Ignite a Spirit of Innovation at Your College

In 2009, Wake Technical Community College was 45 years old and enjoying a solid reputation as a provider of consistently high-quality technical training, college transfer preparation, and workforce development. In my sixth year as president, I was leading a group of professionals who shared a strong commitment to our mission of changing lives through education.

We were at the beginning of a period of unprecedented enrollment growth and capacity enhancement that has continued to present day. We were certainly not strangers to change, but we realized that we were, increasingly, not the drivers of that change. External changes and shifts were driving us: national and state policies, accreditation and accountability measures, professional standards, funding priorities.

It was clear that we needed to get ahead of that tide, to become proactive rather than remaining reactive. And as we kept growing, we wanted to ensure that innovation and continuous improvement kept pace with that growth – that we were not just getting bigger, but better. But how to do it? Faculty and staff had no shortage of innovative ideas; I heard about “aha” moments every day. But somehow, in the urgency of meeting so many external demands, too many of those brilliant insights weren’t seeing the light of day. How could we change the equation? What if we made those “benchmark” ideas our priority and focused on bringing them to fruition? And how would we do that?

Our answer was Applied Benchmarking, a way to institutionalize the sparks of originality and insight that herald real innovation. We would engage every employee in “benchmarking” exemplary projects and practices from the best colleges in the country and adapting them for use at Wake Tech. Simply put, we would capture the best ideas out there and make them our own.

Every college employee would be given the same charge: Identify an issue related to your work, your department, your division; or a problem you want to solve. Find someone who has resolved that issue successfully – preferably in a way that is innovative, imaginative, forward thinking, an idea that has revolutionized another institution or process. Then learn all about it so that you can adapt it to the particulars of your situation and our college, and then apply it. Make it happen. Make it part of standard operating procedure.

I decided that senior staff and I would be the “alpha” and “beta” testers for the initiative. With a new campus on the horizon for Wake Tech, I started by reaching out to another college president to benchmark ways for handling our growth. The second year I asked senior administrators to join me, and by the third year, everyone else joined in. All employees. We provided a 1% salary increase that year to further incentivize and institutionalize the initiative. It was adopted by our Board of Trustees and became college policy.

Applied Benchmarking projects ran the gamut, from instructional techniques to daily operations and management. They were amazingly complex and brilliantly simple. A flexible
workday policy. A data management overhaul in student services that was one of 18 such projects recognized nationally. A faculty rank system to recruit and retain talent. A student ambassador program. A photo gallery to improve campus security. Open online courses to help new and struggling students get up to speed. A more convenient and cost-effective disbursement process for financial aid. And the list goes on.

Applied Benchmarking is change from within, made exponentially stronger by the collective wisdom of a global community.

Now in its fourth year of full implementation, our Applied Benchmarking initiative is a high-performing, sustainable **engine of innovation**, with the potential for generating 1,100 new projects per year. We have added a searchable database to capture, organize, communicate, and archive every success, and every failure – to guide the growing community of innovators driving our college forward.

Applied Benchmarking has had unintended – but welcome – consequences that can best be described by the word “engagement.” This simple yet powerful tool has changed the culture of our college and ignited a new spirit. Faculty and staff report a greater sense of ownership of their work. They confront issues and challenges with the sense that they can solve them – and that they have the responsibility to do so. Now, they are not only driving change, but doing so with greater confidence that they can make things better. They think like innovators on small and large scales; they engage, explore, apply, succeed, fail, and repeat. *Every employee. Every year.*

**Applied Benchmarking: The Process**

1. Identify an issue or problem related to your work.
2. Research solutions/promising practices to find the best, and learn from the individuals or organizations that have employed them successfully.
3. Adopt, adapt, or improve the solution or practice to fit the specific needs of the college.
4. Apply the solution.
5. Evaluate the outcome.
6. Assess the viability of the project for future use; archive or discard.
7. Repeat as appropriate.

