CAL POLY POMONA
OFFICE OF FINANCIAL AID & SCHOLARSHIPS
PROGRAM REVIEW RESPONSE

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INTRODUCTION

The final report of the review from AACRAO provides a sound, objective review of the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships. The review highlights areas of accomplishment and provides areas for improvement, with accompanying recommendations, in order for the office to streamline its current business practices and enhance others already in place. This response reviews and comments on the observations and recommendations.

PROJECT SUMMARY

The assessment made an effective review of pertinent documents, resources, and interviews to formulate the recommendations to be considered for moving forward in the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships. In the review, special attention was paid to the following four areas:

1. Scholarship advertisement and awarding processes
2. Financial aid packaging and awarding policies per discrete student populations
3. Satisfactory academic progress assessment
4. Staffing roles and distribution of office responsibilities

Within the recommendations, three top priorities for action were identified:

1. Address staffing shortages
2. Increase scholarship awards and enhance recruitment practice for Honors students
3. Re-engineer processing to automate communications and eliminate paper files

Key in moving the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships forward will be the consideration of these actions, along with other recommendations in the report, the strategic plan and the current economic climate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Administrative Capability
- As soon as budgets will allow, resume professional development at NASFAA for Diana Minor
- As soon as budgets will allow, resume professional development for Diana, Maryville and others at CASFAA

Response

In the current budget climate, professional development outside the campus has been put on hold unless cost is not a factor. Staff participate in inter-office training, training with other campus departments and training provided by off-campus entities with no cost associated to the office.

We have in place an annual training/staff meeting schedule which allows all staff to train and disseminate information about our practices to other offices. We are also trained by other offices regarding practices and policies that affect our office. We have guest speakers from across campus who educate the staff with a myriad of information about the campus.

Scholarship Programs
- Cal Poly Pomona should consider increasing the amount of its Honors Scholarships to the same level as its competing CSU campuses
- To become more competitive in the selection of students, Cal Poly Pomona must increase the number of qualified applicants it recruits
- Over time, move toward a process and time line for awarding scholarships that utilizes all possible information on financial need and merit to make the best use of university, federal and state resources
- Develop policies on the interaction of aid sources that clearly outline to students, Cal Poly Pomona departments and internal staff how outside scholarships, institutional aid, federal and state aid interact, when students receive more than one type of gift aid
- Determine the staffing (professional and student) required to adhere to stated deadlines for scholarship awards

Response

The Honors College has begun to restructure the current level of awards to offer more competitive amounts which are in line with other prestigious campus awards. The Honors Program concurs with the assessment that early outreach is needed to inform and educate students about the benefits of the Honors Program and what it has to offer. The College realizes the need to attract and increase high achieving students and is implementing a comprehensive plan with the Office of Admissions and Outreach to achieve this increase.

The campus is developing a comprehensive communication plan that points out the benefits Cal Poly Pomona has to offer. The campus is currently working with Hobson's on developing these communication pieces. The campus is also re-structuring a current and prospective student website which will host enticing information about Cal Poly Pomona and its diversified environment.

The University concurs with the recommendation regarding process and time line for awarding Scholarships. We have made improvements in this area, but there is still room for coordination between the academic colleges, the Foundation and the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships. Continued structure will need to be formulated over the next several years in this area.

The Director concurs with the recommendation of developing policies that clearly outline how all scholarships, grants; Federal and State aid interact when more than one type of aid is received. This could be a piece added to the website which is where students will go for this type of information.

The Director is aware of the staffing needs in the area of scholarships. In order to continue and improve services in this area, this area will require at least 2 dedicated staff members with an additional support staff member and a student assistant. With the retirement of the Scholarship Coordinator, a new position has been developed at a higher administrative level. The incumbent will work closely with the Director and the AVP, Enrollment Services to address these issues. Steps will be taken this fall to develop a common timeline and to develop a new scholarship database for students to obtain comprehensive information about the scholarships awarded by the university. Coordiation with the colleges will follow these first steps.

