

Higher Learning Commission
Self-Study Questionnaire/Report for Non-Instructional Units

Non-Instructional Unit: Financial Aid & Student Employment Office

Individual(s) Completing the Questionnaire/Report: Carol Miller, Financial Aid Director

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Describe in a paragraph or two what your unit does (i.e., the services it provides).

The Financial Aid & Student Employment Office assists students whose personal and family resources are not adequate to cover the expenses involved in attending UW-Whitewater. Financial aid available through our office consists of grants, loans, and work-study. Funds for these programs come from the federal government, the State of Wisconsin, the university, and outside agencies. The office offers financial counseling and information on other potential sources of financial assistance such as scholarships and alternative loans.

The student employment coordinator assists students in finding jobs both on and off campus. On-campus jobs consist of work-study, a federal financial aid program and the regular payroll program. Individual counseling is provided for all students needing help with the financial aid application process. Special attention is given to those students who study abroad.

2. Who is/are the constituency/ies you serve, and approximately how many of each constituency do you serve annually? (e.g., students, academic departments, classified staff, etc.)

- Students—6,500
- Most administrative departments (over 50) as well as most academic departments (over 50)
- Classified staff (100)
- Parents of students (5,000)
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3. Overview and evaluate the adequacy of the human, physical, and fiscal resources your department deploys to serve students and meet other programmatic needs by answering the questions below:

Human Resources

Evaluate the general adequacy of the human resources (i.e., the # of employees (including student help) and their skills) relative to the unit's ability to serve the constituencies identified above and achieve other programmatic goals. Do this by assigning a number between "1" (completely inadequate) to "9" (completely satisfies needs).

7 1-9

In a paragraph or two, discuss why you've assigned the score you have. Include, in particular, a discussion of unique strengths as well as important needs not being met or opportunities not being explored because of limitations.

We have five administrators—1 director, 1 associate director, and 3 assistant directors; 1 PeopleSoft liaison with Technology & Information Resources; we have 3 program assistants (support staff), and approximately 16 students each semester. We lost a program assistant position about two

years ago, therefore, putting an extra burden on the other three. We are a very busy office with a high volume of traffic and telephone calls. While we believe that we offer excellent customer service, it could always be better with more staff. Oftentimes we must rely on our student employees to carry out assigned tasks that should be delegated to a permanent staff member.

Physical Resources

Evaluate the general adequacy of the physical resources (e.g., office and storage space, supporting technology, other equipment) allocated to the unit relative to the unit's ability to serve the constituencies identified above and achieve other programmatic goals. Do this by assigning a number between "1" (completely inadequate) to "9" (completely satisfies needs).

9 1-9

In a paragraph or two, discuss why you've assigned the score you have. Include, in particular, a discussion of unique strengths as well as important needs not being met or opportunities not being explored because of limitations.

A few years ago we were very, very fortunate to move from Andersen Library to the newly renovated Hyer Hall. Every administrator has his/her own large office with windows for privacy; our office is accessible to students with disabilities; we have a large area for our current students' files within our suite; we have plenty of storage space both in the suite and across the hall where archives are kept; some people say we have one of the nicest office suites on campus. We receive few dollars (\$258) from the state for service/supplies. However, we receive an administrative cost allowance from the federal government for participating and administering financial aid programs. Therefore, our budget is more than adequate for the purchasing/upgrading of hardware and software.

Fiscal Resources

While recognizing that every unit would benefit from a larger budget, evaluate the general adequacy of fiscal resources allocated to the unit to serve its constituencies and achieve other programmatic goals by assigning a number between "1" (completely inadequate) to "9" (completely satisfies needs).

9 1-9

In a paragraph or two, discuss why you've assigned the score you have. Include, in particular, a discussion of unique strengths as well as important needs not being met or opportunities not being explored because of limitations.

The 9 was assigned again for the same reasons as #3 above. Each year we receive an administrative cost allowance plus \$5 per Federal Pell Grant recipient in order to carry on office operations. This can be close to \$100,000 per year plus we get to carry forward any unused funds in our financial aid administrative expense account. Therefore, we have the luxury of "saving" funds from year to year if we need to make a major purchase.