**One Powerful Example**

Applied Benchmarking generates 1,100+ faculty and staff innovations every year. Harnessing that many improvements – without sacrificing the synergy created by employee-owned initiatives – becomes a challenge. But another Applied Benchmarking project offered the solution: **Scaling Applied Benchmarking Innovations for Learning, or SAIL**, provides a structured, competitive RFP process that invites faculty and staff to collaborate in solving the college’s most difficult challenges.

SAIL offers employees a toolkit for addressing identified priorities: rubrics, timelines, training, and technical support. It includes rigorous review to assure the quality, feasibility, and
sustainability of projects. In its first use, SAIL guided the competitive selection of Wake Tech’s Quality Enhancement Plan, a requirement for accreditation.

**Recognition and Replication**

Applied Benchmarking has been recognized as truly innovative:

- 2014 Bellwether Award – Community College Futures Assembly
- 2013 Innovation of the Year Award – League for Innovation

The SAIL Applied Benchmarking project detailed above (also recognized by the League for Innovation with its own Innovation of the Year award in 2014), guided the competitive selection of Wake Tech’s Quality Enhancement Plan, or QEP, a requirement for accreditation. The QEP that emerged from the SAIL process was presented to the re-accreditation committee of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges in the fall of 2014, and received “no recommendations” for improvement.

Applied Benchmarking is a model of continuous improvement that has transformed our college – and that can easily be replicated in other institutions. The self-directed aspect of the initiative makes it particularly attractive for educational institutions, given their abundance of creative minds – and potentially more applicable than other models.

Every leader knows that great ideas can come from anyone, and that when acknowledged and cultivated, those ideas spark even greater ones. The Applied Benchmarking initiative encourages creative thinking, collaboration, and innovative action. It can start a revolution of ideas that can lead an institution to currently unimagined places.

**Dr. Stephen C. Scott**
**President, Wake Technical Community College**
WAKE TECH

Lead the way.
2015 ACCT Leadership Congress

Ron Wainwright, Vice Chair, Board of Trustees
Dr. Steve Scott, President
Butch Grove, Associate Vice President
APPLIED BENCHMARKING – Exploring and Implementing Best Practices
Governance - 12 Trustees

- Four Appointed by the Governor
- Four Appointed by the Commissioner
- Four Elected by School Board
20,800 FTE
70,000 Headcount
2013 – second fastest-growing large community college in the U.S. (Source: Community College Week)

- Curriculum Enrollment up 35% over the past five years
- Expected to grow another 50% over the next 5 years
What inspired the Applied Benchmarking initiative?

• Response to unprecedented growth
• Need for continuous improvement
• Desire to encourage innovative thinking
What is “Applied Benchmarking”? 

- A college-wide initiative that involves everyone in the pursuit of excellence
- A learning process
- An ongoing improvement process
- A collection of great ideas!
Applied Benchmarking
Engine for Innovation

Identify an issue that needs addressing
Locate a benchmark
Modify benchmark to fit WTCC
Results

- Hundreds of ideas college wide
- Employees taking ownership
- Building professional networks
Implementing Ideas

- Foundation funds to support projects
- ITS – searchable database
Applied Benchmarking Database

- My Benchmarks
- Benchmark Checklist
- FAQ

Search
- Search All Benchmarks
- Recently Created Benchmarks
- Benchmarks CSV File
- Direct Report Benchmarks
- Group Benchmarks

Documentation
- Project of the Year Award Program
- Completion By Design Benchmarking Article
- Employee Handbook Benchmark Reference
- ITS Involvement Summary
- Intro to Benchmarking Video
- PD session notes
- Stats

Applied Benchmarking - Search

There are currently 2,109 benchmarks available to be searched.

