Benchmarking to Identify Best Practices

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Learning goals for workshop

• What is benchmarking
• Reasons for benchmarking
• Examples of potential studies
• Steps to conducting a study
• Projects you could initiate
• Where to go for more information
What is benchmarking?

- Benchmarking is an approach for departments to measure and compare themselves with higher-performing departments with the goal of identifying work processes, products, services, or strategies that will lead to improvement.
Benefits of benchmarking

- Identify best practices that increase student satisfaction.
- Achieve efficiencies and increase productivity.
- Helpful during times of budget growth and reduction.
- Broaden perspectives and overcome resistance change.
- Demonstrate the quality and efficiency of your programs and services.
Origins of benchmarking

- Emerged in 1980s as a survival tool for Xerox.
- In 1990, first university benchmark study conducted by the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education.
- In 1992, the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO) conducted a national benchmark study on administrative services.
- Since 1992, hundreds of schools have participated in NACUBO’s benchmark studies on topics ranging from admissions to purchasing.
- Today many higher education associations conduct benchmark studies.
Opportunities for benchmarking in higher education

- Admissions – process of reviewing of applications
- Registrar – processing transcript requests
- Center for Student Involvement – processing the registration of student organizations
- Student Health Services – scheduling doctor appointments
- Campus Recreation – signing students up for recreation classes
- Career Services – registering employers in job fairs
- Crafts Center – registering students in workshops
- Human Resources – processing timesheets and payroll
- Transportation Services – arranging for special event parking services
- Police – computer-aided dispatch services
- Facilities Design – project design review process
Five steps to benchmarking

1. Planning
2. Identifying target organizations
3. Data collection
4. Analysis
5. Implementation
Step 1. Planning

- Limit the study to what is vital to the performance of your department.
- Consider highly-regarded practices or services that can be made even better.
- Look into practices or services that students and staff regard as “broken”.
  - Labor-intensive, time-consuming processes with suspected waste
  - Services or processes that generate dissatisfaction with students.
  - Processes that affect other key processes in your department or other departments.
  - Processes with poorly defined objectives or frequent errors requiring corrections.
Prioritizing your benchmarking projects

- Potential for improvement in student satisfaction or staff productivity,
- Extent to which the process or service is broken,
- Feasibility of re-engineering the service or product.
Selecting benchmark study team

- Involve staff members who are most familiar with the processes or services.
- If processes or services extend to other departments, involve their staff as well.
- Include a staff member who can successfully recruit the target organizations to participate in the study.
Step 2. Identifying target organizations

• Identify recognized leaders based on:
  – awards, conference presentations, articles in association publications, and leaders in your field.

• Target organizations can be departments:
  – internal to the university that perform similar processes or offer similar services.
  – with similar processes or services at other universities.
  – outside of higher education with similar functions, products, or services.
Step 2. Identifying target organizations

• To ease the recruiting the process look for institutions that affiliate with one another in some manner.
  – They still need to be top performers!

• Secure their cooperation by:
  – Ensuring confidentiality of the results.
  – Making their participation easy by minimizing their investment of time in the study.
  – Promising to share the results.
Step 3. Data collection

• The objective of data collection is to:
  – examine processes or services,
  – resources devoted to processes or services, and
  – measure performance.
Step 3. Data collection

Use methods such as:
- telephone interviews,
- on-line surveys,
- collection of department information (e.g., organizational charts, procedure manuals)
- detailed flowcharts of internal processes
- interviews during meetings at conference,
- interviews and observation during site visits
Step 3. Data collection

- Measuring performance involves developing metrics such as:
  - **QUALITY**
    - student satisfaction surveys,
  - **EFFICIENCY**
    - number of transactions completed per departmental FTE, or
    - departmental cost per transaction processed.
Examples of metrics

• Benchmarking study of custodial services in Student Centers

• QUALITY
  • Staff and student ratings of the appearance of various spaces in the facility (e.g., bathrooms, dining spaces, meeting spaces, lounge spaces).

• EFFICIENCY
  • Number of FTE dedicated to custodial services divided by facility square footage
  • Number of FTE dedicated to custodial services divided by the number of people who visit the facility each day
  • Amount of supplies and expenses budgeted to custodial services divided by the number of people who visit the facility each day.
Step 4. Analysis

- Your analysis may focus on:
- Differences in quality and efficiency levels.
- Factors that contribute to the differences in quality and efficiency including:
  - Organizational structure,
  - Leadership and mission
  - Organizational stability and staff experience,
  - Policies,
  - Work flows and internal processes,
  - Use of technology such as the web, email, phone
  - Staffing levels,
  - Training of staff,
  - Division of job responsibilities,
  - Funding,
  - Use of assessment to receive student feedback
Step 5. Implementation

- Analysis phase culminates in a documented action plan and recommendations
- Identify strengths and weaknesses relative to benchmark partners,
- Recommendation may include changing:
  - processes,
  - job responsibilities,
  - staff involved,
  - use of technology and development of software tools.
Resources

- American Society for Quality
  [http://www.asq.org](http://www.asq.org)

- Student Voice
  [http://www.studentvoice.com](http://www.studentvoice.com)

- Educational Benchmarking Inc.
  [http://www.webebi.com](http://www.webebi.com)
  - Has national benchmark studies on first-year experience, housing, Greek life, student centers, student organization leaders.

- International Benchmarking Clearinghouse
  [http://www.apqc.org](http://www.apqc.org)