

SAN DIEGO
MESA COLLEGE



Program Review

Summary and Reflections with Unit Goals, Action Plans, and Updates

Student Services - Financial Aid

Executive Summary

Describe the successes and challenges your unit has faced since the last comprehensive review.

For the last year, the Financial Aid Office has been stressed beyond its capabilities holding on to any possible source of internal positive encouragement and motivation while providing services to students, staff, faculty and the community in accordance with our office and San Diego Mesa College's mission.

The effects of the pandemic continue to affect the office operation. Flexibilities granted by the U.S. Department of Education trickled down throughout the first year followed by a series of updates to the same document which was hard to follow given that the document's date was never updated. The guidelines provided expiration dates by either per required process, or by aid program, or by flexibility to a regulatory mandate. At the same time, aid processing is completed through Campus Solutions, the student's pillar from Oracle's PeopleSoft ERP. We are highly dependent on Oracle's programmer's ability to quickly analyze, understand and apply these changes for system implementation. Because the flexibilities granted under COVID-19 were temporary changes and not statutory or regulatory changes, it was left up to colleges and universities to make up "fixes" or temporary procedures. The lack of technical support on a highly regulated office added even more stress to the office staff as well as District staff assigned to work with us.

High levels of stress is felt and physically manifested in the staff when responding to leadership mandates to address the daily emails which continued to be in the hundreds especially when the same student sends multiple emails in a short period of time if the staff does not immediately replies to the initial request adds an unnecessary trying to be everything to all students, SDCCD and Mesa's leadership in a vain attempt to resolve unrealistic expectations and demands have not faded away upon the full return to campus. The combination of all these stressors has unfortunately, affected the staff by creating a heavy burden to bear with many leaving the college, the district and/or the field. In all my years at Mesa, the Financial Aid Office has never experienced such a high employee turnover with the inability to attract qualified personnel.

Staffing, since June 2020 our office has systematically been losing staff by attrition and is currently severely understaff with only half of the classified contract staff available to serve students pre-COVID. The reasons for leaving are as diverse as we are. Some people left due to retirement, a couple found other jobs that were less stressful and more fulfilling, others left because they completed grad school and found jobs in their field and two left because they felt betrayed, abused, and their rights trampled by SDCCD policies that pushed back employees over students.

Work Environment, for the Financial Aid Office is a hazardous, hostile working environment where the level students and parent's attitudes, sense of self-entitlement, high levels of pervasive demands combined with unnecessary, unwarranted verbal abuse, intimidation and threats makes working in our office a dreadful action. Sadly, in addition to the abuse sustained from students and parents, three office staff members were also victims of the same level of abuse from a co-worker that is no longer with us. The experiences were never reported due to fear of increased antagonism.

It will be difficult for our office to overcome many of the challenges we face. The reality is that we are experiencing a reflection of the lack of knowledge and understanding by the individuals entrusted with the responsibility to assert the truthful equality amongst job classifications. We are part of a higher education organization that fails the most basic concepts of a "learning organization" (Peter Senge, The Fifth Discipline). We cannot accept in confidence, the current "status quo", the belief that the broad volume of knowledge and expertise required by each and every one of our staff, per classification, is the same to the requirements and expectations for any other staff in the same or similar classification with similar pay rate in other departments. This deceptive perception is as illogical as to say that all fruits are apples.

Summary and Reflection

Despite the significance of things worthy of celebration, they are not enough to mitigate the cost associated with doing more with less in uncertain times and with no benchmark and sense of support to guide us.

If applicable, describe any major curricular or service changes your unit has engaged in and the impact of those changes since the last comprehensive review.

Our office continued following federal guidance with regards with flexibilities granted by operating both in-person and remotely for students who could not otherwise complete processes in person per location.

Our office was also extra careful in analyzing course of action for students whom had physically relocated to other states (without notification and/or updating their physical address in the student's portal to keep their CA Resident designation), as well as into states in which the SDCCD cannot enroll students due to regulations under "State Authorization" (34 CFR 600.9). After disclosing their physical location requesting the school to forward federal financial aid checks, the vast majority of students became verbally combatant when federal regulations were explained.

