EL CAMINO COLLEGE

FINANCIAL AID 2011

PROGRAM REVIEW

Program Description

1. **Describe the program emphasizing the program's objectives and how the program supports the college's mission and vision statements, strategic initiatives, and core competencies.**

    The Financial Aid Office is a highly regulated and complex operation with a broad range of responsibilities. In addition to keeping abreast of federal and state mandates, this office has a myriad of responsibilities to the institution and the extended communities. Responsibilities include educating students about the financial aid application and delivery system, creating services to support student success and graduation rate, and assisting students to create a balance between work, school and personal responsibilities.

    In the past year, the Office has experienced a dramatic growth in the student population as well as the Financial Aid applicants. This rapid growth created a number of challenges, especially related to effective communication with students. It appears that many students are reluctant to utilize email as the primary means of communication. Another challenge is a more timely delivery of funds to qualifying students. The third challenge is in coordinating Financial Aid programs and services at the Compton Education Center.

    With these challenges in mind, Financial Aid is proposing the following objectives:

    A. Educate students in all aspects relating to applying for financial aid and maintaining eligibility.

    B. Send warning notices to students who are in danger of losing eligibility for aid

    C. Evaluate why students are not making satisfactory academic progress.

    D. Promote Financial Aid Campus-Wide.

    E. Increase Outreach and Retention Activities

    F. Ensure that financial aid students meet with a Financial Aid Counselor to complete Education Plans, Lock-in-Lists, and other counseling requirements that will prepare students to focus on their educational goals and complete their program of study in a reasonable time frame.

2. **Describe the student population served by the program using available data.**

   The Financial Aid student population is reflective of the college's population. The Federal Pell Grant Program is the largest grant program at El Camino College based on data for 2010-11. It consists of 61% female and 39% male. 44% of Financial Aid students are of Hispanic descent, 28% are African-Americans and less than 10% are identified in each of the following ethnicities-White-non-Hispanic, Asian, or multi-ethnicity. 39% of Financial Aid students are under 19 years old and 40% are between the ages of 20 and 29 years. 45% of students receive the Board of Governor's Fee Waiver and 12% receive the Federal Pell Grant.

   The number of students who complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) has increased by at least 20% in the past two years. However, many students do not qualify for the Pell Grant because they do not meet Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) standards.

3. **What happens after students participate in the program's activities? If applicable, address whether students are successful in meeting their educational goals.**

   A. Students who receive financial aid participate in various student services programs, i.e., Counseling, EOPS, Special Resource Center, Career Center, Transfer Center, Project Success, Puente Project, FYE, etc.

   B. Students who receive financial aid receive AA/AS degrees if they complete the requirements for the program of study.

   C. Students who receive financial aid receive Certificates degrees if they complete the requirements for the program of study.

   D. Students who receive financial typically transfer to four year universities and colleges.

   E. Students who receive financial aid and meet with a financial aid academic counselor receive electronic Education plans and lock in lists when applicable.

   F. Students who receive financial aid are provided access to various workshops designed to increase their knowledge about the steps, resources and choices they have to define, clarify or achieve their goals at ECC and beyond as well as a better understanding of Financial Aid satisfactory academic policies

4. **List notable achievements that were linked to the College's Strategic Initiatives which occurred since the last program review.**

   A. Successfully completed transition from paper files to document imaging.

   B. Increased online services for financial aid students, including online forms and fee waivers, and responses to Web Q&A.

   C. New computers were updated with financial aid restricted web sites for student use.

   D. Implemented ongoing Online FAFSA workshops.

   E. Opened financial aid computer lab for students to apply online, make corrections, and participate in online orientations.

   F. Hired two new full-time counselors in December 2009.

   G. Send email communications instead of mailed letters to students.

   H. Updated financial aid website.

   I. Incorporated financial aid information into the New Student Welcome Day orientation and the Student Enhancement Program.

   J. Completed training and continued collaboration with EOP&S Counselors on "Lock-in-List" procedures for students.

   K. Financial Aid and Basic Skills counselors made classroom presentations regarding frequently asked financial aid questions, review general procedures, and to discuss Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policies.

5. **What prior program review recommendations were not implemented, if any, and why? What was the impact on the program and the students?**

   A. Hershey (systems) works closely with the Financial Aid office to image at least four years of student files. Online forms are the second project in priority to be assigned.

   B. Hershey is currently working closely with Admissions & Records and Financial Aid.

   C. Hershey is experiencing difficulty with migrating documents in Laser fiche to Hershey Singularity.

   D. Student Surveys with positive remarks on customer service and confidentiality

E. A more streamlined and efficient financial aid application and delivery process. The plan to link enrollment and financial aid applications was not feasible because the Free Application for Federal Aid (FAFSA) is the required federal form. CCC-Apply only asks if students are interested in receiving financial aid information, not directly apply for financial aid.

Student Learning Outcomes (SLO)

1. **Describe how program personnel are engaged in the creation, discussion, and review of SLO Statements, assessment results, and reports.**

   Staff are informed and encouraged to participate in the creation, discussion, and review of SLO statements, assessment results, and reports. An SLO Committee was formed to encourage understanding and development of potential SLO's. SLO statements are reviewed in staff meetings, office email communications and placed on posters displayed for the staff and public to view. SLO assessment results are shared with staff for examination in both electronic email and hardcopy format. SLO reporting sections one through three are circulated and shared with staff at each interval to encourage participation and maintain interest.

2. **How does the program ensure that SLO's are assessed consistently?**

   It is a challenge! The importance of SLO's are discussed in staff meetings as an opportunity to improve the program and to make real, substantive changes to processing, and customer services. SLO's are also used as a means for staff to be more fully involved in the financial aid processes by making positive changes in financial aid programs. Although this is a relatively new practice for El Camino College and the Financial Aid Office, it is mandatory that SLO produces some measurable results so that staff can see and understand that SLO's are assessed and producing positive recommendations for change.

3. **Have the SLO assessment results indicated the need to change or modify components of the program? If so, were the changes implemented?**

   Yes. The first SLO was successful and produced quantifiable results based upon feedback from a survey, and Google statistics. Based on analytical data from the survey, website, and online services the program revamped the financial aid website to make it easier for students and families to learn and understand the financial aid process, staff rewrote the Financial Aid Handbook, and are working on updating online financial aid student orientation to help meet the needs of the "YouTube" generation.

Program Improvement

Explain what changes need to be considered to improve the program.

1.   **What activities has the program engaged in to improve services to students?**

     The Financial Aid Office implemented the following changes since the last program review:

     A.   Opened a Financial Aid Lab

     B.   Optical Imaging using Hershey Systems

     C.   Email blasts and regular email communication

     D.   Auto-packager processing for non-verification files

     E.   Stricter and more consistent SAP appeal guidelines

     F.   Debit cards for financial aid disbursements

     G.   Increased the financial aid counseling staff to two full-time and one part-time counselors

     The department is always behind in scanning. The Hershey System's Singularity is extremely straining to the eyes of staff who review files daily. An improvement of the system is needed or a change to a system that is more effective and not challenging to the user's eyes.

     Ideally, scanning of documents should be done after the file has been processed. Currently, the system is flawed for many reasons. First, there is no clear accountability for who scans what and where documents are at a certain time. In addition, the image quality is extremely poor. At this time, those who work with imaged documents on a regular basis complain of eye strain and headaches. This situation is ripe for holding the El Camino College District accountable for worker's compensation cases. Too many staff hours are wasted looking for documents or trying to read poorly imaged documents.

     The Financial Aid Office ordered new computers with dual monitors so staff can access Datatel screens and Hyland imaged documents concurrently. We are waiting for ITS to distribute the new computers.