Policies and Procedures
- Policies and procedures should be contained in a comprehensive manual (online or printed) that defines how financial aid is awarded at Cal Poly Pomona
- Policies demonstrate how Cal Poly Pomona treats each award fund, determines recipients of awards and how it complies with federal and state regulations, as well as institutional policies
- Utilize two model documents to assemble/compile a policy and procedures manual
- Procedures should provide a roadmap for each part of the financial aid operation

Response
A current document is in place for packaging guidelines. The document is updated as new developments arise. Staff has access to the document via a shared folder. The Director agrees that the document could include more information with details of how processes work.

A more thorough review will take place based on the recommendation to utilize the NASFAA templates along with our current document to create a more robust, and comprehensive document. The completion of this enhancement is expected by spring 2011.

Satisfactory Academic Progress Policy
- Conduct a study of student progress that is focused on those students who do not meet the 2.0 GPA requirement at 36 credits
- Provide clear information for students on how many total credits are required to each degree, such that the unit cap requirements can be seen in the context of the minimum credits required

Response

Satisfactory Academic Progress has moved from a stand-alone access database product to a module within PeopleSoft. This module has functionality that the previous database did not. One of the new features will allow mid-year notification to a student who may appear to be moving in the direction of not making satisfactory academic progress. This notification will include a link to a student survey to obtain feedback about the reasons for insufficient process.

A document is in process that will explain how many total credits are required in order to continue on financial aid along with explanations of the required GPA and excessive units.

Staffing
- Cal Poly Pomona is thinly staffed to meet the needs of its students and is operating an efficient organization
- Over time, increase staff by between 2-6 FTE

Response

As noted in the review, the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships at Cal Poly Pomona is thinly staffed compared to other CSU campuses of similar size. The most pressing need as identified in the report is in the area of scholarship assistance. The two other areas in need are the counseling and service team in that respective order.

The Director concurs with the addition of 2-6 full time employees to bring staffing levels up as compared to other like institutions and will request additional staff as campus funding becomes available.

Staff Training
- Continue the cross-training program and assure that as many as possible are able to attend it from all levels of the office
- Consider setting aside a time for staff training during the week

- Do not allow training times to become processing "catch-up" times in the office

<u>**Response**</u>

The office develops a training/staff meeting schedule annually and will continue to do so in order to provide as much cross training and education about the campus as possible. All staff is required to attend the trainings/meetings. There is a set day and time for these sessions to take place on a bi-weekly basis. The dedicated meetings/trainings are held in the conference room where staff are away from their desk and can be active participants.

Financial Aid Packaging

- Conduct a financial aid analysis that assesses the impact on and association with enrollment
- Review the job stream of financial aid packaging and batch sequence as many of the 13 jobs as possible

<u>**Response**</u>

The office would appreciate the opportunity, when funding permits, to work with AACRAO Consulting to develop and/or create an analysis tool to assess the impact of financial aid with enrollment trends. This may be something to begin at a lower level and move toward a high level assessment as funding permits. The Director will consult with AACRAO Consulting for further recommendations and cost.

As the campus is moving to the 9.0 version of PeopleSoft, several of the processes performed in the current 8.9 version have been enhanced and may address the observations in the review. Batch processing in several areas is one of the changes between the two versions.

Work-Study Program

- Centralize the pool of work-study positions under the Financial Aid Office budget
- Reinstitute a job fair on campus at the start of each fall term
- Review packaging policies to expand the number of students who are awarded work-study funds

<u>**Response**</u>

The Director does not concur with the centralization of work-study positions under the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships budget. This would require a major shift in budget allocations for the campus and would hiring office staff to transfer operating funds for the hiring of work-study students to the Office of Financial Aid. Plus, needs may change each year and each individual office would be more appraised of their needs more than the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships. Departments should keep the autonomy to budget and hire as they deem necessary.

The campus (Career Center) does sponsor a job fair each year, but not at the level it has in the past. Based on the current economic climate, changes needed to be made as to the structure of the event. The Director does agree that when the current climate improves, a much larger job fair would be a benefit to students, the campus and employers.