Search in Title / Summary:

Search for Institutions:
(please choose)

Search for Submitters:
(please choose)

Search for Divisions:
(please choose)

Yearly Benchmark Creation Activity

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Fiscal Year</th>
<th>Benchmarks</th>
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<td>2011-2012</td>
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<td>2010-2011</td>
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Benchmark total: 2,109
Electronic Disbursement of Student Financial Aid
Processing FA

Curriculum Headcount

- **2004-05**: 17,015
- 2012-13: 27,819
- 2013-14: 28,594
- **2014-15**: 28,946

Students Receiving FA

- **2004-05**: 2,868
- 2012-13: 14,114
- 2013-14: 13,832
- **2014-15**: 14,067
Benefits to college

• $25,000 in direct staff time
• $12,000 in postage and supplies
• Fewer questions, phone calls, outdated addresses
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>FA</th>
<th>Students</th>
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<tr>
<td>2012-13</td>
<td>$61.7 million</td>
<td>25,027</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013-14</td>
<td>$65.8 million</td>
<td>26,413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014-15</td>
<td>$67.2 million</td>
<td>26,625</td>
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</table>
Benefits to students

• Electronic disbursements are more secure
• Students receive funds sooner
• Younger students expect more electronic services
• Vendor notifies students when funds are available
PC Power Management

• Problem:
  – Wake Tech operates more than 3700 student computers in over 100 labs and classrooms.
  – Students frequently leave computers turned-on:
    • overnight, weekends, holidays and student breaks
  – Resulting in wasted energy and decreased lifecycle of the machines.
PC Power Management

• Assumptions:
  1. Classed end by 10:00 PM.
  2. PC would be powered-down a minimum of 10 hrs./day M-F and 24 hrs./day on weekends and breaks.
  3. Approximately 30% or more of computers are left turned-on.
  4. Each computer uses about 65W of energy every hour in idle mode.
PC Power Management

• Applied Benchmark Solutions:
  1. Networking software from vendor at a cost of about $50,000.
  2. Further collaboration with IT staff and others revealed an in-house solution with existing software at NO additional cost.
PC Power Management

- Results (cost savings):

$20,567

(conservative – could easily be 2x)
Enhancing Online Courses with Web Conferencing Software

Problem:
Higher demand for online education
Lower retention and success rates for online courses

Benchmark:
Data has shown that increased social engagement in courses correlates with higher student retention and success.
Application at Wake Tech

**Pilot:**
Blackboard only vs. Blackboard + Adobe Connect

**Results:**

![Bar chart showing comparison between Blackboard with Adobe Connect and Blackboard Only in terms of Retention Rate, Success Rate, and Mean Grade.](chart.png)

- **Retention Rate**
  - Blackboard with Adobe Connect: 80%
  - Blackboard Only: 70%

- **Success Rate**
  - Blackboard with Adobe Connect: 70%
  - Blackboard Only: 60%

- **Mean Grade**
  - Blackboard with Adobe Connect: 90%
  - Blackboard Only: 80%
Interest to Enrollment

• Wake County at a glance:
  – Approximately 50% of the population over the age of 25 holds a bachelor's degree or higher, making us one of the most highly educated communities in the country.
  – Located in the Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill metro area known as “The Triangle”
  – 11 Colleges/Universities in The Triangle
National Decline in Enrollment

College Enrollment Growth and Decline by Sector: Fall 2012 - 2013 (National Student Clearinghouse)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>All Sectors</th>
<th>Public 4-Year</th>
<th>Nonprofit 4-Year</th>
<th>For-Profit 4-Year</th>
<th>Public 2-Year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-1.50%</td>
<td>0.30%</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
<td>-9.70%</td>
<td>-3.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Applications Decline vs. Enrollment Growth

Wake Tech Community College - Curriculum Education
Enrollment and Online Applications

Unduplicated Headcount

Academic Year


Curriculum Enrollment
Online Applications
Questions?

Ron Wainwright

Contact Butch Grove at rhgrove@waktech.edu for more information
Lead the way.