University of Wisconsin – Whitewater
Division of Student Affairs

Financial Aid
Office Planning & Review (OPR)

Executive Summary
July 2004

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INTRODUCTION

The Financial Aid Office conducted an extensive Office Planning and Review (OPR) process from July 2003 – May 2004. The review was coordinated by Carol Miller, Director of Financial Aid, and Susan Johnson, a Limited Term Employee. The OPR consisted of an office Self-Study, a Campus Evaluation Team Review, and an External Consultant Review. The Campus Evaluation Team consisted of Brian Bredeson, Chair, Associate Director, Career Services; Jackie Breuer, Senior, Speech Communication; Wade Dazey, Associate Professor, Philosophy & Religious Studies; Al Haberman, Director, Student Financial Services; Richard McGregory, Program Director, Academic Support Services; Troy Moldenhauer, Assistant Director, Office of Admissions; and Adrian Sherman, Director, International Education & Programs. The team reviewed the Self-Study documents provided to identify and assess strengths and challenges of the office. Their report was submitted in April 2004. Pamela W. Fowler, Director of Financial Aid, at the University of Michigan, conducted the External Consultant Review. Ms. Fowler met with several campus representatives during her visit on May 6-7, 2004. She reviewed the operations of the office in relation to its goals and how well it serves the students, staff, faculty, and community of the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Her report was submitted May 20, 2004.

MAJOR OBJECTIVES OF THE OFFICE

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. This mission is in ac with divisional and institutional goals, particularly in the areas of recruitment and retention, graduation rates of all students, with special support for graduating multicultural and disadvantaged students at a rate comparable to the general university population.

SELECTED FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS/MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

Following are Selected Findings and Observations from the OPR Reports. The report is identified in brackets: *Self-Study [SS] Campus Evaluation Team [CET] External Consultant [EC]*

- The Financial Aid Office is very much aware of the vital role that they play in both student recruitment and retention. During 2003-2004, over $49.4 million was offered and accepted. Of the 250 respondents in the ACT Financial Aid Student Services Survey, 76.7% agreed with the statement that they could not have attended UW-Whitewater without financial aid. Work is also important to these students; 70.4% of the students said they must work in order to meet school and/or living expenses. The completed *"Student Employment Retention Study"* again showed a high correlation between on-campus work experience and matriculation, with 86.70% of those students who were employed on campus during 2002-2003 returning to campus in 2003-2004. [SS, CET].
- Overall, students were very satisfied with the services provided by the Financial Aid Office as shown by the results of the ACT Financial Aid Student Services Survey. 71.3% agreed that financial aid administrators were available to talk with in private; 73.1% agreed that the financial aid administrators 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; 2.8% were dissatisfied with staff/students on the phone; 5.1% were dissatisfied with the administrator's explanation of how the award was evaluated. [SS, CET] ***We will continue our efforts to further improve customer service in all areas of our office.***
- The Financial Aid Office provides very good service to students, their families, and the faculty and staff of the university. Everyone with whom I met considers the office staff to be knowledgeable and helpful. The staff is well trained and has a great desire to serve the university community. [EC]
- Customer service provided by the office and its entire staff is meeting and exceeding stated objectives. [CET] ***Customer service training was initiated and integrated into weekly staff meetings. Handouts were provided followed by discussion.***
- There is a daily *"counselor on duty"* to see walk-ins, providing additional customer service. Over 1,000 students received assistance during "counselor on duty" hours. This is in addition to the 2,769 appointments made by students/parents during the academic year/summer. [SS, CET] ***This service will continue to be provided.***

- Financial Aid should continue to collect and track data related to numbers of applicants, disbursements of funds, and payment of university bills of disadvantaged students in the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP). [CET] ***As of July 7, 2004, 265 EOP and/or other disadvantaged students were identified. One hundred nineteen students were already packaged for aid or waiting to be packaged; 136 students were sent a financial aid application; and 10 students were sent a Missing Information Letter.***

- Financial Aid should continue to provide data on the percentage of eligible students served as well as how much of their financial need was met. [CET] Undergraduate statistics based on 2003-2004: 61.15% of all undergraduates applied for financial aid; 67.64% of students who applied, received financial aid (Note: This does not include those students who were offered aid and chose to decline it.); students demonstrating financial need had 75.45% of their need met; the average financial aid package of all applicants was $5,970; the average need-based gift awards (grants & scholarships) was $3,790; and the average self-help awards (loans & work-study) was $4,048. ***We will continue to collect this and other related data.***

