Administrative Services Report

Financial Aid 2012-13
Humboldt State University
1.

Mission
State your department mission. Discuss how the unit supports the broader university mission. Discuss how the unit evaluates its effectiveness in meeting the divisional mission.

Narrative
The HSU Financial Aid Office is committed to assisting students seeking resources to finance their education by administering federal, state, and institutional aid programs, and providing a fair, sensitive, and confidential environment in which students can receive a variety of counseling and other resources to assist in making informed financial decisions.

The Financial Aid Office supports student success and we evaluate our effectiveness with measures such as: increasing the number of students served with 80% receiving aid via standard processes, completing manual processes for 20% of students who require additional support outside of standard practice, streamlining and increasing accuracy and frequency in communication plan with students, and providing first disbursement of aid to students prior to the first day of classes.
2.

Goals
Describe the service under review, emphasizing the unit’s goals, and its impact on student success. Goals might include delivery of a specific service, compliance with state or federally mandated monitoring, or other activities directed at providing support to the institution or to students.

*If the unit's goals have changed since the last self-evaluation, explain how and why they have changed. Show how the changes responded to changing needs, technologies, external requirements, and/or other relevant factors.

*This will be accomplished in the second year of review.

Narrative
Goal #1: To stay within compliance of all federal and state regulations, as well as local policies and procedures.

Goal #2: We strive to provide the most aid to the most number of students in as fair and equitable manner as possible.

Goal #3: To broaden our delivery of both financial literacy and progress to degree initiatives, in order to assist students in meeting their degree objectives in a timely manner as well as with a minimum of debt
3.

Department Effectiveness
Describe your clients in terms of their roles on campus (student, staff, administrators, etc.), and reflect on whether you are serving the groups you are expected to serve (in terms of diversity, program goals, etc.). Describe how the unit engages all members in the discussion, review, assessment and relevant factors. How and when has your unit assessed program outcomes, and how have you responded to the results? What changes have been made based on the result of the assessed outcome?

If data is available, describe how well your program is doing in terms of the following outcomes:

- Volume of unit activity (number of students/clients served, number of appointments, etc.)
- Efficiency (responsiveness, timeliness, number of requests processed, etc.)
- Effectiveness of service in accomplishing intended outcomes (accuracy, completeness, etc.)
- Client/student satisfaction with services (data needs to be disaggregated by gender, ethnicity, abilities, etc.)

Describe how program or achievement outcomes relate to the unit goals.

Narrative
Goal #1:
Staff members within the Office of Financial Aid have been effective at understanding and remaining in compliance with regulations via this framework:

1. Federal training for all new hires to understand compliance
2. Colleague training and mentoring within the office
3. Director receives daily & weekly notifications on regulatory changes
4. Director-level discernment on regulatory changes and involvement of team
5. National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) membership for all professional staff members
6. Annual audits (at different levels) as well as interpretation assistance from
   1. HSU Student Affairs Division
   2. CSU Directors of Financial Aid
   3. Monthly meetings with CSU Directors and Chancellor's office Director of Aid
   4. Department of Education

Goal #2
Directors in the Financial Aid Office conduct regular Funds Management meetings to assess funding levels and determine whether we are exhausting funding levels as best we can for the current academic year. Equity is the number one consideration whenever any awarding decision is made, whether it is setting up the systematic awards, or awarding for special circumstances.

Each year in the Fall, awarding priorities are reassessed based on previous years’ trends and expectations regarding incoming classes. This year, we have requested several years’ data from the Institutional Research Office in order to more fully explore who we are awarding and their success rates, in order to be even more strategic. We will also be implementing a new "Financial Aid Advisory Committee," made up of various interested parties around campus, which can assist in informing FAO of campus-wide priorities that can be considered when strategizing awarding.
4.

**Department Improvement**
Discuss how the unit addresses improvement. What activities has your unit engaged in to improve the administrative support service and environment?

**Narrative**

Goal #3: To broaden our delivery of both financial literacy and progress to degree initiatives, in order to assist students in meeting their degree objectives in a timely manner as well as with a minimum of debt

We have been effective in a small sense to meet our goals of increasing Financial Literacy Initiatives – increasing outreach activities in HOP/Preview events, and making a Basic Financial Literacy Session mandatory for new freshmen as of Fall 2013 HOP. However, there is improvement to make in this area, as well as tackle our rising (along with the National level CDR) Cohort Default Rate by planning and implementing a Default Management and Prevention strategy.

We have also recently implemented the Financial Aid Summary pagelet on the portal – showing students their earned and attempted unit progress toward limits and caps, their Pell Lifetime Eligibility used, and their current loan debt. Students with 120 earned units or more, who do not indicate with a graduation date that they are on track, are asked to come into the office to meet with a counselor.

Staff vacancies within the Office of Financial Aid have limited the ability to broaden our financial literacy initiatives. We have been able to participate in most everything we are asked to do, but we would like to be more pro-active in reaching out to new student audiences that would benefit from the messages of budgeting, debt counseling, and financial management. Additionally, we began making plans for a strategic approach to Default Management and Prevention, but the loss of Linda Byrne (Loan Coordinator and Intake Services Supervisor) in August brought that to a halt. We plan to revisit the ideas and strategies around Default Management when staffing is back up to normal levels.

