Cerritos College
Spring 2021 Financial Aid (FA)
SELF-STUDY EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Financial Aid Mission

The Financial Aid Office at Cerritos College is here to provide students and the community a better understanding of financial aid programs and services available. Our department is responsible for the review and dissemination of financial resources to assist students in meeting their educational expenses and achieving their educational goals. We are committed to administering our programs with integrity and professionalism. We value and take pride in the diversity of our students and the support we provide in promoting student success.

FA Program Review Process

FA participated in the Program Review self-study process throughout the Spring 2021 semester utilizing the CAS Standards. The purpose of the review was to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the department and develop a plan for improvement. From the 12 content areas of the CAS standards, 39 indicators were reviewed in detail to determine the degree to which the program met each standard.

The Self-Study team was led by Pamela Sepulveda, Case Manager of Falcon Basic Needs. Her role was to facilitate an honest, nonjudgmental discussion with the team to arrive at a fair rating of each of the various sections.

Members of the team included:
- Pamela Sepulveda, Case Manager of Falcon Basic Needs, Self-Study Lead
- Yvette Tafoya, Division Manager
- Jamie Quiroz, Department Manager
- Juan Mercado, Financial Aid Systems Analyst
- Natalie Gordon, Financial Aid Program Assistant II

- Anabelle Horton, Financial Aid Specialist
- Leo Lopez, Financial Aid Technician
- Dr. Sheila Hill, Faculty/Counselor
- Colleen McKinley, Director, Educational Partnerships and Programs

Following an introductory meeting the team met seven times to review evidence, and during a final meeting reviewed preliminary findings and the draft final report. Evidence for each indicator was gathered prior to the meeting for which that indicator was reviewed, and during the meetings the team reviewed the evidence, discussed if the standard was met, and held general discussion about opportunities to improve or enhance services to meet the standards. For the rating of each indicator, the group provided individual scores, which were then discussed, and a consensus score was determined. At the end of this summary is a chart with the summary of ratings for each indicator reviewed.

Summary of Findings

Main Conclusions

FA provides students with a well-trained, professional team of experts in their scope of practice. The FA leadership provides ample training and support for the staff to be successful in their duties. Moreover, the FA team is innovative and well connected to ensure students have continuity of care.

Self-Study Limitations

A limitation this team experienced throughout the self-study was the coordination of the various staff schedules. The strength of the process is having a multidisciplinary team which also brings competing schedules. At one point, voting on the standards was postponed to the next meeting to ensure a team vote was diverse with professional representation.

Additionally, with such a comprehensive review came many standards to review. The level of detailed discussion that accompanies each standard is robust. This team often felt rushed to stay on the targeted timeline- balancing thorough discussions with time management needs.

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Lastly, this being a newer process without well established guidelines was a strength and limitation for this team. It seems each Program Review team is defining and improving the process to work within their particular scope which means the process is open to interpretation. That said, the strength lies in exploring the process to best adapt to the department needs.

Primary Strengths
The following were identified as strengths of FA.

2.3 Program Structure and Framework

Within this last year, the FA organization chart was updated due to various changes to its structure. FA demonstrated adaptability and resiliency with these changes. Staff were continually trained to assist in understanding roles and responsibilities beyond basic job descriptions- furthering their ability to assist in identification of workload balance, efficiency, and accountability. Most impressively, while facing the structural changes, the FA Department was proud to report no audit findings at the March 2021 Board Report all while processing over 16k emails from students since distance learning due to COVID-19.

5.1 Inclusive and Equitable Educational and Work Environments

FA has a history of advocating for diversity, equity, and inclusion trainings dating back to the late 1990's. A discussion centered around operationalized efforts for students in the physical space of the FA office and the FA innovative leadership with task force development (i.e. Basic Needs, UnDocuAlly, and FA liaisons assigned to special population groups). Programmatic shifts have been made with a DEI focus including, but not limited to: FA utilizes a Ubiduo and translator phone for student accessibility to staff and Qless Program to assist in electronic Financial Aid lines via text.

5.3 Advocating for Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Financial Aid reported a continued interest to engage in DEI involvement and advocacy through team brainstorms, staff involvement in the various ally program, and the exploration of new partnerships (i.e. targeted Financial Wellness workshops for students within the Falcon's Nest).

6.1 Leadership

Evidence was provided to show that when workload increases, staff assignments are shifted to provide best practice for students. This type of supervision allows for cross training and a supportive team environment. Further, when the FA Department shifted into new leadership, the new Dean met with each staff member about their roles, needs for support, etc., demonstrating that the department leadership was accessible.

7.3 Personnel Training and Development

FA is proud to share the educational levels of the FA staff. Evidence cites all FA staff have a minimum of AA degree with most staff having a bachelor's or master's degree. Leadership has encouraged and supported continued educational degrees with flexible schedules and mentorship.

8.1 Collaboration

The FA Department is proud of their high level of collaboration. They have embedded liaisons that support various special population groups and multiple other task forces, advisory groups, and other departments.

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Primary Areas of Improvements

The following were identified as weaknesses of FA, as they were scored as 'Partly Meets.'

1.1 and 1.2 Mission Statement

The team identified an opportunity to include the mission on more student facing outreach platforms (emails, letters, outreach items).

While the college mission was last updated 2 years ago, the FA mission has not been reviewed for about 10 years. Therefore, there are potential missing links between the college and FA Department missions. Further, the current FA Department goals have broadened beyond the current mission statement. FA mission does not include diversity, equity, and inclusion practices while "equity minded pathways" are cited in the college's mission statement. Lastly, the FA mission is missing points on student development and learning.

4.3 Assessment Plan and Process

A barrier within FA is that technology is not always streamlined and efficient. There are still several processes that could be automated at this time. Specifically, the data warehouse utilized by the research office does not include FA data creating a reliance on FA to generate and analyze their own data. Consequently, FA reviews and interprets their own available data and will continue to improve as the institutional data collection process improves.

4.4 Gathering Evidence

While FA does gather data and discuss it during staff meetings- moving forward, the FA Department would like to gather additional data from students during outreach activities. Additionally, the team found a need to memorialize the data as it is currently kept in email. The team discussed the FA Operational Calendar and the opportunity for improvement to support the assessment and data indicators.

4.6 Reporting Results and Implementing Improvement

While the team discussed various recent efforts around equity, inclusion, and responsiveness, the decision was made that the FA Department could be more intentional with these forms of assessment. Additionally, a discussion also focused on how to engage other staff, faculty, and administration outside of the FA Department regarding assessment.

5.4 Implementing Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

With such strong links to DEI, the team discussed FA could improve on being more intentional on goals to access, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Student success definitions could include intentional language on goals.

6.4 Strategic Planning

While the leadership and supervision is one of the impressive strengths of the FA Department, there are some identified gaps with strategic planning. As previous cited in Section 1, it is recommended that FA review and revise their Mission Statement. Further, FA does not currently have a vision statement.

10.1 Funding

Current funding of Financial Aid staff is diverse and limited. The team expressed concerns over the sustainability of the department with this type of funding.

As FA pursues the professional standard for technology updates, the proposals are not always funded. Although, FA has a history of having a fulltime Programmer for IT support, this is not the current staffing reality for the department. In the 2021 proposed Unit Plan, FA has recommended obtaining a fulltime Business Systems Analyst for IT support.

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FA Best Practices

There were many areas of strength within FA that are identified as best practice in the field. The following list showcases notable efforts by the department.

- FA has strong evidence of collaboration between departments through the development of liaisons for special populations and student groups. This is an exemplary system that demonstrates the value and importance of partnerships to build collaboration and break down silos.
- A vital component of the FA team is the cross training of staff to adjust to workload demands, schedules, etc. This provides important team building and staff with the support needed.
- Engagement with targeted communities, current and future students, staff/faculty, community stakeholders and partners sets the FA Department as leader in outreach.

Final Recommendations

List, in order of priority, and briefly describe improvements needed and the actions to be taken, noting completion dates and responsible position(s), as well as resources needed.

1. Utilize additional student facing platforms to promote the mission statement.
2. Update the mission statement to align it with the college mission statement and reflect the equity minded pathways of diversity, equity, and inclusion along with student development and learning.
3. Develop a Financial Aid Vision Statement.
4. Develop goals with an intentional focus on access, diversity, equity, and inclusion.
5. Gather student data when providing services and memorialize all data points in a department based and accessible platform.
6. Include assessment and data indicators on an Operational Calendar to document the participation, statistics of business processes, etc.
7. Continue to request funding for a fulltime Business Systems Analyst for IT support.

Summary of Ratings

Part	Indicator	Rating
1.1	Program and Services Mission	Partly Meets
1.2	Mission Statement	Partly Meets
2.1	Program and Services Goals	Meets
2.2	Program Information and Services	Meets
2.3	Program Structure and Framework	Meets
2.4	Program Design	Meets
3.1	Program Contribution to Student Learning, Development, and Success	Meets
3.2	Student Learning and Development Domains and Dimensions	Meets
3.3	Assessment of Student Learning and Development	Meets
4.1	Establishing a Culture of Assessment	Meets
4.2	Program Goals, Outcomes, and Objectives	Meets
4.3	Assessment Plan and Process	Partly Meets
4.4	Gathering Evidence	Partly Meets

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4.5	Review and Interpret Findings	Meets
4.6	Reporting Results and Implementing Improvement	Partly Meets
5.1	Inclusive and Equitable Educational and Work Environments	Meets
5.2	Organizational Aspects of Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion	Meets
5.3	Advocating for Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion	Meets
5.4	Implementing Access, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion	Partly Meets
6.1	Leadership	Meets
6.2	Management	Meets
6.4	Strategic Planning	Partly Meets
7.1	Staffing and Support	Meets
7.2	Employment Practices	Meets
7.3	Personnel Training and Development	Meets
8.1	Collaboration	Meets
8.2	Communication	Meets
9.1	Ethical Statements	Meets
9.2	Ethical Practice	Meets
9.3	Legal Obligations and Responsibilities	Meets
9.4	Policies and Procedures	Meets
10.1	Funding	Partly Meets
10.2	Financial Planning	Meets
10.3	Financial Management	Meets
11.1	Systems Management	Meets
11.2	User Engagement	Meets
11.3	Compliance and Information Security	Meets
11.4	Communication	Meets
12.1	Design of Facilities	Meets
12.2	Workspace	Meets
12.4	Facilities and Equipment Use	Meets

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