4. In a paragraph or two, overview significant changes made in your unit since 1996 (i.e., the last North Central Association Accreditation Visit). (e.g., re-organized, key staff changes, change in purposes, etc.)
 - New director
 - New associate director
 - Lost three program assistants
 - Emphasis on customer service
 - Increased automation

- PeopleSoft
- Increased collaboration among various offices on campus.
- Increased Financial Aid Night presentations
- Will soon be implementing a new Satisfactory Academic Progress policy for the campus.
- Will be implementing a new imaging system in February, 2005.

In another paragraph or two, describe why these changes occurred.

There was an agreement between the former director and the administration that he would return to his role as assistant director. The associate director then became the director. One of the assistant directors became the associate director. Three program assistants were lost due to retirements. One of them was not replaced. In addition, our receptionist position is a burnout position and hard to keep someone permanent there for a long period of time. Therefore, in the last 6 months, we have hired 3 new program assistants. Nine high schools were served by Financial Aid Night presentations. An audit cited the campus for not complying with federal regulations in our Satisfactory Academic Progress policy. Therefore, a new policy was written and will be implemented in May 2005. We are striving to go “paperless” by implementing an imaging system.

MISSION & PLANNING

5. In a paragraph or two, describing any significant projects/initiatives that your unit is planning or currently has underway, but has not yet completed.

Becoming a “paperless” office. We will implement ImageNow imaging system in a few weeks. We are also working on a self-service screen for our student customers so that they may view their financial aid records/documents needed, etc. Up until this time, we always required our students to return their award letters showing us what they were accepting and/or declining. This year for the first time, the students will go online and accept/decline the aid. In a year or two, we hope to have award letters be sent electronically to the students with no hard copy necessary.

6. Below are five “core values” the University identifies as central to its purposes and operation. Please evaluate the importance of each core value in terms of how each aligns with the purposes of your unit (i.e., take a hypothetical 100 points and distribute them among the five values, with those values that align more closely to the purposes of your unit receiving more points).

Core Value	Importance (100 points)
Commitment to the pursuit of knowledge and understanding	20
Development of the individual	10
Personal and professional integrity	10
Commitment to serve	50
Commitment to develop a sense of community, respect for diversity, and global perspectives	10
Total=	100 points

7. Each and every academic and non-academic unit engages in planning for the future. Review the list of variables below and evaluate the extent to which each of the following influences decision-making behind the planning process for your unit (i.e., take a hypothetical 100 points and distribute them among the planning variables listed below, with those variables playing the larger role in your unit’s planning efforts receiving more points)

Planning Variables	Importance (100 points)
The mission of the university or the unit	10
Academic assessment data/information relevant to student performance against learning outcomes	2

Other data/information gathered relevant to performance (e.g., Audit & Review feedback)	14
Societal/Cultural trends (e.g., changes in demographics, lifestyles, professions)	2
Campus trends (e.g., changes in university-initiated needs and demands)	2
Technology trends (e.g., technology developments that affect delivery of service)	20
Professional trends (e.g., changes evident at other universities/colleges)	5
Available human resources (e.g., # of employees, talents, etc.) within the unit	15
Available financial resources (e.g., budget, available and accessible \$)	10
Available physical resources (e.g., space, existing technology, etc.)	20
Other:	
Total=	100 points

8. Does your unit have a mission statement?

Yes No

If you answered "yes," please list the mission statement here. or, if your mission statement can be accessed on the web, please list the URL here.

The mission of the Financial Aid Office is to provide all current and prospective UW-W students with the necessary financial aid information, counseling, and timely monetary assistance to support them in their pursuit of a college education. We strive to help our diverse student population eliminate financial obstacles so that they may succeed in their academic endeavors.

If you answered "yes," please describe how, if at all, this mission statement plays a role in your unit's planning and/or decision-making.

We provide a "counselor on duty" five days a week for our students to come in without an appointment when they need help. We strive to get our award letters out by April 15 for the following fall. We really have become more aware of helping students in a "timely" manner knowing that students' financial aid paying the university bill and their receiving a refund check is critical to their pursuit of knowledge. I believe that we have become much more automated to be of more service. We also process applications by edit exceptions for faster service.

OPERATION AND PERFORMANCE

9. What are the major or measurable objectives of the unit?

Comply with federal/ state/institutional policies when awarding financial aid. Participate in "clean" audits.

Help UW-Whitewater in every way possible to promote the recruitment and retention of our students.

Move toward becoming a paperless office by implementing an imaging system in time for 2005-06 academic year processing.