Verification
- Employ a formula to determine which of the ISIR records flagged by the Federal Processor Cal Poly Pomona will select for verification
- Assure that all records received that contain data which is part of the verification process are placed into the review process

Response

The office verifies the required 30% of ISIR records and, on occasion, goes slightly above that level. Documents that are submitted as change in income files then become verified resulting in an increase in the percentage of files verified. A report is pulled each month to determine the verification percentage. Funds are budgeted in the verified and non-verified categories at approximately 65% and 35% respectively. As the year winds down, funds are moved as needed from one area to the other.

The Director concurs that all documents which are part of the verification process will be verified even if not determined by the Central Processor.

Student Loan Program
- Continue the good progress already made to convert to the Direct Lending program
- Anticipate that there will be many current students who do not complete new master promissory notes for the DL program
- Develop a process to load entrance counseling data directly to PeopleSoft and eliminate manual entry of counseling records
- Develop a collections/due diligence process for Perkins Loans that extends beyond the initial attempts to contact students
- Each year, evaluate the loans that have not been collected by the collections agency and assign some portion of that portfolio to the Federal Department of Education
- Review the process for reconciliation of loan accounts in FFELP and map the new process for DL funds with the Student Accounts Office

Response

The office continues to move in a positive direction with the transition to Direct Lending. All testing has been completed and the first transmission for 2010-2011 occurred in the beginning of September.

Communication has been sent on a monthly basis to students informing them of the process. We have also updated our website to provide instruction information about the Direct Loan process. The office will continue to communicate the new process and assist students as needed.

Testing is in progress to determine loan entrance counseling data that can be directly loaded into PeopleSoft to avoid manual entry of this data.

The Administration of the Perkins program including entrance counseling requirements and the collection process is in the area of Student Accounts and Cashier Services. The recommendations will be forwarded to the Director in that area for review and possible implementation.

Reconciliation takes place weekly between the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships and Student Accounts and Cashier Services. Our office will coordinate the reconciliation process for Direct Loan with assistance from other campuses as needed.

Document Imaging

- Cal Poly Pomona should re-engineer the document receipt process
- Convert to Hershey's Singularity product as soon as possible
- Explore further how document imaging can be used to streamline workflow in verification
- Establish document folders based upon item

Response
Due to staffing shortage issues, the current staff in Enrollment Technology is not able to take on the volume of documents received in the Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships. The Director will take steps to explore this recommendation as the climate changes over the next year.

Document Processing

- Following the imaging recommendations, accept and post any document received from students via mail or in-person
- Use the PeopleSoft checklist to automate communications about documents received and a reminder to check the Bronco Direct portal for the list of missing documents

Response

This recommendation will be reviewed with the Enrollment Technology staff.

Outreach

- Cal Poly Pomona should provide financial aid night presentations to all high schools in its service district that desire them
- Expand the focus of financial aid nights to exceed process (FAFSA or other applications) and funds (Pell, Cal Grant, etc.)
- Cal Poly Pomona should participate in the national College Goal Sunday program, sponsored by Lumina and the YMCA, with partnership from NASFAA (among many other higher education and community organizations)
- The Financial Aid Office should join Outreach in participating in the CSU Super Sunday program

Response

The Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships provides financial aid nights at several schools in and out of our service area on a request basis. As a standard, we provide these presentations to the high schools in the Pomona Unified School District.

The current presentation address process, funds awarded and services offered. The Director concurs that the presentation could include more detail in other areas such as financial literacy. The office will work on including new areas for the 2011-2012 presentations.

When staffing and funding allows, the office has participated in several local area College Goal Sunday events. With limited staff resources, we are not able to participate in the programs out of the local area.

The Director acknowledges that communication and coordination between the Outreach and Office of Financial Aid & Scholarships should take place as not to duplicate recruitment efforts. One area of concern may be the timing of recruitment efforts and application season for financial aid.