

Sherri Yerk-Zwickl – Campbell University

At Campbell University, IT's all for one, and one for all

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Every time CIO [Sherri Yerk-Zwickl](#) looks at the recently completed student union at [Campbell University](#), it reminds her of the progress being made in the school's IT Department. That includes many things, from 74 upgraded classrooms to a new phone system to the new Information Technology Advisory Committee that oversees tech across the three campuses.



Sherri Yerk-Zwickl | Associate Vice President and Chief Information Officer | Campbell University

As the associate vice president and the first CIO, Yerk-Zwickl joined the North Carolina university in 2017 with a goal of consolidating its IT efforts and strengthening its culture. Looking around, she found ways to centralize operations and developed a new mindset along the way.

"When COVID-19 hit, we were ready. The team pulled out all the stops to shift to online operations over a weekend," she says. "The foundational work two years earlier paid off."

Positioned to serve North Carolina

In the decade prior to Yerk-Zwickl's arrival, the university had added a school of osteopathic medicine and a nursing school at the new Health Sciences campus, and a school of engineering at its main campus in Bules Creek—in addition to moving the school of law to a new location in downtown Raleigh. All the school needed, she recalls, was a technology expert to tie operations together.

"It was a great opportunity coming to a school that was making strategic investments to create a place where students could be successful in the professions we need for North Carolina," she says. "It convinced me this was the place I wanted to be."



On arriving, she evaluated how technology touched everything from the undergraduate and graduate admissions processes to how students are attracted and retained. Looking back, she says there were a lot of duplicate systems between campuses. What's more, she adds, technology efforts were siloed. For example, technology-enhanced spaces—such as classrooms and meeting spaces—were supported by IT personnel as well as facilities staff, yet no common standards were being used. Support was fragmented, and confusion existed about who was responsible for technology in various spaces.

As her next step, Yerk-Zwickl sought to eliminate the duplicate systems. She removed unnecessary TV lines and unused data circuits and acquired a university-wide Zoom contract. From a cost standpoint, she was able to save \$248,000 annually through a mobile device stipend policy and by renegotiating the university's printing contract.

"Developing a centralized purchasing practice alone made a big difference in our budget," she says. "It gave us a better opportunity to analyze costs and become effective stewards of our resources."

Inspiring confidence, embracing change

From 2018 into 2019 Yerk-Zwickl completed what she called an "intra-organization IT merger" by establishing a centralized IT services department, bringing the many disparate IT professionals together. She also encouraged employees to think critically instead of waiting for orders.

"It was a matter of bringing people into the fold, helping them understand the role of the department—and their place within it—to weave everyone into a common effort," she explains. "I wanted people to be comfortable voicing their opinions to drive the department toward its new future."



IT Services Leadership Team (L to R): Scott Moore, John Skuce, Tracy Byrd, Kimberly Whitted, Sherri Yerk-Zwickl, Allan Winter. Missing: Mark Gibbons, Larry Essary

This effort paid dividends a year later during COVID-19 when the newly formed team had to shift the university to online learning when a stay-at-home order was issued. Interestingly, experienced colleagues in adult and online education helped during the transition, working together to help support faculty in their remote teaching activities.

"Things like that were made possible since we made a significant difference in how IT is being viewed, repurposing the ways we meet the needs of the university. We were all juggling uncertainties personally and professionally, but we made the magic happen to educate our students," Yerk-Zwickl says.

Assisting in the technological upgrades at the university is the higher education technology consulting firm Ferrilli. Since 2016 the school has used Ferrilli's CORE System Administration services to provide patch management, database support and maintenance, and environment cloning for its ERP system.



This year, Ferrilli helped migrate Campbell's ERP operating system and servers from a Hewlett Packard HP-UX environment to Red Hat Linux to improve business operations. Ferrilli has also provided custom programming for payroll retirement contributions, transcripts and gifts; configuration for the law school; and training around financial aid and communications management.

"I value the partnership we've made with Campbell University and Sherri," says Ferrilli Executive Vice President Kelly Sinacola. "The university knows that they can call us for an honest opinion, even if it doesn't result in a new contract. Our goals and their goals are aligned, improving student success."

The new normal

While the pandemic has pushed technology further ahead in recent months, the tech transformation is not complete, especially with the evolution in technology itself, in addition to new needs surfacing during the pandemic. Currently, the school's operating a hybrid learning model using Blackboard Collaborate and Zoom to provide synchronous teaching online and in person.

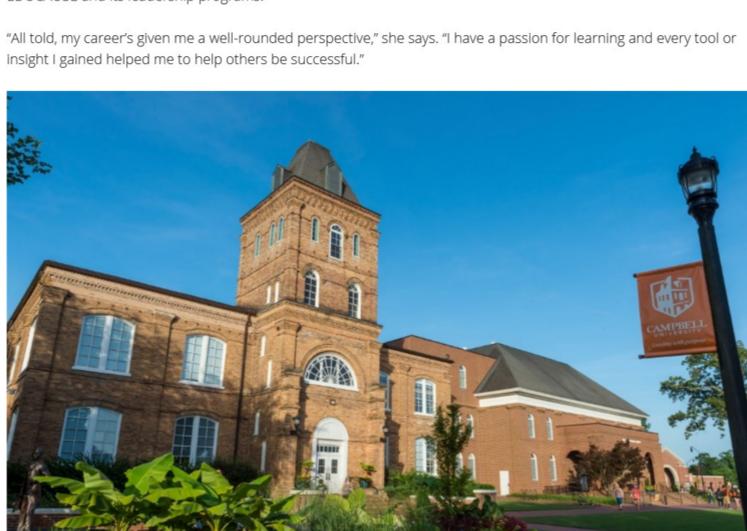


"Financially, we need to be fiscally responsible in managing resources while meeting the goals of the university," Yerk-Zwickl emphasizes. "That's especially important as higher education continues to see demographic shifts resulting in fewer traditional-aged students."

To make decisions on the best use of IT resources, she draws from her diversified background in various technological roles. Over the past 20 years she has worked in IT administration and at academic institutions such as Lafayette College, where she was a senior programmer analyst for nine years starting in 1988.

Her most in-depth experience came from Lehigh University where she did everything from serving as a senior instructional technology consultant; director of project management, web and mobile services; and director of library and technology services in planning and administration. She also gained considerable experience through EDUCAUSE and its leadership programs.

"All told, my career's given me a well-rounded perspective," she says. "I have a passion for learning and every tool or insight I gained helped me to help others be successful."



Her experience paid off when she was named the university's first female CIO and member of its executive team. She appreciates the team's trust in her and sees being a woman as a competitive advantage.

"People don't expect me to be a tech leader, and that can be useful," she notes. "I don't debate people about technology itself, I talk to them about what they want to accomplish."

From that perspective, there's no question the leadership team is unified in its mission to make students the priority—wherever the ideas come from.

"Nothing makes me happier than to see students—and even those staff on our team—accomplish things they never thought was possible," Yerk-Zwickl says. "I'm a teacher at heart and helping everyone go out and do what they've been called to do is what it's all about."

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