If applicable, describe the impact of any new resources (human, fiscal, etc) on the unit and/or action plan implementation.

The high level of turnover positions has been detrimental to the office morale as we train new staff only to lose them within one or two years forcing us to start the process all over again. Historically, it takes one (1) to two (2) years for an entry level staff to be fully capable of working with little or no supervision and up to three (3) years for an SAT-FA to achieve the same level on independent work. The working rules, environment, supervision and hours were violently changed by the Declaration of the National Emergency and World Pandemic. COVID changed society's way of working in ways never expected. Our office staff is mentally and physically exhausted seeing help being hired, hoping for a reprieve, welcoming and training the new staff only to see the same people leaving perpetuating a vicious cycle. Even under these circumstances, the staff's integrity and sense of responsibility makes them hesitant to take a leave of absence. This is exemplified by the care and cautiousness demonstrated when requesting a leave, by the understanding that someone else will be taking up additional duties to avoid student complaints against the office for taking care of ourselves. In recognition of having a limited staff, recognition of human frailty and as an effort to mitigate the hopelessness and burn-down, our office opted to have "windows of operation". We are here open from 8:00 am – 6:00 pm. Because we are not omnipresent, we answer phones from 10:00am - 12:00 pm and from 2:00pm to 4:00pm, staff at the counter rotates every two hours which is a shorter period of time when compared to pre-COVID times. It was also agreed that we must take hold of old truths and take care of ourselves first before we can help anyone else. Until the office is fully staff in accordance to federal regulations found and biding under 34 CFR 668.16, we will continue to exercise sound judgement and not over-extended ourselves just to reduce complaints when we are not working fast enough or the processes are not happening immediately.

Effective November 7, 2022 and upon full return to campus, most of the flexibilities granted under the National Emergency Declaration, began to fade. These flexibilities, for the most part ended once the President of the United States signed on 4/11/2023 that the end of the national emergency with an effective date of 5/11/23. There are a few exceptions to the flexibilities for the Federal Work Study that will remain in place past 05/11/2023.

If you assess OUTCOMES, please confirm that the outcomes have been reviewed for accuracy. If you do not assess Outcomes, skip this question.

Reviewed & Accurate

Related Documents for Charts and Graphs

Executive Summary Complete

Yes

Summary and Reflection

Data Reflection

Trends observed in program/service area's data.

Our office is seeing an increase in the time needed to walk through recent high school graduates or continuing college students experiencing financial hardship due to the economy climate. The student demand for one to one assistance completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the CA Dream Act Application (CADAA), asking for guidance on additional resources available, or for information on professional judgements on adjustments to the EFC formula known as Request for Income Reductions has also increased. Unfortunately, the results or possible assistance with students requesting Income Reductions is not as positive as we would like to see as in many cases the financial hardship is not the result of loss of income but rather a result of high cost of living in San Diego outpacing middle class, wages and salaries and to some degree business owners net gains. According to the 2022-2023 EFC formula, for a student to receive an “automatic 0 EFC” (maximum aid eligibility) the parents of a dependent student or a married independent student, their income threshold is set at \$27,000 or less to qualify. To receive a “Simplified EFC formula” analysis and calculation, a dependent student and their parents or an independent student, married with both, the student and spouse working, cannot have a combined income above \$49,999 and not have filed a Schedule 1 with their Income Tax Return. Both income thresholds cause students earning wages above these numbers financial stress while in school as they attempt to complete programs that may allow them to earning living wages for the area and properly provide for their families causing students to either distrust the information received or perceive the office as one that has no interest in providing students with the so much needed assistance when nothing could be further from the truth. Nevertheless, with no internal funds allocated to the office, or the allocation of State aid funds not associated with eligibility, awarding and disbursement of other state aid programs, our ability to assist is nullified and we refer students to other service areas for plausible financial assistance.

Describe any equity gaps in the data. Are there differences and/or patterns observed by demographics (e.g.race/ethnicity, gender, age, etc.)