Develop an online award letter. Utilize the PeopleSoft self-service accept/decline feature.

Investigate the use of e-signatures for electronic completion of forms.

Review the packaging policy to re-evaluate the awarding of campus-based funds to help not only the neediest students, but the most students.

Revise and update office policies as needed.

Take over the administration of the Satisfactory Academic Progress policy for the campus.

Utilize maximum College Work-Study funds.

Provide award letters by April 15 for the following fall.

Complete the Fiscal Operations Report and Application to Participate (FISAP) by October 1 each year. Complete the UW System Comprehensive Data Report (CDR) by July 1 each year.

Continue to provide maximum quality service to our customers.

Encourage staff attendance/participation at Student Affairs programs and campus-wide programs and at other conferences and workshops.

10. What outcome measures (i.e., data, information) provide evidence that your unit's objectives are being met?

The Financial Aid Office, as part of the Office Planning and Review self-study, completed the Self-Assessment Guide published by the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. Full-time staff each completed a survey. The scores were tabulated to determine the mean, median, and mode of each question. Certain questions were then discussed by staff. Based on these discussions, it was determined which issues needed to be acted upon. Plans were formed to implement appropriate changes.

As part of the Office Planning and Review process, the Financial Aid Office surveyed our main customers—the students. We used the Financial Aid Student Services Survey provided by ACT. The results of the survey then became part of our OPR.

The Financial Aid Office volunteered to participate in a Needs Analysis class research project throughout the fall 2003 semester. A communication audit was conducted within the office by students of this class. The audit pertained to internal research of the office and its communication style and methods. The audit team analyzed research to find common themes within the communication style of the office. While many positive characteristics about the Financial Aid Office's current style were found, we also discovered some areas of concern. These concerns were looked into with further details, while suggestions were made regarding how the office could improve these areas.

11. Related to question #10, does the unit regularly collect data/information to evaluate how effectively it serves its constituency(ies)? (This might include surveys of constituencies.)

Yes No

If "yes," please list specific data/information sets that the UW-W Self-Study Committees, and/or the Higher Learning Commission's Visiting Accreditation Team can access to review/consult.

- We try to conduct student service satisfaction surveys every few years. The latest one was completed for our OPR in 2004—ACT Financial Aid Student Services Survey.
- Each year the associate director/student employment coordinator compiles statistics regarding the retention rates of students who are employed on campus. There seems to be a high correlation between the two.
- The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education Self-Assessment Guide – OPR 2004.

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12. In a paragraph or two, describe specific changes to the unit's operation or planning, if any, have resulted from the collection and use of the data/information identified in the preceding questions. Please be specific.

We are considering having all administrators meet with and counsel study abroad students to increase the availability of appointment times.

In order to make the application process easier for students, we can better inform them that we are available to assist them with filling out the Federal Application for Federal Student Aid ((FAFSA). We also now encourage students to apply on the web because it is easier, faster, and fewer errors are made.

We have continued to “reserve” some of our campus-based funds to be utilized during the course of the year when special situations arise.

We are more proactive with providing important information to our students.

We continue to emphasize excellent customer service.

We need to increase awareness of our website; we will also keep our website more current.

13. Please provide a list of services, if any, that your unit provides for constituencies that are external to the university.

- Financial Aid Night presentations were given at nine area high schools during the months of December 2004 and January 2005.
- Correspond with area Chambers of Commerce regarding student employment.
- Encourage off-campus employers to advertise their jobs on the e-Recruiting software system.
- Meet with various lenders of alternative loans to stay current with policies and procedures.
- Establish very good working relationships with area guidance counselors by answering their questions so they can help their students.
- Do numerous interviews with the media regarding financial aid and changing policies.

14. Please list any partnerships your unit has developed with the community (external to the campus, at the local, national, or global-level).

- Student employment coordinator/employers
- America Reads Program—Work Study students/local schools
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STUDENT LEARNING (COMPLETE THIS SECTION ONLY IF YOUR UNIT HAS AS PART OF ITS MISSION OR PURPOSES THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS)

15. If your unit serves students as its primary constituency, does the unit have learning or development-related objectives relevant to its work with students? That is, does your unit expect that students will acquire certain knowledge or skill sets as a direct result of working with your unit or its programming?

Yes No

If "yes," please list these outcomes/objectives.