The Financial Aid Office is represented by Director and FAO staff in the following efforts and activities:
- Enrollment Management Working Group
- International Advisory Committee and International Program Review Committee
- HSU Outreach/Admissions events – HOP/HOOP, Spring Preview, Fall Admissions Day, January travelling receptions
- Veterans Advisory Group
- AB540 Task Force
- Grad Squad
- Staff Council

Since 2009, the Financial Aid Office has lost 5 Full time positions. Much of this loss of staff has been alleviated by using technology (in particular, Nolij and paperlessness) to streamline processes. However, while processes get streamlined, the number of students we serve continues to rise – with both rising enrollment rising number of FAFSAs filed, as well as increasing percentages of “high need” students.

We currently have two vacant positions: the Associate Director of Operations, and one SSP2 position, formerly the Supervisor of the Intake and Document Tracking areas. Both of these positions are critical in the larger picture issues of Counseling, Financial Literacy, Default Management, Progress to Degree, and Outreach. It is my understanding that both of these vacancies will be addressed fairly soon.

The financial aid office is open to the public Monday through Friday from 8 am until 5pm. Walk-in counseling is advertised as Monday through Friday, 10-4, but counselors are scheduled from 8 to 5 in case any client needs counseling during any open hour. Our staff members do attend occasional weekend and evening outreach events to local high schools, College of the Redwoods, Cash-4-College events, and others.
5.

**Department Environment**

1) Discuss the unit’s environment, including the relationships among staff and program engagement with other units or support areas.

2) Discuss the unit’s engagement in institutional efforts and activities.

3) Discuss facilities, staff and equipment assigned to the unit and how well they support unit goals.

4) Indicate the specific hours the unit operates and describe how the scheduled hours of availability meet the demand for services. If the unit operates during other than normal business hours, specify how these additional times meet the needs of other units/programs/students.

5) Describe the influences that external factors, such as state laws, changing demographics, and the characteristics of the students/clients served have on the structure and services of the program and how the unit addresses these factors.

6) Describe the interactions between this unit and other units/programs on campus and any particular influences these interactions have on the ability of the unit to meet its goals.

**Narrative**

1. The Financial Aid Office is part of the Office of Enrollment Management. A great deal of effort has been put forth in the last year between FAO and both Admissions and Records to facilitate more collaboration between offices. This has been greatly successful.

2. The Interim Director of Financial Aid participates in the Enrollment Management Working Group, in Student Affairs Leadership, in the International Advisory Committee and International Program Review Committee, and the Veterans’ Advisory Group. Staff members in FAO participate in Staff Council, GRad Squad, and other groups.

3. We have adequate facilities at this time. We are in the process of upgrading out-of-warranty computers. We currently have two vacant positions: the Associate Director of Operations, and an SSP2 position, formerly the Supervisor of the Intake and Document Tracking areas. It is my understanding that both of these vacancies will be addressed in the coming months.

4. The financial aid office is open to the public Monday through Friday from 8 am until 5 pm. Walk-in counseling is advertised as Monday through Friday, 10-4, but counselors are scheduled from 8 to 5 in case any client needs counseling during any open hour. Our employees do attend occasional weekend and evening outreach events to local high schools, Cash-4-College events, and others.

5. Operations in the Financial Aid office are governed by federal and state law, CSU policy and local policy. Directors and staff keep up on changes via various means, including correspondence from the Department of Ed and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, as well as annual conferences.

6. The Financial Aid Office works most closely with Student Financial Services in the delivery of aid. We also work closely with the Office of the Registrar to coordinate communications regarding progress to degree. I anticipate that the collaboration between FAO and Admissions and Records will grow further in the future.
6.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Present any conclusions and recommendations resulting from the self-evaluation process, referencing any of the topics in the study. Include information on how the unit engages all unit members in the self-evaluation dialogue and how everyone participates in the program review process.

1) Summarize your areas of strength and areas that need improvement.

2) Identify strategies for the future. Discuss any projected changes and anticipate how the changes may affect staffing, facilities, equipment, and other operational areas.

Narrative

The Financial Aid Office is in fairly good shape despite the loss of 5 staff members over the last five years. Our move to paperlessness – eForms, Nolij, etc. – has greatly alleviated the workload. Staff morale is excellent. We are delivering aid in a more timely manner than in years past primarily due to streamlined processes, and increased communications to students regarding their unmet requirements. We have instituted new measures both via the portal and via email communications - to assist students in understanding their aid as it relates to their progress to degree. The areas in which we could be more effective are fairly insurmountable until we fill at least one of the two vacant positions we have. The biggest priority is Default Management and Prevention – with Cohort Default Rates at an all-time high (both here at HSU and nationally), we must plan and implement strategies to educate our students. We would also like to increase our Financial Literacy measures – doing outreach to more organizations and students on campus. Even more communications to students – via the portal and social media – about all aspects of aid, in particular loan debt, will increase student success.

Goals:

- Increase Financial Literacy initiatives
- Implement Default Management and Prevention tactics
- Continue to improve communication to students, including enhancements to portal