2.   **What activities has the program engaged in to improve services to students?**

The Financial Aid Office has hired two new full-time counselors and one part-time counselor, new funds delivery system, email instead of hard copies, improved appeal process, opened a computer lab, greeting students in line to determine if they can be helped faster.

3. **How have program personnel used metrics to improve program services? (Provide metrics from the last four years).** (See attachment)

3. **If applicable, explain any patterns in student success, retention, and persistence in terms of student characteristics and program objectives and discuss plan<u>ned</u> responses or changes.**
    This is not applicable.

Program Environment

1. **Discuss the program environment, including the relationship among program staff and students and involvement with other programs or support areas.**

    <u>Relationship among staff</u>

    Overall, staff members within the Financial Aid Office report having a positive working relationship and generally get along with one another. However, staff members reported that the working relationship and environment lacks teamwork. During peak times, when the office is highly impacted with applications and students needing services, some staff members will not show up to work. The unplanned absences force other employees to leave their work to fulfill the role of the absent employees. When staff members have to leave their job responsibilities to fulfill the roles of other employees it causes the office to get behind and this increases the time it takes to process students' financial aid. The Financial Aid Office continues to provide monthly staff meetings, trainings and staff development activities to improve the skill sets and attitude of the staff. Employees are encouraged to engage in discussion and planning of events to develop a more cohesive teamwork. Currently the front counter staff is meeting weekly to address improvements in customer service.

    The working relationship among staff is also hindered when staff members are not held accountable for their work. This leaves the weight of the work load on other staff members. These occurrences require other employees to complete financial aid processes accurately to ensure students do not suffer from the frequent mistakes made by their colleagues. In addition, during peak times there is no sense of team to help one another with the high volume of students waiting in line. A contributing factor to the lack of team work is that is seems as if staff members do not understand how their work influences the work of others.

Relationship among students

Advisors spend time with students once or twice a week. About two to three advisors will work with students in workshops and informational presentations. Management meets with students' everyday over the phone, via email, and in person regarding various problems with the financial aid office. The front office assistants constantly interact with students over the phone and in person for the duration of the work day.

Students who come into the office to turn in documents or gather information are usually frustrated with the long wait in line or the multiple visits they have had to make to the office to complete their financial aid paperwork. After they wait in the long line to turn in paperwork, they become additionally aggravated when they learn of the wait time to receive their funds. Students who need their financial aid immediately express concerns about purchasing books and supplies necessary to attend class.

The relationship between students and the front office personnel is not generally positive or pleasant. Staff members do not exhibit the necessary skills to work with students effectively. Often times, staff will treat students based on negative interactions with other students. If a staff person assumes that a student is not properly reading his or her email or checking his or her MyECC account, the staff person will treat the student different and in some cases overtly judge the student negatively for not knowing how to access information about financial aid.

Some students have been surprised to encounter a pleasant experience at the front counter of the financial aid office. There have been instances when a student told a Financial Aid Assistant "…thank you for not treating me like a number". This student was surprised to have a positive experience at the counter and receive useful information. In addition, on a separate occasion, a student working with a front counter employee indicated that he considered dropping out of school due to the difficult process of financial aid and the multiple visits he made to the office. In this case, the student had to complete his paperwork and turn it into the office a second time because the office lost his files.

Students may not be comfortable sharing their personal information with a staff person at the front counter. The counter space does not provide the necessary privacy for the students as they share personal information about their financial situation. A person can easily hear the student sitting to the side of him or her when they are sitting at the front counter.

Students do not have accessible contact with financial aid personnel. If students simply have questions about financial aid or if they need to make an appointment they are forced to wait in a long line unless the computer lab is open. However, not all staff operates the lab consistently. Some staff members allow students to freely

use the computer lab and other staff members will visit with students one at a time. This causes students to continue waiting in line. When students are new to the college and new to financial aid, more often than not, they will have to wait in line to receive basic information about financial aid. These students are also at risk of having a negative experience at financial aid, which may jeopardize their probability of continuing to attend El Camino College.

