

## FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATIVE UNIT REVIEW 2022

### COCC Mission Statement

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

### Section 1: Mission Fulfillment

#### Financial Aid Mission Statement

COCC Financial Aid Department assists certificate and degree-seeking students to obtain financial assistance from a variety of sources to meet their educational expenses at the college.

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 Veteran Affairs (VA) programs:
  - Understand aid availability by program and student type.
  - Receive and manage electronic FAFSA applications (over 6,100 for 2021-22)
  - Receive and manually manage ORSAA application data (about 50 for 2021-22)
  - Responsible for over a dozen funds with a total annual disbursement of over \$15.5 million (2021-22), including an additional \$7.5 million in HEERF funds.
- Application processing:
  - Answer questions via phone, email and walk-in
  - Help students file FAFSA/ORSAA's via personal appointment or group workshops
  - Verify eligibility through review of documents such as tax returns, etc.
  - Mitigate students' special circumstances
  - Certify eligibility for veteran students
- Manage receipt of funds to help students meet educational costs.
- Provide student employment opportunities through the Federal Work-Study program.
- Ensure compliance with Federal, State and Institutional laws, regulations and policies.
- Serve as a resource for:
  - Students, parents, guardians and local advocates
  - Advising and orientation
  - Instructors, departments and special academic programs
  - COCC Foundation
  - High school counselors through Financial Aid Nights.
  - Financial literacy and debt management strategies
  - Community-based college access programs administered locally.

#### Staffing Structure

- Staff
  - Consisting of 8.0 FTE, which include a Director, Assistant Director, Financial Aid Advisor, Tech Analyst, Senior Financial Aid Specialist, two full-time Financial Aid Specialists and one full-time Veteran Certifying Official.
  - 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 and develop personal expertise in specific areas and communicate with other team members when issues are identified. The Financial Aid Office has also made it a priority to cross-train specific daily and weekly tasks so every position has a backup to ensure consistent, streamlined processing.

Customer Service: The Financial Aid Office prides itself on providing timely, accurate and thorough services for our students. As a department, we prioritize students by returning phone messages within the hour and email messages within one business day. Although college enrollment has declined over recent years, the complexity of student questions requires devoted time in addressing all the student needs. This includes listening with patience and empathy and may include referrals to other college and community resources to help address their financial needs. Continued training on college and federal policies is provided throughout the year to ensure all staff have up to date accurate information.

#### Improving Efficiency:

Due to the global pandemic and remote work requirements, we have implemented new processes and procedures to improve access and workflow. For the 2022-23 aid year, we have moved to electronic student files. We continue to use fillable PDF and Dynamic forms, allowing students a more streamlined experience when completing their financial aid requirements. These improvements also allow staff easier access to student information when assisting students over the phone or email.

### **Section 4: Department Challenges**

Changing Staff: The Financial Aid Office continues to see consistent turnover in staff, which is not uncommon in the industry. However, financial aid takes about a year to train the basic concepts necessary for most positions. In addition, working remotely for over a year delayed training progression for staff hired within the year of moving to remote work. The on-going turnover has the potential of some tasks being overlooked during transitions. All team members are required to review and update processing documentation on an annual basis and team members are encouraged to review essential tasks on a regular basis to reduce the potential issues or oversight.

Ensuring Compliance: As a team, we place a high value on compliance. With financial aid being a complex, highly regulated program and the number of new team members, the department

has the potential for compliance or processing errors. While I am confident we have good training and audit procedures in place, we will need to continue to be diligent in tracking and review our work. Staff are encouraged to identify and fix practices that may create a liability for the College in an audit. In June 2016, the College received its first federal program review in more than two decades and there were no financial liabilities assessed. The review continues to encourage us to be diligent in learning and implementing policies appropriately. As a department, staff regularly attend FSA, NASFAA and OASFAA events and webinars to stay knowledgeable on new and changing regulations.

Constant Change: While change can be considered a constant in the field of financial aid, the frequency and magnitude of these changes have put added pressure on the department to meet our obligations. A few of the recent changes that have demanded a significant amount of staff time include beginning rollout of FAFSA simplification regulations, the national emergency and COVID provisions and changes in State funding. These changes challenge internal department communication and communication to our colleagues and community.

Decreased enrollment and FAFSA/ORSAA filing: Enrollment continues to decrease across higher education, specifically in the community college sector. We can speculate that the pandemic and economic strain have contributed to the decrease. In addition, the overall high school population growth has slowed, meaning there are fewer graduates and of those high school graduates, more are taking 'gap' years to explore other interests. While FAFSA/ORSAA filing is down for graduating high school seniors, filing is down even more significantly for returning students. Again, the on-going pandemic and current economic issues may be contributing factors.

## **Section 5: Department Outcomes**

1. Students will be able to recognize the Financial Aid Office 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 MS Access and the Financial Aid Dashboard (Tableau beginning 2022).
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.
4. Military connected students will be aware they can receive both GI benefits and Federal Financial Aid benefits by completing the FAFSA.

## **Section 6a: Measurement Tool and Timeline**

1. Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) data for 2021 has been provided to the College by Institutional Effectiveness (IE). We will compare this data to the 2017 CCSSE results for analysis.
2. The Financial Aid Dashboard is updated weekly and will provide a complete picture of the 2021-22 award year when it concludes in June 2022. At that time, we will review the number of FAFSA/ORSAA applicants as compared to the population of certificate and degree-seeking students.
3. Survey of Entering Student Engagement (SENSE) data for 2021 will be available in 2022 to assist us in assessing our third outcome regarding students understanding financial aid processes and policies. When the information is provided to the College, we will compare the results to the 2017 survey.
4. FAFSA completion rates for our military connected students will be collected using Argos and Access for 20-21 and compared to 21-22.