

Santiago Canyon College
Student Services
Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report
2009-2010

Department Name – Financial Aid Office

Department Mission Statement – The Financial Aid Department at Santiago Canyon College (SCC) will promote awareness of Financial Aid programs through aggressive, year-round outreach efforts. Our department will emphasize the value of students' developing proficient on-line application filing, follow-up, and correspondence skills. We will provide students with multiple opportunities and appropriate guidance to support enhancement of their skill sets. We will utilize and expand technologies to prepare our students for the transfer experience.

Student Learning Outcome - In our present student population we typically have three types of technical skill sets: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. Currently, the Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) and Board of Governor Fee Waivers (BOGW) can be completed either online or via paper. While paper applications can take up to six weeks to process, the online application has a turnaround time of 48 hours. Generally, when a student transfers to a four-year institution they are expected to possess the necessary skills to complete the FAFSA online.

The SCC financial aid office promotes the online process as the primary method of application processing. We believe that a financial aid office which makes no effort to inform applicants on how to use the online application process is performing a disservice to their students in preparing them for the future. For this reason, the financial aid office created the following student learning outcome for **2007-2008** and we have decided to keep the same SLO for the next three years (2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11):

AS A RESULT OF UTILIZING THE ONLINE RESOURCES TO APPLY
FOR FINANCIAL AID, STUDENTS WILL DEVELOP SKILLS TO
COMMUNICATE AND PROCESS WEB RELATED APPLICATIONS.

Methods - The financial aid office utilized the following tracking mechanisms to monitor student usage of online services:

- Financial Aid Management System (FAMS)
- Department of Education Electronic reports
- CCC Apply website for the California Community Colleges
- Open Net-Sallie Mae reports for electronic loan processing.

Those students who completed the online FAFSA were assessed for the learning outcome.

Implementation of Assessment Process - In order to accomplish our SLO, we conducted a staff meeting and established the following methods, tools and resources needed to implement our SLO:

1. Set up computer workstations in the “E” building lobby as a place to apply for the students without a home online access. Another objective was if students had questions, they were able to access a financial aid staff immediately.
2. Designated a workstation for student use in the financial aid office. The purpose of the “in office” workstation is to provide one-on-one counseling for the low percentage of students whose online skill sets are considered to be at the beginner level and in need of the one-on-one encouragement/coaching.
3. The Financial Aid Office staff believes that this new operation in their department also assists in one of SCC’s student learning outcomes: “to communicate in various formats using diverse technologies.” During Fall 2010, individuals who came into the Financial Aid Office were asked to answer questions about the various aspects of the online financial aid application process. Feedback will assist staff to 1) determine how efficient and user-friendly the online loan application process is and identify possible areas needing improvement, and 2) provide an indication of the levels of our students’ transferable skills in technology applications and life skills and identify possible areas in which we can better prepare our students.
4. Planned and conducted several in-reach and outreach activities which included:
 - a. Cash for College Workshops – students received hands-on instruction in a computer lab environment to aid them in completing their FAFSA.
 - b. Parent Nights – section by section format of the FAFSA to educate parents on the financial aid processes.
 - c. Financial Aid Awareness Days – provided students with general information about the FAFSA, online filing assistance, and answered questions.
 - d. Classroom Presentations – general overview of financial aid in a Q&A format.
5. Initiated online access via the financial aid website for students to complete the Board of Governor Fee Waiver (BOGW).
6. Created/Edited/Provided informative publications regarding financial aid programs and processes which included basic information guides on “How to Apply for Financial Aid Online”.

We decided that upon conducting the above activities we would evaluate our SLO via a student survey. In fall of 2009, in consultation with our Research & Development Department, we created a student survey. This year we decided to conduct two surveys one in fall 2009 and other one in spring 2010. By conducting this survey we hoped to ascertain whether or not by steering students to the online financial aid process enhanced their skills for similar tasks in future.