There was a major change in the Financial Aid Lab schedule in Fall 2011. Only one employee is scheduled to assist students at the lab and he is trained to have students sit at a computer so they can learn how to check the status of their files and how to read award letters and other correspondences and documents.

Relationship with other programs

The relationships with other programs on campus do not effectively serve students. Often times, students will come from another office on campus with misinformation about their financial aid status. The reporting structure within Enrollment Services creates disconnect between programs. There is little cross-training among departments.   This causes students who are involved in other programs receive inefficient information on Financial Aid.

The Financial Aid Office will develop quarterly or semester meetings with representatives from the areas that work closely with students. This will include the Counseling Department, Admissions and Records and Information Technology Systems. We plan to implement this before the upcoming Spring 2012 semester.

2. **Describe the number and type of staff and faculty (include current organizational chart).**

   The financial aid office consists of 20 employees including the Financial Aid Director, Assistant Director, Student Service Advisors, Accounting Technician, User Support Technician, Senior Clerical Assistant, Financial Aid Assistants and an Administrative Assistance. (See attached organizational chart for the reporting structure.) In addition, there are three Financial Aid Counselors, two full-time and one part-time, all of whom report to the Dean of Counseling and Student Services.

3. **Describe facilities or equipment needs for the next four years.**

   The following is a list of equipment needs for the next four years:
   a. Additional scanners
   b. Reconfigured space to allow for more privacy when working with the

students

c. An available printer for student use in the lab
d. Available office supplies at each front counter workspace

4.   **Describe how well the scheduled hours of availability meet student demand and indicate the specific hours the program operates.**

Financial aid staff members are able to meet the student demand during the hours the program operates.

5.   **Describe the influences that external factors such as state laws, changing demographics, and the characteristics of the students served have on the program and   services and how the program addresses these factors.**

The highest population of students served by the Financial Aid Office is between the ages of 19 and 20. This newer generation entering community college is more adept to new technology as a means of communication including social networking and text messaging with cell phones. These factors may influence how the Financial Aid Office effectively communicates with the next generation of students attending the college. The second highest population is between the ages 25 and 39. The age gap between the populations of students served by Financial Aid means that it is also important to use traditional forms of communication such as email, mail, and verbal.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Present a brief summary of the program's strengths and areas for improvement. List all recommendations in a prioritized manner for subsequent placement into the program's annual plan.

1.   **Summarize the program's strength and areas that need improvement.**
The Financial Aid Office has adequate staff and equipment to serve students. However, there is a need for private areas for students who need to discuss sensitive information. Front counter work stations need to be configured for exemplary student service.

The Financial Aid Office needs to operate in a proactive manner rather than a reactive manner. Offering more application workshops and starting the awarding process sooner will help to minimize the number of calls and visitors to the financial aid office during the summer months. There is a need to contact faith-based organizations to reach non-traditional students. Strong promotion of applying for financial aid earlier with support from the financial aid staff is also needed.

Customer service training and scripting is needed to reduce unnecessary frustration and delays experienced by students. The annual planning meeting is focused on improving customer service for internal and external customers. One positive approach to

developing better work relationships is to organize the staff into teams. The team members bring various strengths that will ultimately be more productive to overshadow the weaknesses. This approach will need to involve all staff, regardless of job functions.

3. **List prioritized recommendations. (Provide proposed organizational chart if appropriate).**

   A. Provide more financial aid workshops prior to March 2nd.
   B. Improve the Auto-packager fro Pell Grant programs to start the awarding process earlier
   C. Review and train for customer service protocol
   D. Provide private space for students with sensitive issues.
   E. Hire a third party servicer (ProEd Solutions) to assist with processing files that are not selected for verification.

4. **X   Continue Program**