- Money management training
- Problem solving skills
- Loan indebtedness counseling
- Time management skills
- Credit checks/credit ratings
- Develop more responsibility
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16. Does the unit use data/information to evaluate the extent to which these learning or development-related objectives are, or are not being met?

Yes No

If "yes," please list specific data/information sets that the UW-W Self-Study Committees, and/or the Higher Learning Commission's Visiting Accreditation Team can access to review/consult.

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17. What specific changes to the unit's operation or planning, if any, have resulted from the collection and use of the data/information identified in question #15? Please be specific.

All first-time first-year borrowers in the Federal Direct Loan program must go through an online entrance counseling session before loan funds can be disbursed to them. They will also go through an exit counseling session.

SELF-EVALUATION

Strengths

18. List and prioritize no more than three primary strengths that have emerged in your unit's efforts to meet its mission, goals, or objectives. To identify these strengths, you may wish to consider: What does your unit

do very well? What good things do people say about your unit? How has your unit aided the campus in meeting its mission? In what ways has your unit "gone beyond the call of duty?"

After identifying each strength, specify supporting evidence that suggests that the statement is true. This may include data/information gathered relevant to unit performance, trend data, information gathered from audits or external agencies visit, etc.

1. Specific Strength: **Students are very satisfied with the human aspect of the Financial Aid Office.**
 - Supporting Evidence: 71.3% of the ACT Student Survey agreed that financial aid administrators were available to talk with in private; 73.1% agreed that the financial aid counselors were friendly and easy to talk to; 63% found communicating with financial aid counselors to be easy. Only 4% of the respondents were dissatisfied with the staff/students at the reception desk. Only 2.8% were dissatisfied with staff/students on the phone. Only 5.1% were dissatisfied with the counselor's explanation of how the award was evaluated.
2. Specific Strength: **Longevity of the professional staff.**
 - Supporting Evidence: The five professional staff have a total of 91 years total; that averages out to 18+ years of experience each.
3. Specific Strength: **We take advantage of the available technology; we keep current on the newest releases of our software; we take the best practices from other universities and use them here; we have an individual in the office who is the PeopleSoft liaison between our office and T&IR.**
 - Supporting Evidence: We packaged over 2400 students by April 1, 2004, for the 2004-2005 academic year. This was two weeks earlier than our goal of April 15, 2004. We gave out more money in a timely fashion. We ran out of Work Study funds during the first run. Our PeopleSoft liaison staff member is a member of the Product Advisory Group. She has attended every Wisconsin Higher Education PeopleSoft Users Group conference and every Higher Education Users Group conference. Our program assistant 4 recently attended the Electronic Access Conference. Two staff members just returned from ImageNow training in Kansas to prepare for our transition to document imaging. We will have two consultants on campus for two weeks in February to help us with the transition. In the summer of 2004, we completely redid our summer packaging in PeopleSoft by using a two-month Expected Family Contribution which made processing summer aid much easier.

Concerns

19. List and prioritize no more than three primary concerns that have emerged in your unit's efforts to meet its mission, goals, or objectives. To identify these concerns, you may wish to consider: What could be improved? What is done poorly? What do we, as a unit, avoid doing, even though we know it's important?

After identifying each concern, specify supporting evidence that suggests that the statement is true. This may include data/information gathered relevant to unit performance, trend data, information gathered from audits or external agencies visit, etc.

Finally, identify one or more recommended actions to address the area of concern. This may include actions that your unit has already begun, actions being planned, or preliminary thinking about how to address the area of concern.

1. Specific Concern: The administration of the Satisfactory Academic Progress policy. Currently our policy says that all students must have at least a 1.5 cumulative grade point average in order to receive financial aid. We are not in compliance with the federal regulations and have not been for many years.
 - Supporting Evidence: A recent Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) finding for the 2001-2002 academic year cost the university over \$19,000 due to non-compliance. We are in the process of looking at the next three years to determine what our fine will be for non-compliance.
 - Recommended Actions: A new proposed Satisfactory Academic Progress policy was written and submitted to the Chancellor. The proposal was approved in October 2004. Academic Support Services will no longer be responsible for the administration of the academic requirements for financial aid. The Financial Aid Office will assume that responsibility in May 2005.

2. Specific Concern:
 - Supporting Evidence:
 - Recommended Actions:

3. Specific Concern:
 - Supporting Evidence:
 - Recommended Actions: