

Financial Aid and Scholarships Program Review

I. Overview

A. Program Profile

The Financial Aid & Scholarship Office is responsible for the disbursement of more than six million dollars in federal funds and four million in state funds. This is an operation that is highly regulated at the federal, state and institutional levels. A broad range of tasks that are unique to the administration of Title IV programs have to be completed to maintain especially federal program compliance. In aligning with the mission of El Camino College and the federal and state mandates, there are several critical components to operating an efficient and effective operation. These include:

Staffing- Hiring, Training and Retaining

The employees are key stakeholders in any operation. They will not provide the best service to customers if they do not feel that managers are meeting their basic needs, including training and opportunities for career advancement. With this in mind, we continue to nurture our employees by providing training, regular feedback on job performance and inclusion in setting goals and objectives for the operation. The employees are more committed to a process that they help to create so there is more buy-in when they are involved in decision-making.

Technology- Using Current Software for Processing

The Department of Education sets minimum technology standards for hardware and software to facilitate the administration of Title IV aid. These standards are updated regularly and we are in compliance with the most recent standards that were recommended in 2004. Traditionally, we use the Board Financial Assistance Program (BFAP) funds from the Chancellor's Office to purchase new computers, printers, and other equipment.

Administrative Capability-Separation of Functions

Title IV regulations mandate the separation of duties between the Financial Aid Office and the Fiscal Services as they relate to the disbursement of Title IV aid. In essence, an institution cannot have the same person requesting funds from the Department of Education and disbursing to students. Furthermore, administrative capability encompasses the delivery of funds to eligible students in a timely and efficient manner. We are currently in compliance with the Department of Education standards of administrative capability and separation of functions.

In March 2006, a team consisting of Assistant Director of Financial Aid, Director of Accounting and accounting assistants assigned to Financial Aid and Fiscal Services attended the Department of Education Fiscal Services Training. They received financial aid updates and the new Financial Aid Blue Book, which is a compilation of federal rules and regulations governing the processing and disbursement of Title IV aid.

Coordinating Activities-Outreach, etc.

The Financial Aid Office offers Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) workshops on and off campus. These workshops are coordinated with other offices including the Office of Outreach and School Relations, Extended Opportunities Program and Services, Counseling Services and several feeder high schools.

The financial aid advisor who coordinates outreach activities works closely with Recruitment and High School Relations to visit as many feeder high schools as possible, especially during the peak periods before March 2 each year. March 2 is the deadline for students to apply for Cal Grants and students are required to complete their FAFSA and GPA Verification before the deadline to qualify for Cal Grants.

Compliance-Keeping Current on Changes in Laws and Regulations.

The managers and staff attend state and federal workshops and training to increase levels of competence, refresh their knowledge and reinforce good practices. There are several training tools available online to all staff and they are encouraged to increase their knowledge base and skill sets. Currently the Financial Aid Assistants meet at least weekly to discuss items that they have identified as critical factors that will impact successful outcomes. Similarly, the Financial Aid Advisors meet regularly to discuss processing rules and that are specific to their area of expertise.

B. Status of Previous Recommendations

The last Program Review in which Financial Aid & Scholarships participated was in October 2000. We are not aware of any formal recommendations at that time so in this report we will focus on the status of progress made in unit objectives that were identified in 2000.

Install Optical Imaging

Scanning documents and storing them in electronic format is one of the most significant accomplishments of the Financial Aid Office. This task was identified as necessary in 2000 but was not implemented until 2005 for two reasons. First, the feasibility study and evaluation process was detailed and time-consuming. Secondly, there was not funding to cover the cost of equipment and labor. In 2003-04, the California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office awarded additional Board Financial Assistance Program (BFAP) funds to community colleges across the state to increase outreach activities to needy families. A portion of these funds was appropriated to increase efficiency by imaging student financial aid files. This was an enormous undertaking so we went through the bidding process to select a company to perform the job. Precision Document Imaging (PDI) was selected and they recently completed scanning archived documents dating back to 2000-2001. This will meet the federal guidelines for record retention.

Improve Data Storage and Archiving

Data storage and archiving was a critical issue resulting from the conversion from Powerfaids (Financial Aid processing software) to Datatel Colleague in 1999. There were several years of student files archived in Powerfaids and stored on a very old server. There were two major obstacles that prevented the retrieval of student data from Powerfaids. First, the server was so old that that we feared that it would crash at any time. Secondly, the College Board, who owned Powerfaids was uncooperative because El Camino College did not have a current maintenance agreement with them. This is no longer an issue because all four years of student data to meet record retention requirements are currently stored in Datatel Colleague.

Remodel/Redesign Scholarship Office

The Scholarship Office was remodeled in 2001. This included the installation of new carpet and the purchase of new office furniture. This created a more pleasant work environment and an open and welcoming space for students. In conjunction with the new office layout, a station of four computers was created for students to apply for financial aid online (FAFSA on the Web) and to use scholarship software and websites to search and apply for scholarships. The Financial Aid Office purchased and installed adaptive technology in the Scholarship Office for students with disabilities. This afforded out office the opportunity to serve students with disabilities onsite.

The Scholarship Office had an ongoing challenge to stay open longer to accommodate the schedules of more students. Students, staff and managers were critical of the limited hours of operation. In response to the need for additional hours, we created an online Scholarship database which launched in February 2006. Students were able to apply online and the Scholarship Committee also reviewed applications online.

Improve Telephone System

The biggest complaint from students in 2000 was the inadequacy of our telephone system. Students and other stakeholders were on hold for extensive periods of time. This frustrated both the callers and staff and created additional stress for all. Fortunately when the new Automatic Call Director (ACD) telephone system was installed in 2003, the Financial Aid Office was selected as a “pilot” site. We saw the benefits of this new system immediately and there the complaints about our telephone system were drastically reduced.

Improve Reporting System

In 2000, the second biggest challenge was the limited support from Information Technology Services (ITS). It was very difficult to keep up with all the changes and constant upload of patches from Datatel without a technician assigned to Financial Aid. In 2000, the technical skills of the employees using colleague was significantly low and it was difficult to validate information. Fortunately Cabinet listened to our concerns and in 2002 a User Support Technician was hired to support Financial Aid. This person has received extensive training and work experience with Colleague and is now very skilled in creating reports, setting up new programs and installing or customizing software to meet the needs of the office.

C. Continuing Recommendations

Improve Timelines for Application and Delivery Systems

Students always ask how long it takes so long to receive their financial aid disbursements and the answer is “it depends”. In addition to the typical three or four month’s backlog of files for processing, the system must be set up properly every year to accommodate program guidelines and changes from the Department of Education and Datatel. In 2005-06, we experienced multiple delays in setting up Colleague because of software bugs and changes in the delivery system. As of May, 2006, we have completed all set ups and started processing files for 2006-07. We are three or four months ahead of where we were this time last year.

Increase Outreach/Inreach and Retention Activities

Our current organizational chart includes a financial aid advisor who is assigned the responsibility of coordinating outreach activities. This includes on-campus and off-campus workshops, orientations, high school parents’ nights and community service events. We coordinate outreach activities with High School Relations, Extended Opportunities Program and Services and other programs on campus.

The busiest time for recruiting is during the months of January and February each year. The financial aid advisor responsible for outreach/inreach activities schedules weekly visits to as many feeder high schools as possible during this time. She recruits other staff to assist and we have served all of the high schools that requested assistance and added a few more schools.

Promote Financial Aid Campus-Wide

We are increasing visibility on campus through participation in Flex Day activities, Financial Aid Awareness Fairs, dissemination of flyers and announcements of special events, a new and improved Web page, and participation in various campus events like High School Senior Day and Transfer Conference. We continue to work with other programs to increase the over-all awareness of financial aid.

Link Admissions and Financial Aid Applications

Our goal is for every student who applies for admission to the college to use the link to apply for federal and state aid simultaneously. Currently, the students who use *CCCApply* (online application for admission) can also use the online Board of Governors Waiver application and some students are using both. However, a large percentage of students who may qualify for aid are not applying for federal aid. If we can develop a link from the admissions application that can pre-populate some of the fields of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, it may motivate more students to apply for financial aid.

Automate More Functions and Services (SAP)

Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) is one of the most challenging functions of the financial aid processing. Federal regulations state that the institution is required to measure the progress of students receiving aid qualitatively and quantitatively. In the past we developed the SAP standards and had to measure each student's progress manually. This meant that we were manually reviewing approximately fifteen thousand records and each advisor had a caseload of almost two thousand files. It was extremely difficult to apply the standards consistently across the board and very often had to correct human errors. A major overhaul of the SAP review process two years ago culminated with the implementation of an automated SAP review in Fall '05. This has improved the effectiveness and accuracy of our SAP review tremendously during the first phase. The second phase was completed a month ago when 'warning letters' were mailed to students who are in danger of losing financial aid eligibility.

II. Program Data

A. Student/Client Satisfaction.

The Financial Aid, in collaboration with Institutional Research, created a survey instrument that measures student/client satisfaction with services delivered on the web. Our new survey has not been activated and is in the last stages of development. It appears that in order to facilitate program reviews appropriately, the Financial Aid Office will need to develop comprehensive surveys.

B. Student/Client Outcome Data

Analyze program data. Identify and list trends found in the data.

The Financial Aid Office has developed a list of performance indicators to track how we are conducting business and facilitating customer service in the Financial Aid Office. These performance indicators include the following:

Data Collection Points	Frequency
1. Financial Aid Programs (federal, state, institutional, private)	Each term
2. Financial Aid Orientations	Weekly
3. FAFSA Workshops	Weekly
4. Federal Work Study Workshops	Each term
5. MIS Data Submissions	Each term
6. National Student Loan Clearinghouse	Each term

7. Master Outreach Activities	Varies
8. Scholarship Office Workshops	Each term
9. Front Counter & Walk-in Visits	Daily
10. Phone Calls Received	Monthly (ACD)

Based upon the trends and performance indicator data (e.g., metrics) what changes, if any, should be made to improve the program? All program improvements must be tied to the data.

C. Campus/Community Collaboration

What program functions are dependent upon external collaborations or partnerships with other programs or services on campus or in the community? Describe the effectiveness of each collaboration or partnership.

The following collaborations have been developed and maintained on campus to improve the flow of processes in the Financial Aid Office. They are Fiscal Services/Financial Aid/ EOPS/ITS monthly meetings and regular communication with Admissions and Records.

Financial Aid and Fiscal Services have worked in collaboration to establish policies and procedures for disbursement and reconciliation of federal, state and institutional funds. Staff members from both departments meet monthly to address issues affecting the operation of the Financial Aid department. They also establish a disbursement and reporting schedule for each academic year. The departments also work collaboratively to complete all annual federal and state reports.

Managers of both Admissions and Records and Financial Aid meet as needed to resolve issues that affect both operations. Admissions and Records assisted in the implementation of the automation of Satisfactory Academic Progress which is critical to the review of files for financial aid eligibility. There were several missing student records that had to be completed and managers in both departments worked to resolve them.

How can program personnel strengthen these collaborations or partnerships?

One method by which these collaborations can be strengthened is by promoting the availability of Financial Aid staff to disseminate information at campus and community events. Financial Aid staff members also sit on various committees including High School Senior Day, Student Success Transfer and Retention Services (SSTARS), and First Year Experience (FYE). Another method by which we can strengthen these collaborations is by increasing the visibility of Financial Aid Office and interacting more with other divisions and departments.

What other collaborations or partnerships should program personnel pursue for program improvement and why?

Program personnel are not closely linked to the Counseling Department. There is a full-time counselor assigned to the Financial Aid Office but more staff members can benefit from a closer interaction between Financial Aid and Counseling.

Financial Aid and Admissions and Records currently meet as needed but this collaboration needs to be stronger to improve service to students. A more efficient procedure to address and resolve discrepant information between departments will ultimately improve retention. The directors of both operations are discussing the feasibility of having joint staff meetings at least once each semester. This will give staff the opportunity to meet their colleagues and brainstorm measures everyone can take to improve services to students.