- Financial Aid should document its continual improvement in providing award letters early. [CET] Over 2,400 Award Letters totaling over $17 million in aid were mailed on April 1, 2004, for the 2004-05 academic year. The previous year 1,948 Award Letters totaling over $12.4 million in aid were mailed on April 2, 2003. This represents an increase of 24.8% and 37.0% respectively. ***We will make every effort to continue this early Award Letter practice.***

- Financial Aid should continue to utilize maximum College Work-Study funds. In FY04 $724,799 was spent, an increase over FY03 of 3.7%. [CET] ***We will continue to utilize maximum funds.***

- The Financial Aid Office staff share a commitment to communicate with and serve the students as evidenced by their printed publications, their use of the internet, their own website, and their significant use of e-mail. [CET]

- Financial Aid should continue to accommodate requests for Financial Aid Nights. [CET] During the 2003-04 academic year, all schools (seven) requesting a financial aid presentation were served. ***We will continue to accommodate as many requests as possible.***

- The external consultant conducted a survey (2004) of over 40 four-year public institutions on staff size. The average ratio of financial aid staff to students enrolled was 927 to 1 and the median was 848 to 1. UW-W's is 1167 to 1. Based on these figures, the staff size of the office is not excessive. In addition, the university's goal to provide study abroad opportunities to at least 10% of the population is an admirable one that has created significant additional work for the Financial Aid Office staff. [EC]

SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS/DEVELOPMENT OF NEW GOALS

- Revise the Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) policy to bring it into compliance with current federal regulations and charge the Financial Aid Office with the administration of this policy. [SS, CET, EC] ***A proposal has been submitted to the Assistant Chancellor for Student Affairs with recommended revisions to the SAP policy, which will bring it into compliance with federal regulations.***

- The focus of the office must shift from providing student service the way it was defined years ago to embracing technology to provide the type of service this generation of students prefers. [EC] ***We will increase awareness of our website and keep it current. We will continue to educate the students on our e-recruiting site. We will keep encouraging students to use the web when applying for financial aid.***

- The self-service aspect of PeopleSoft 8.0 should be given high priority. [EC] ***The Self-Service module of PeopleSoft is currently being worked on. The target date for implementation is August 1, 2004.***

- Implement direct deposit of excess financial aid checks at the earliest opportunity. [EC] ***The university is currently investigating this possibility.***

- Consider implementing an imaging system to improve application processing. [EC] ***Three staff members visited the UW-Madison Financial Aid Office for an imaging demonstration/discussion. A trip to UW-Green Bay is being planned.***

- The university should continue to closely monitor the progress of the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, particularly the proposal to eliminate the base guarantee in allocating campus-based funds to institutions. As currently

proposed, UW-Whitewater will lose funding. A plan to secure other funds to compensate for this reduction should be developed to ensure the continued ability to meet the needs of students. Including funding for need-based aid in the university's next capital campaign is an option. [EC]

- Student Financial Services and Financial Aid should collaborate on the automation of non-disbursing financial aid i.e., alternative loans, private scholarships, and external organization billings, which will reduce the risk of error to the student customer. [CET]

- Review and revise packaging policy in order to meet the full need of low income students, which is critical to their retention. [EC] ***Each year the packaging policy is reviewed by the administrators in January/February for the following year.***

- Review the initial edits currently included in the processing cycle to determine if the number can be reduced. This will reduce the time it takes to notify students of their award. [EC] ***Discussions have begun among staff members.***

- Increase the use of mass e-mail to communicate with students. It is efficient and cost effective. [EC]

- Revise and update staff position descriptions. [SS] ***Completed June 2004.***

- Allocate resources for anticipated/seasonal fluctuations in staffing demands. [SS]

- Develop an effective training program for new staff and student assistants. [SS, CET]

- Make ethics a more routine part of staff discussion (i.e., case study examples) and development. Involve student staff in discussion of ethics. [SS, CET]

- Develop a worksheet or website for students to help them identify potential funding sources that can be directly applied to international travel. [CET]

- Because the process of funding students studying abroad cannot be automated, as the program grows, funding will become more of an issue and the staffing requirements will increase to one full FTE to manage the program in the Financial Aid Office. Also, without institutional resources to offset costs for students, the use of alternative loans may be needed to help students fund their study abroad. [EC]

- Annually evaluate the aid process from the application to disbursement to improve and streamline the process more each year. [EC]