

# ISSA CIMS™ CERTIFICATION CASE STUDY



## COMPANY:

University of Georgia  
Physical Plant Division - Services Department

## HEADQUARTERS:

Athens, GA, USA

## NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES:

325



## Effective Management and Green Cleaning Standards Lead to Healthier Students and Documented Savings

In 2006, the University of Georgia's Physical Plant – Services Department faced a problem – the need to streamline operations and do more with less. While not an unusual problem for a university in-house cleaning operation to have, Kimberly Thomas, assistant director, recognized that it would force UGA to take a fresh look at the way they operated and require unique solutions, especially given the university's increasing focus on sustainability.

Thomas and her team decided that the most effective way to tackle the problem was to implement a comprehensive green cleaning program rooted in the principles of efficiency and resource conservation. Implemented campus wide in June 2007, the program was an immediate success and found great support among the university's 44,000 students, faculty and staff.

In successfully implementing the Green Cleaning Program, UGA went beyond traditional environmental purchasing and sought to adopt a truly comprehensive program that focused on training and education. Yet, a piece of the puzzle still seemed to be missing. After all, it is not easy to implement such a program across a campus that has more than 9.5 million square feet spread out over 615 acres. Recognizing the crucial importance of documentation and standardization of systems, UGA began looking for a program that could "bring it all together." It was at that time that UGA's primary cleaning products supplier, Athens Janitor Supply, suggested that the university consider ISSA's Cleaning Industry Management Standard (CIMS), recognizing it as a unique tool that could help UGA implement an overall management structure that focuses on quality and customer satisfaction, while helping reduce costs. Thomas and her UGA teammates immediately saw value in effective management and elected to pursue CIMS certification for a portion of the campus referred to as the "North Campus: Green Corridor"; certification which was expanded to the entire campus in 2010, as well as to include the CIMS-Green Building criteria. And UGA's successful pursuit of CIMS and CIMS-GB certification has proven to be beneficial beyond anyone's dreams, resulting in healthier facilities and documented savings of more than \$400,000 per year.

The first benefits flowed from the standardization of systems and procedures across the entire campus. "In order to maintain facilities to a high operational standard it is essential to ensure that everyone is dedicated to standardized best practices," notes Thomas. "CIMS was chosen as the method to standardize due to its variety of criteria and focus on customer service and has proven to offer tremendous value."

The university also found CIMS to be an excellent way to validate their existing in-house programs and set UGA apart as a true organization of excellence. "We focused on an effort to improve our overall operations," notes Al Jeffers, interim superintendent, building services. "It is very easy to think that an organization is operating efficiently from within, but an outside and qualified voice helps you see things from a different perspective."

Thomas and Dexter Fisher, director of services, agree. Thomas notes that the department already believed their business practices to be top notch, but did not have a way to validate such belief without a third-party certification like CIMS. Fisher takes it one step further and stresses the importance of UGA setting an example for others. "We really wanted to be the standard for other universities to emulate and, at the same time, add a true level of professionalism to our staff," he states.

“ I believe CIMS will help us continue to standardize overall business practices and present a positive image for physical plant operations and UGA as a whole. ”

— Kimberly Thomas  
University of Georgia

**BEST TIP  
FOR COMPANIES  
THINKING ABOUT  
CERTIFICATION:**

*The frontline workers are a very important part of your in-house cleaning organization, so involve them in the CIMS and CIMS-GB certification process, making them true professionals, and giving them ownership in how their organization performs and you will see a boost in morale.*

Yet, achieving CIMS and CIMS-GB certification was not easy and involved a total team effort, lead by Thomas and John Chittom of Athens Janitor Supply. Chittom, who is one of seven Athens team members to achieve CIMS "ISSA Certification Expert" (I.C.E.) status, literally walked through the Standard point-by-point to identify areas of strength and those where improvement was needed. Ultimately, Chittom found himself positioned as the person who directly assisted in bringing all the pieces together. Among the services provided by Chittom and the Athens team in their capacity as I.C.E.-certified professionals, were training, workloading, and helping define scopes of work and frequencies – all geared toward helping the university justify their budget and staffing requests. Thomas further stresses that success did not happen overnight. UGA first put together a team that developed a strategic plan of action. The plan then enabled the team to work toward a common goal, and handle any challenges that were encountered.

Thomas and the rest of the UGA team are certainly pleased with the results, pointing to improved overall business practices, better customer service and communication, and improved productivity as among the greatest benefits. Yet, it is the way that customers view the work of the services department and the impact that effective cleaning can have on the health and safety of occupants that has stood out the most to Deborah Massey, building training specialist. "Customers seem to look at us differently," she notes. "CIMS certification has really given us a sense of pride. Everyone is glowing and now we can definitively say that we are providing a safer, healthier and more friendly environment."

Fisher and Thomas agree and could not be more pleased with the appreciation of building occupants. Fisher points to the fact that staff is now viewed as industry professionals and administration recognizes the true value of the services provided. "The Administration sees the department as one that is willing to hold itself to the highest standards and is dedicated to making the university a world-class institution," Fisher says. Thomas highlights the positive responses from students and staff, noting that they "appear to be as proud of our certification as our employees are."

Thomas, for one, sees CIMS's role in the university's "green" efforts as the number one benefit for the future. "The greatest benefit as we move into the future will be the environmental sustainability aspects of the Green Cleaning Program and its interplay with CIMS and CIMS-GB," Thomas stresses. "Both programs and the university's improved daily management and operations promise to have a tremendously positive impact on the campus community as a whole, including both department employees and the people who use university facilities."

Overall, UGA points to the tangible, real-world budgetary and workplace health and safety benefits that have resulted from the university's commitment to green cleaning and effective management through CIMS. Specifically, Thomas attributes annual cost savings of \$414,000 to UGA's implementation of the programs. Further, UGA has enjoyed a reduction in lost time due to workplace injuries and recordable workers' compensation claims. In fact, from 2007-2008, lost time decreased from 981.5 to 858 hours, resulting in employees being available for active work for 123.5 more hours than in the year before.

Brenda Greshem, building services supervisor, is not surprised, as she has noticed an improvement in operational consistency and is impressed with its effect on maintaining a safe and healthy work environment. "Everything is now consistent in terms of keeping all areas safe, clean and healthy for ourselves and our customers. This helps us do a much better job satisfying the customers which is most important."

## About CIMS:

CIMS is the first comprehensive management and operations standard for cleaning organizations. Administered by ISSA and the American Institute for Cleaning Sciences, CIMS is a standard of excellence designed to help building service contractors and in-house service providers develop quality, customer-centered organizations.

The CIMS framework is built around five quality principles that have proven to be the hallmarks of well-managed, successful cleaning operations:

- Quality Systems
- Service Delivery
- Human Resources
- Health, Safety & Environmental Stewardship
- Management Commitment

Why should a company certify to CIMS? Daniel Wagner, director of CIMS for the ISSA, explains: "Implementation of the standard's elements affords an organization a tremendous opportunity to validate its management systems and processes. Professional, customer-centered cleaning organizations finally have a touchstone resource, a common rallying point around which all members of the industry can gather and work toward achieving an unprecedented level of professionalism and excellence."

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