



Client Success story

Abilene Christian University Gets Buy-In from Leadership with FCA

Client

Corey Ruff, Executive Director of Facilities and Campus Management at Abilene Christian University

Geography

Abilene, Texas

Vitals

Approx. 4,000 on-campus students, 60+ buildings across 2.3 million sq. ft.

Challenges

To move toward a successful preventive maintenance program, the university's considerable deferred maintenance backlog first had to be addressed.

Results

After a third-party FCA provided the platform for buy-in from senior leadership and additional funding for their deferred maintenance backlog, the team has now been able to make a number of measurable improvements.

When he considered professional services at Brightly's annual user conference a few years ago, Corey Ruff was wondering what the facilities team's deferred maintenance (DM) backlog looked like at Abilene Christian University, as well as how their operations at ACU compared to others in the market. As the Executive Director of Facilities and Campus Management, he knew the team would have difficulty performing the facilities condition assessment (FCA) required to get to the bottom of these questions, especially while being understaffed.

"The chance of us ever getting it done...slim to none. We knew we needed to partner with somebody because we needed a quick turnaround," Corey says. "I personally believe that a third-party vendor brought more credibility to the table than our in-house team would have been able to bring. Our team has a great track record with the senior leadership team at ACU, but there is something about having an unbiased outside firm come in to report their findings that helps communicate the true need."

Enlisting professional services, the facilities team had a third-party firm conduct a thorough FCA on campus, and when it was completed in 2014, they had answers. The six-month assessment performed by professional engineers and architects looked at not only ACU's facilities, but their hardscape and equipment inventory as well. At its conclusion, the FCA confirmed that the department had a staggering \$160 million backlog in deferred maintenance.

With Corey and the team's goal being to move toward a preventive maintenance (PM) program, it seemed like quite a stretch if they kept working as reactively as they were. It was clear they would need further support from the school's senior leadership, and now backed with the credibility of a third-party analysis rather than a self-assessment, the team was able to prove that facilities work affects the big picture of the campus. What they're not able to perform due to understaffing and underfunding is not only their issue, but a larger university concern.

With that, the tide began to change. Three years later, the department has been able to make valuable, lasting changes, including:

- Sharing reports with others on campus to support their efforts with just a few clicks
- Getting a PM program up and running, using the PM work orders they weren't able to fulfill as evidence in capital increase proposals
- Replacing mechanical systems that were way beyond their expected life cycle
- Upgrading their building automation system to help operate the campus more efficiently
- Eliminating the campus's oldest, most troublesome building that had previously been a DM bleed
- Achieving a little over a 20% annual cost avoidance in their energy conservation program over the past four years

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Corey Ruff

Executive Director of Facilities and Campus Management, Abilene Christian University

Their biggest victory, however, was using the data story the FCA provided to get enough buy-in from the university's senior leadership to receive additional funding. "The greatest benefit for our team is that we have been able to invest an additional \$11 million into the campus, which has allowed us to free up labor hours to focus on becoming more proactive instead of reactive," Corey says. "The additional capital infusion into our mechanical systems has allowed our HVAC technicians to focus on PM work orders instead of being totally reactive dealing with hot/cold calls across campus."

"The FCA really helped us understand how our facilities ranked based on their facility condition index and the total need for the major building systems (mechanical, electrical, plumbing, roofing, interiors, etc.) on campus help us make better data-driven decisions," he adds. "I look at the facilities condition assessment I would say at least probably once a week, and any time somebody needs data, I'm able to get it to them quick."

With the strengthened partnership between the facilities team and senior leadership, as well as the additional funding to address their DM backlog and move toward more PM, Corey and the team are leaps and bounds from where they were just a few short years ago. They're even having the professional services firm come back to update their FCA now that additional facilities have been added to the campus.

When asked if he would recommend using a third-party service to other schools, he ended with, "I would highly recommend partnering with a professional services firm to help facility managers tell their story. As you know, facility management is a fast-paced, dynamic operation, so if you are needing accurate, unbiased results in a timely manner, find a professional firm that is willing to partner with your operations."

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