

Baylor University Optimization Case Study



Optimizing a typical, well-running chiller plant saves money and boosts efficiencies.



Waco, TX

Higher Ed

Industry

5+

Years with Optimum

\$209,000

Annual Operations
Cost Savings

\$460,000

Year 1
Utility Savings

Project Details & Scope

Plant Equipment: 8 chillers, 9 primary chilled water pumps, 11 condenser water pumps, 13 cooling towers

BAS: Siemens building automation system

Plant Type: Mix of variable-speed and constant-speed equipment of different sizes

Pre-Optimization Energy: 32 million kWh of electricity per year

Cooling Capacity: 16,196 tons

CW Production: 30,245,599 ton-hours

Conditioned Space: 4.9 million sq ft

Cooling Days: 365 days/year

Pre-Optimization Efficiency: 0.897 kW/ton

Post-Optimization Efficiency: 0.681 kW/ton

Electrical Energy Savings: 2.9 million kWh/year

CO₂ Reductions: 4.3 million lbs/year

Executive Summary

Baylor University, a private college in Waco, Texas, had a typical chiller plant—it ran well, but it was also a hodgepodge of equipment. The only major problem was that the plant was managed manually. Kenneth Haltom, who manages Baylor's energy services through a partnership with Aramark Energy Services, and his team suspected that chiller plant optimization would be the best way to increase efficiency and reduce related costs. The energy team brought in Optimum Energy to assess the opportunity—and found that their hypothesis was right. Within the first year of installing Optimum's OptimumLOOP® software and the OptiCx® platform, Baylor saved more than \$460,000. Demand for chilled water decreased across the campus and its air-conditioned spaces became more comfortable. The solution proved to be even more flexible than Haltom had expected.

Challenge: Automating a Heterogeneous Plant

Prior to optimization, plant operators judged when to add or shed load based on demand. Their criteria were sound, but unfortunately, they acted on critical decisions, such as shifting a building's temperature or starting or stopping equipment, only once per shift. Human error made the plant even more inefficient. For example, operators could interpret criteria differently, resulting in inconsistent system adjustments. One thing standing in the way of chiller automation was complex hydraulics.

The plant equipment varies widely—some of the eight chillers are 18 years old, while others are only a year old. Three have variable-speed drives, two have dual compressors, and each has a different pressure drop and design flow. A fixed-valve solution to balance water flow between chillers was out of the question.

“We had to get the machines that don't have variablespeed drives to work correctly with those that do, making sure the machines wouldn't overflow, but we'd still get an efficient flow out of each of them,” said Haltom.

Solution: Finding the Ideal Balance Points

Optimum Energy's OptimumLOOP® is a closed-loop solution that reads data every 30 seconds and dynamically adjusts the chiller plant equipment in real time in response to changing conditions. The company's engineers had to find the balance point for each chiller, whether it was running concurrently with the others or individually.

To do this with a valve table would have meant determining the ideal valve sequence — out of a possible 256 run combinations — that would enable the chillers to maintain appropriate water flows while operating as efficiently as possible. Since that was not a plausible approach, OptimumLOOP® dynamically adjusts the control valves on all running chillers to maintain balance instead.

The solution uses proprietary algorithms, but as with all plants, Baylor's combination of fixed- and variable-speed equipment required some customization to fit requirements. But since variable-speed drives were already installed on all pumps and cooling towers, installing the solution didn't require any mechanical changes.

Now the software automatically determines the best operating conditions across the plant and makes on-the-fly changes to all of the chillers as well as the nine primary chilled water pumps, 11 condenser water pumps, and 13 cooling towers.

"OptimumLOOP® made everything automatic, from slightly adjusting a single valve to improve water flow, to shedding entire machines from the system when demand decreases," explained Haltom. "Each of the eight chillers operates at a different output and rate, depending on what gives us the greatest efficiency."

"Chiller optimization offered us the biggest bang for the buck when Baylor explored ways to reduce its energy spend. Optimum Energy is top notch."

— Kenneth Haltom,
Aramark Energy Services

Result: Almost Twice the Energy for the Same Cost

Within the first year, OptimumLOOP® saved Baylor more than \$460,000 in utility costs — roughly 24 percent of electricity costs — while dramatically reducing energy consumption. Over the course of the partnership, the university has averaged 2.9 million kilowatthours and 4.3 million pounds of CO₂ in savings per year.

"The product from the chiller plant is better, more consistent, and it's now based on real-time load rather than operator guesses," said Haltom. "Dynamically adjusting the chillers in real time has made a big difference in energy consumption."

Maintenance has also been simplified. Staff can remove a component from the OptimumLOOP® list for cleaning or repairs, and once restored, the component automatically comes back online.

Optimum's OptiCx® platform gives the facilities team deep visibility into plant operations down to the equipment level — enabling them to track active chillers, anticipate when the next chiller will be added or shed, and compare differential chilled water pressure across campus buildings.

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He continued, "Optimum Energy is top notch—their engineers really understand the chiller equipment, and OptimumLOOP® works very well, is flexible, and integrates seamlessly with our Siemens building automation system."

Project Benefits

- Energy savings
- Cost savings
- CO₂ emissions reduction
- Water savings
- Automated facilities operations
- Systems reliability
- Improved environmental control
- Performance drift mitigation
- Enhanced operational visibility