Data collected by the Financial Aid Office is not segregated by ethnicity, gender or other demographic traits. The Financial Aid Office data to a certain degree reflects the economic status of aid applicants. San Diego like many other cities in California and a few around the country has a high cost of living. According to The Bureau of Economic Analysis, the average cost of living index for the US is 100. Cities and areas with higher costs have an index above 100. San Diego’s Index is 116. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the median income in 2021 was \$69,021. The middle-class range in San Diego, Chula Vista and Carlsbad is \$61,000 to \$182,000. San Diego’s poverty income level is \$28,950 and Pell Grant and other “need based” programs designed by Congress in the 1960’s fail to account for the disparities on cost of living, income and the EFC formula. Consequently, many San Diego area students struggle to make meets end are not “eligible” by definition to may of the grant programs.

Describe the discussion(s) that took place about the unit's learning outcomes assessment data.

We had none other than to confirm the need to carry forward the same SLOs due to the “open enrollment” policy and transient nature of students.

Related Documents for Charts and Graphs

Data Reflection Complete

Yes

Practice Reflection

Describe current practices your program/service area has engaged in that you believe impact the above data trends and equity gaps.

For the last 3 years, our office has highly depended on the Outreach Ambassadors, Peer Navigators, and EOPS staff for assistance with guiding students through the FAFSA and CADAA application process as well as referring students to the Financial Aid TV pages on our website. Unfortunately, our office’s current staffing level, that even at its peak was insufficient, do not give room have any practice in place that can enable our office to meet the

Summary and Reflection

student's demand in services and traffic evidence demonstrates that watching the videos on Financial Aid TV on how to apply for aid is a not well received.

What other factors (internal or external) might also impact the above data trends and equity gaps?

This is too early to correlate. The process landscape for financial aid offices across US colleges and universities will drastically change with the road to implementation of the provisions incorporated into the 2022 FAFSA Simplification Act and the 2022 FUTURE Act. These Acts make significant changes to students and families applying for aid while behind the scenes schools will be working with two completely different methodologies, applying principles of estimating and awarding aid to student records.

Related Documents for Charts and Graphs

Practice Reflection Complete

Yes

Mid-Cycle Updates

Are there any edits or updates to the Executive Summary above?

Are there any edits or updates to the Data Reflection above?

Are there any edits or updates to the Practice Reflection above?

Summary and Reflection

Increase FAFSA / CADAA Application

Unit Goal: Increase the number of college enrolled students complete the FAFSA / CADAA application.

Goal Status: Active

Beginning Year: 2022 - 2023

Projected Completion Year: 2025 - 2026

Action Plans	Action Plan Update
<p>Action Plan Status: Active</p> <p>Action Plan: 1. Increase the number of aid application workshops in partnership with EOPS. 2. Increase visibility, marketing, exposure of the 24/7 easy access of the Financial Aid TV videos to the student population.</p> <p>Action Plan Cycle: 2022 - 2023, 2023 - 2024, 2024 - 2025, 2025 - 2026</p>	

Completion of FA Files

Unit Goal: Increase the number of students who complete their financial aid files and whose files have Mesa as Campus of Record (COR).

Goal Status: Active

Beginning Year: 2022 - 2023

Projected Completion Year: 2025 - 2026

Action Plans	Action Plan Update
<p>Action Plan Status: Active</p> <p>Action Plan: 1. Develop additional notifications by social media to enrolled students, grant eligible students of their need to complete their files.</p> <p>Action Plan Cycle: 2022 - 2023, 2023 - 2024, 2024 - 2025, 2025 - 2026</p>	

Successful SAP Appeal

Unit Goal: Increase the number of students satisfactorily submitting an SAP appeal whom have Mesa as Campus of Record (COR).

Goal Status: Active

Beginning Year: 2022 - 2023

Projected Completion Year: 2025 - 2026

Summary and Reflection

Action Plans	Action Plan Update
<p>Action Plan Status: Active</p> <p>Action Plan: 1. Submit for approval to the District SS Council updates and modifications simplifying the Satisfactory Academic Progress for Financial Aid Recipients policy (34 CFR 668.16).</p> <p>2. Update the SAP appeal's form and distributed materials to reflect the changes to policy.</p> <p>3. Update the SAP appeal's workshop presentation and materials.</p> <p>Action Plan Cycle: 2022 - 2023, 2023 - 2024, 2024 - 2025, 2025 - 2026</p>	