracks SOS button, which Cannon says works great. An SOS notification is received by Cannon and a few team members as soon as it’s enabled, meaning that the team can start the process to make sure the aircraft is okay immediately.

To make the aviation industry safer, Cannon says we can begin with flight schools. One significant way to do this is by not pressuring pilots to fly when it’s unsafe.

Want to see how Flight Data Monitoring can help improve your safety standards? [Learn more here.](https://www.spidertracks.com)