1. Financial aid staff offered the survey to students who completed or attempted to complete the FAFSA and BOGW online and at the counter.
2. Submitted data to Research & Development for a calculated result report and proceeded to analyze the data.
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RESULTS - Generally, respondents were satisfied with the online process:

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Fall 2010 Survey (276 individuals Participated in this survey)

- Most respondents (94%) completed their FAFSA online, while only 70% completed the BOGW online.
- 83% of the respondents reported that completing the worksheet created by staff prior to processing the FAFSA online was "very helpful" or "somewhat helpful."
- Nearly three-quarters of the respondents (64%) found communicating with staff regarding their financial aid process via email to be helpful.
- More than 80% of the respondents understand the importance of preparing the necessary paperwork and reading the instructions prior to filling out the online applications.
- More than three-fourths of the respondents stated that as a result of completing these online applications at SCC, they are more comfortable in conducting similar business transactions via the Internet in the future, including renewing their financial aid applications next year.

Spring 2010 Survey (153 individuals Participated in this survey)

- Almost all the respondents (99%) completed their FAFSA online. This is an increase of five percentage points from Fall 2009 semesters.
- 86% (vs. 83% in Fall 2009) of the respondents reported that completing the worksheet created by staff prior to processing the FAFSA online was “very helpful” or “somewhat helpful.”
- Three-quarters of the respondents (75% vs. 64% in Fall 2009) found communicating with staff regarding their financial aid process via email to be helpful.
- More than 80% of the respondents understand the importance of preparing the necessary paperwork and reading the instructions prior to sitting down and filling out the actual online FAFSA and BOGW applications.
Most respondents (approximately 80% vs. 70% in Fall 2009) state that as a result of completing these online applications at SCC, they are more comfortable in conducting similar business transactions via the Internet in the future, including renewing their financial aid applications next year

Decisions and Future Recommendations - This was the Third go around for us to implement the financial aid SLO. As a department we have decided to keep the same SLO for at least four years to accurately understand, improve, and monitor the effects of the SLO. We are already seeing an increase in our on-line communications and students' willingness to embrace the e-commerce era. As a result our processing numbers are increasing as financial aid analysts can concentrate on awarding more students in a timely manner.

We will remain steadfast in our approach to financial aid by demonstrating patience and understanding to our students. We realize that financial aid, like any other process at the collegiate level is a learning process. To that end, staff will integrate training techniques to adapt effective communication strategies to our current and prospective students for exceptional service and effectiveness.

We have also realized that most of the students are freshman in fall term and they are going through the first cycle of application process. By the time spring term ends they have gone to the application and disbursement cycle twice and they are getting the better understanding of the process. We have decided that next year we will conduct this survey in spring term to allow our students to make a well informed decision.

It feels good that we are accomplishing what we set out to do. Most respondents are likely to conduct similar business via the Internet in the future, including filing their FAFSA and/or BOGW online next year, most believe that they are likely to conduct similar business via the Internet in the future and that their experience with the FAFSA application increased their comfort and skill level with this type of online process

We will utilize and expand technologies to prepare students for post-collegiate life by providing online filing, follow-up, and correspondence. We believe that our SLO is already preparing students for four-year institutions, e-commerce and other financial related processes requiring serious attention to detail, such as: loan applications, mortgage applications, tax filings, etc.

Conclusion - Our staff will offer levels of service designed to meet the specific needs of each individual student and strive to exceed the expectations of our students, staff, and community. Our staff will set the bar for excellent organization and administration of financial aid in California Community colleges by attending cutting-edge year-round training and seminars sponsored by regional, state, and national organizations.

As we complete this survey analysis we are already planning to implement the Student Web Advisor module to introduce our students on moving towards a responsible direction of tracking their aid instead of relying on mail for communication of award letters and account balances.

It is the responsibility of the Associate Dean of Financial Aid and staff to review the results of this study and attempt to implement any recommendations that they deem desirable and manageable.

Attachments: SLO Survey & Results