Information Technology Services is a major ‘player’ in all that we do so strengthening the partnership with ITS is critical to the success of our programs and services. We have approached ITS about developing new methods of communicating with students earlier in the application process. For example, if a student applies for financial aid but has not completed an application for admission to El Camino College, there needs to be an effective way to communicate with that student.

D. Program Data Recommendation

No data was received from the Office of Research and Planning.

III. Program Requirements

A. Program Support

All programs depend upon the support of other departments on campus. What is the impact of those departments on this program and what can program personnel do to further strengthen those relations?

The Financial Aid Office has worked with the following departments to establish and maintain mutual support. They are Fiscal Services, Information Technology Services, Admissions and Records, Counseling Services and Public Relations and Marketing.

The Financial Aid Office meets monthly with Fiscal Services staff to discuss issues affecting both areas. The Accounting Technician assigned to the Financial Aid Office works closely with Fiscal Services Accounting staff to resolve discrepancies in student accounts and other tasks related to program reconciliation.

Information Technology Services (ITS) and Financial Aid have a good working relationship. There is a User Support Technician assigned to the Financial Aid Office and she works directly with ITS on programs related to Financial Aid.

Counseling Services has assigned a counselor to assist Financial Aid students in completing their Educational Plan, Lock-in List, and other counseling requirements. The counselor also spends a lot of time educating students about success in college and maintaining satisfactory grades.

Financial Aid managers worked closely with the Public Relations and Marketing in updating the Financial Aid Office webpage. Several new features were added and students are now able to check the status of their application, download forms, and apply for fee waivers online.

B. Facilities and Equipment

Describe the adequacy/inadequacy of the facilities and equipment available to the program.

The Financial Aid Office expanded two years ago to include two additional classrooms that were remodeled for office space. This is a temporary expansion for the next two or three years until the new Student Services Center is constructed.

The Financial Aid Office is mandated by federal regulations to meet the minimum technology requirement to adequately process student aid. The office upgrades computers regularly to meet this requirement and Board Financial Assistance Program (BFAP) funds are used to purchase necessary hardware and software.

List recommendations regarding facilities and equipment.

It is difficult to make recommendations at this time without the details of the layout of the new Student Services Center. There has been a lot of discussion about a ‘Welcome Center’ and an open floor plan.

C. Staffing

The Financial Aid & Scholarships Offices are adequately staffed since 2003 when additional staff was hired to increase outreach activities and expedite the delivery of aid to needy students. The managers got permission from Cabinet and the Chancellor’s Office to allocate funds from the Board Financial Assistance Program (BFAP) administrative allowance to hire more advisors and assistants to improve the operation and service to students. .

Personnel Trend

	Current Level		In 3 - 5 years		Retirement	
Personnel Type	# of Staffing	FTE	# of Staffing	FTE	# of Staffing	FTE
Full-time Faculty (Tenure Track)	1		2			

Full-time Faculty (Non-Tenure Track)						
Part-time Adjunct Faculty	3		5			
Full-time Classified Staff	22		25			
Part-time Classified Staff (Permanent)						
Part-time Classified (Temporary)						
Casual Employees	1		2			
Student Employees	4		6			
Manager	1		1			
Supervisor	1		1			
Temporary Project Administrator	0		1			
Faculty Coordinator	0		0			

FTE: Full Time Equivalent (i.e., 2 employees working at 50% would equal 1 FTE)

How does this data impact the program or the future of the program?

Currently less than half of the student population applies for federal grants. There are several reasons for this low participation rate including: eligibility based on family income; other qualifying criteria such as graduation from high school and maintaining satisfactory academic progress; submitting all required documentation before the deadlines.

Financial Aid staff will increase the outreach efforts on and off campus and will tap into the Enrollment Management Plan to increase the number of students applying for federal aid. At least fifty percent of El Camino College students qualify for the Board of Governors Waiver (BOGW). If more of these students apply for the Federal Pell Grant, we will see a significant increase in the number of applicants and recipients in the future.

A seamless link between the admissions application and the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) will facilitate this approach to increasing the number of financial aid recipients. Ideally, the admissions application (CCCApply) will pre-populate the demographic data on the FAFSA and applicants will have less data to enter.

Are program personnel current in their field? If not, describe what is needed to maintain currency and how it will improve the program.

Financial Aid employees attend regional meetings and workshops regularly. In the past two years, more employees have had an opportunity to attend workshops and receive updates and training to maintain currency in the field. The technical staff also has access to the Department of Education and National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Association (NASFAA) daily updates and newsletters. They also attend the annual California Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Association (CASFAA) and California Community Colleges Student Financial Aid Administrator (CCCSFAA) conferences and receive their newsletters.

Staff is encouraged to attend computer training classes offered through Staff Development. With the emphasis on improving Web pages and other electronic media, it will be helpful for more staff to attend training.

List and prioritize all staffing recommendations.

The staff requested additional training which they continue to receive weekly. Furthermore, the clerical assistants were reclassified to financial aid assistants which is in alignment with their regular duties. The combined reclassification and specialized training have better prepared the financial aid assistants to meet the demands of the counter.

The financial aid advisors were reclassified approximately four years ago and they continue to improve the performance of their duties. There is additional demand on the advisors with an increase in applications. Therefore, the assistants are receiving training to perform some of the basic functions in reading and interpreting ISIR data at the counter. This has proven to be helpful with accepting 2006-07 forms from students.

D. Planning

What major changes or trends might impact the program in the next five years? What program plans are in place or will be created to respond to major changes or trends?

California Community Colleges are currently facing a decline in enrollment. There are various factors that contribute to this phenomenon but it is difficult to pinpoint the real issues. Some believe that the increase in enrollment fees from eighteen to twenty-six dollars per unit is the culprit. Others say that in a good economy, more people go to work and fewer people go to school.

Financial Aid has been partnering with other outreach groups to increase financial aid awareness in the community. Datatel Colleague has added features that can be used to communicate with prospective students and families. This is an option that will be explored in more detail in the future.

El Camino College has developed an Enrollment Management Plan that will be the driving force for recruitment in the next five years. Financial aid is an integral part of enrollment and will continue to play a pivotal role in recruitment and retention.

Financial Aid has been supporting the Marketing and Public Information Office with radio, television, newspaper and other media announcements and advertisements. Traditionally we have used BFAP funds, especially since one of the goals of BFAP is outreach. We are able to link general campus announcements with a special focus on financial aid outreach.

What data, not currently provided, would be needed to improve program development planning? Explain the type of data desired, why it will be useful, and list the possible sources if known.

El Camino College recently conducted a survey of the community it serves. It would be interesting to see what people in the community are requesting and if we are able to meet their educational needs. For example, if more adults are requesting evening or weekend classes, the college may increase the offerings at these times. Financial Aid would offer special FAFSA workshops and orientations to these prospective students and thereby increase the number of students participating in the program.

The Research and Planning office can provide the data that is needed.

Describe how program personnel are made aware of what is happening in the program, future program plans, external/internal changes affecting the program, and changes that need to be made to enable the program to adapt and continue to be successful.

The Financial Aid staff attends annual conferences such as California Community Colleges Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Association (CCCSFAAA) and California Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (CASFAA). At these conferences they participate in information sessions relating to federal and state program changes.

The more technical staff (financial aid advisors) receives National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) daily news and quarterly magazines (Student Aid Transcript) as well as updates from the California associations. The advisors meet regularly to discuss external/internal changes to the program and implementation to maintain currency and compliance.

Explain how program personnel are involved in the creation and implementation of program plans?

Staff is actively involved in planning meetings and their recommendations are included in planning and implementation. In the past two years, the make-up of the committee responsible

for the annual planning meeting has been financial aid advisors and assistants. Managers provide some guidance and focus of the planning meetings but the committee has successfully introduced changes in the way we do business.

Describe how the program's plans tie into student learning outcomes.

The Financial Aid Office continues to focus on educating students and the community in all aspects relating to applying for financial aid and maintaining eligibility. There are several approaches to this critical task. The first one is to encourage all students, especially first year students applying for financial aid, to participate in Financial Aid Orientation. The facilitator describes the steps from application to disbursement, meeting deadlines, maintaining Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), and other important information. At the end of the 30 to 45-minute session, the participants complete a survey in which they comment on the presentation.

First year students also meet with an academic counselor to develop an educational plan. This prepares the students to focus on their educational goals and complete their program of study in a reasonable timeframe.

This year, the Financial Aid Office implemented an 'early alert' warning that was mailed to all students in jeopardy of losing eligibility for reasons such as attempting excessive units, grade point averages below 2.0 or excessive non-grades. Students who did not understand the intent to the letter called or came in and had the opportunity to meet with an advisor who explained the letter in detail.

E. Program Requirement Recommendations

IV. Recommendations

The Financial Aid Office has successfully completed the transition from paper files to document imaging. This was a very expensive project and it was funded through Board Financial Assistance Program (BFAP) administrative allowance. The negative aspect of utilizing BFAP funds for these costly projects is that less funding is available for other projects. Therefore, we need to request additional funding to augment our operation budget. See Request for Funding section at the end of this report.

The Financial Aid Webpage was updated to include current information and links to the online Board of Governors Waiver application and Free Application for Federal Student Aid. Students are using the links to check the status of their applications, download forms to complete their files and other tasks. We do need to increase marketing of the online Fee Waiver application and

re-visit the procedures for this application. Currently less than 10% of Fee Waiver applicants use the online application. This is mostly because students need to provide hard copies of tax returns and other income information to complete the application and approval process.

The Financial Aid staff started processing files for 2006-07 earlier and students will be receiving award letters this summer. They have started the processing of files and are waiting for spring grades to be posted. In the meantime, the award letters are estimated until satisfactory academic progress reviews are completed.

Automating Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) review was a huge project and it took more than two years to complete. It is up and running and significantly improving the efficiency and program integrity of our office.

Request for Funding

The Financial Aid Office is hereby requesting an augmentation of funding in the following categories:

Supplies (\$2,000)

The Financial Aid Office is requesting an augmentation of our supplies budget for 2006-07. This allocation has been reduced each year from \$8,132 in 2004-05, \$4,232 in 2005-06 to \$6,400 in 2006-07. We have an increase in applications and the number of students served each year so our supplies budget should be increased in proportion to the number of students served.

Equipment (\$2,000)

In the past, we allocated a portion of our BFAP budget to purchase new equipment. Currently, with the reduction of our BFAP allocation, we are unable to set aside funds for new equipment. All of our BFAP allocation is dedicated to salaries and health benefits for eight full-time employees in the Financial Aid Office and 50% of the salary for an employee in EOPS.

Overtime (\$10,000)

There is no budget allocation for overtime. In the past, staff was allowed to earn overtime for special projects and evening hours of operation. Now staff can only earn compensatory time when they are required to work on special projects and during peak times.

Staff training (\$10,000)

Each year, the staff attends the regional California Community Colleges Student Financial Aid Administrators (CCCSFAA) and the California Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Association (CASFAA) conferences in December. This year, we do not have any funds for training and conferences in our departmental budget to augment staff development funds for training.

Consulting (\$15,000)

The Financial Aid Office continues to promote the advancement of technology and new ways of educating students, enhancing services and collaborating with other student services. We have made much progress in automating the application and delivery processes for financial aid but there is one more project that will add to our services. It is to automate the packaging process- auto-packager. Tyler Robbins has done a lot of the preparatory work in this arena and will need a Datatel consultant to complete the project. Auto-packager will identify the files that can be automatically processed and will reduce the waiting period from six or eight weeks to two or three weeks.

Return of Title IV (R2T4) (\$20,000)

Students who receive financial aid and withdraw from classes before completing 60% of the semester are required to return a portion of the funds they received. The institution is also responsible for these withdrawals and is required to return a portion of the funds that were disbursed. The institutional liability has been increasing over the last three years and I have been requesting additional funds to reimburse the Department of Education. I am requesting assistance to cover outstanding institutional liability which is currently in excess of \$17, 000.