

FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT REVIEW 2017

Financial Aid Mission Statement

Central Oregon Community College promotes student success and community enrichment by providing quality, accessible, lifelong education opportunities.

Section 1: Mission Fulfillment

Student Success: The Financial Aid Office assists student success by helping students obtain financial support to cover educational costs. Reducing financial barriers contributes to student access and completion.

Section 2: Department Purpose

Key Duties and Responsibilities

- Administer financial aid and Veterans Affairs (VA) programs:
 - Understand aid availability by program and student type.
 - Receive and manage electronic FAFSA applications (over 9,000 for 2015-16)
 - Responsible for over a dozen funds with a total annual disbursement that has exceeded \$50 million (2011-12).
- Application processing:
 - Answer questions via phone, email and walk-in.
 - Help students file FAFSAs via personal appointment or group workshops.
 - Verify eligibility through review of documents such as tax returns, etc.
 - Provide financial literacy and debt management strategies.
 - Mitigate a student's special circumstances.
 - Certify eligibility for veteran students.
- Manage receipt of funds to help students meet institutional costs.
- Provide student employment opportunities through the Federal Work-Study program.
- Ensure compliance with laws, regulations and policies:
 - Federal.
 - State.
 - Institutional.
- Serve as a resource for:
 - Students and parents in our district
 - Advising and Orientation
 - Instructors, departments and special academic programs
 - COCC Foundation
 - High school counselors through Financial Aid Nights.
 - Community-based college access programs administered locally by organizations such as NeighborImpact.

Staffing Structure

- Staff
 - Consisting of 8.5 FTE, which include a Director, Assistant Director, Financial Aid Advisor, Tech Analyst and five Financial Aid Specialists.
 - Located primarily in Bend, but also available Monday/Thursday in Redmond.
 - Hours available are Monday-Friday, 9am-5pm (Wednesday to 6pm)

Section 3: Strengths and Accomplishments

Sense of Team: The Financial Aid Office has prioritized learning to work as a team to address a wide variety of tasks. As a team, staff are encouraged to learn to develop personal expertise in specific areas and at the same time communicate with other team members when issues are identified.

Improving Efficiency: Building on the concept of a team-based approach, we have developed improvements to workflow. Sometimes automation is the solution while at other times, an adjustment in procedures works. These improvements free up staff time to focus on other urgent needs and allow us to meet our student response time benchmarks. For example, we recently reviewed our document policy for the Verification process. We realized we were requiring more documents than what was needed by federal guidance. This freed up staff time and reduced the waiting period for students. In addition, we changed the timing of our disbursement schedule on the tuition due date so that start during the day until waiting after hours. This change is a more efficient use of our time and also allows us to post awards sooner in the day which in turn reduces student anxiety.

Ensuring Compliance: As a team, we also place a high value on compliance. Staff are encouraged to identify and fix practices that may create a liability for the College in an audit. Recently, our efforts were put to the test in two important reviews. In February 2016, we participated in a peer review overseen by our national organization (NASFAA). While the review identified issues needing attention, overall the comments were positive. In addition, in June 2016, the College received its first federal program review in more than two decades. The results of the program review could be considered the best-case scenario. There were no financial liabilities assessed and the review was expedited by the auditors.

Section 4: Department Challenges

Growing Staff: During the past few years, the Financial Aid Office has seen a dramatic turnover in staff. Most of these departures were positive, as they were the result of retirement and promotion to other campus positions. Regardless of the reason, more than half the staff have been hired within the past two years and do not come from a student services background. The relative lack of experience has reduced the overall efficiency of the department and has contributed to an increase in processing errors.

Constant Change: While change can be considered a constant in the field of student financial aid, the frequency and magnitude of these changes have put added pressure on the department to meet our obligations. Here are a few of the recent changes that have demanded a significant amount of staff time: the new Oregon Promise Grant, Gainful Employment regulations, subsidized loan usage limits, the recent ORSAA application for undocumented students, Early FAFSA and Prior-Prior Year, changes to Oregon Opportunity Grant eligibility cutoff and recent changes to the OSU-Cascades financial aid consortium agreement.

Loan Repayment: In recent years, the student loan default rate for community colleges has reached historic highs. If the default rate gets too high, federal aid for the institution can be terminated. One Oregon community college almost had its funding cutoff for this reason but was able to bring the rate down low enough to avoid sanctions. With a relatively inexperienced staff and the unexpected prospect of new changes, it is difficult for our department to adequately develop and execute a strategy to reduce our institutions default rate, which currently stands at 25.3%.

Section 5: Department Outcomes

1. Students will be able to recognize the Financial Aid Advisor as a source of assistance as measured by CCSSE data.
2. Students will implement their knowledge of the financial aid application process by applying for aid through the FAFSA (or ORSAA) as measured by the percent of applicants as tracked by the Financial Aid Dashboard.
3. Students will be able to articulate that they are aware of the policies and processes needed to obtain and keep financial aid as measured by the SENSE data.

Section 6a: Measurement Tool and Timeline

1. CCSSE data for 2017 has been provided to the College but additional detail/breakdown is needed to make an informed analysis of trends related to this outcome. We will work with IE staff to determine how and when this information might be made available.
1. The Financial Aid Dashboard is updated weekly and will provide a complete picture of the 2017-18 award year when it concludes in June 2018. At that time, we will review the number of FAFSA/ORSAA applicants as compared to the population of certificate and degree-seeking students.
2. SENSE data for 2018 will not be available until 2019. When it has been provided to the College, we will compare the results to the 2015 survey.