

Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Report
Santiago Canyon College
Student Services Division
Financial Aid Office
2010-2011

Department Name –Financial Aid Office

Department Mission Statement –The Financial Aid Office 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-based FAFSA applications may take up to six weeks to process; online applications have a processing time of approximately 48 hours. Generally, students transferring to four-year institutions are expected to possess the necessary technical skills to complete the FAFSA online. Hence, it is essential to acclimate students to these business practices as preparations for their future endeavors.

The SCC Financial Aid Office strives to transform the online FAFSA application process to become the primary method for SCC students to apply for financial aid. We believe that the inability to make considerate efforts towards promoting the use of the FAFSA online application process is a disservice to students and further hinders their development. For this reason, the financial aid office created the following student learning outcome listed below for **2007-2008** and will consistently maintain the same SLO for the following for three more years (2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11) for the purpose of assessment and evaluation of students’ progress:

AS A RESULT OF UTILIZING THE ONLINE RESOURCES TO APPLY FOR FINANCIAL AID, STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO 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 California Community Colleges
- Direct Loans and Open Net-Sallie Mae reports for electronic loan processing

Students who completed the online FAFSA were assessed for the learning outcome.

Implementation of Assessment Process—To accomplish our SLO, the Financial Aid Office conducted a strategic planning meeting with staff and established the following methods, tools, and resources needed for implementation:

1. Set up computer workstations in the “E” building lobby for students to electronically apply for financial aid, particularly for students who lack online access at home. This strategy was purposefully designed to allow students instantaneous access to a financial aid staff shall they have questions during the application process.
2. Designate a workstation for student access inside the financial aid office. The purpose of the “in office” workstation is to provide one-on-one technical assistance 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. Plan and conduct several in-house and outreach activities to include but not limited to:
 - a. Cash for College Workshops—students receive hands-on instruction in a computer lab environment to aid them in completing their FAFSA.
 - b. Parent Nights—step-by-step overview of the FAFSA to educate parents on the financial aid processes.
 - c. Financial Aid Awareness Days—provide students with general information about the FAFSA, online filing assistance, and questions and answers session.
 - d. Classroom Presentations—provide general overview of financial aid in a Q&A format.
4. Initiate online access via the financial aid website for students to complete the Board of Governor Fee Waiver (BOGW).
5. Create/Edit/Provide informational publications regarding financial aid programs and processes which included basic information guides on “How to Apply for Financial Aid Online”.

We concluded that to add further depth and breadth, we would evaluate our SLO via a student survey beyond the above set activities. In Fall 2010, in consultation with our Research & Development Department, we further enhanced the current student survey. This year we decided to conduct one survey at beginning at the end of Fall 2010 and at the start Spring 2011 semesters. By conducting this survey, our goal is to ascertain

whether or not the steering of students to the online financial aid process has continued to enhance their skills for similar tasks in future as it did in 2009-2010.

1. Financial aid staff offered the survey to students who completed or attempted to complete the FAFSA and BOGW online or at the counter.
2. Submitted data to the Research & Development Department to analyze the survey data and provide and summary report of the survey results.
3. The Financial Aid Office staff believes that this business practice aligns with one of SCC's institutional student learning outcomes: "to communicate in various formats using diverse technologies." During the end of Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 semesters, 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:
 - a. Determine how efficient and user-friendly the online loan application process is and identify possible areas needing improvement.
 - b. 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.

RESULTS—Generally, respondents were satisfied with the online process:

End-of-Fall 2010 and Spring 2011 Survey (151 individuals Participated in this survey)

- Many respondents completed their FAFSA (95%) and BOGW (72%) applications online. Both show a decrease of online applications (4 and 18 percentage points respectively) from last year's respondents.
- 87% (very similar to last year's) of the respondents reported that completing the worksheet created by staff prior to processing the FAFSA online was "very helpful" or "somewhat helpful."
- Slightly more than three-quarters of the respondents (70%) found communicating with staff regarding their financial aid process via email to be helpful.
- Prior to filling out the FAFSA or BOGW application online, a quarter of the respondents had never used the Internet to fill out an application.
- Respondents use online application processes, similar to the process used in financial aid office, quite often to apply for a job, pay bills, etc.
- At least 80% of the respondents gathered the necessary paperwork AND read the instructions prior to sitting down to fill out the actual online FAFSA and BOGW applications. Most (95%) of those who did prior preparation found these steps enabled them to handle detailed oriented processes comfortably.
- Almost all respondents (99%) stated that as a result of completing these online applications at SCC, they are more comfortable in conducting similar detailed-

oriented transactions via the Internet in the future, including renewing their financial aid applications.

Decisions and Future Recommendations - This was the fourth and final year to implement and assess the established financial aid SLO. Collectively as a department, the SCC Financial Aid Office strategically decided to keep the same SLO for at least four years to consistently monitor student's progress, understand challenges, and make quality improvements.

SCC Financial Aid Office is confident to report that the past four years' data, as situated in the established SLO, have demonstrated a positive developmental impact on SCC students' abilities to access and navigate through online web-based business systems. As students prepare to enter the workforce and/or four-year higher education institutions, the data collected from both Spring 2010 and Spring 2011 surveys consistently reported that 99% of the respondents suggest that learning these online processes at SCC has been helpful in preparing to handle future electronic applications.

Although the survey result states that:

“Many respondents completed their FAFSA (95%) and BOGW (72%) applications online. Both show a decrease of online applications (4 and 18 percentage points respectively) from last year's respondents”

We made an intentional effort to identify and survey those who were not utilizing the online application process for FAFSA and BOGW application hence bringing forth awareness to those applicants.

We continue to observe a growing trend in our on-line communications and students' willingness to conduct business online. 99% of the respondents from Spring 2011 survey reported that they are definitely or most likely to complete another online application. As a result, our processing numbers continues to increase to impact the staff ability to award students' financial aid in a timely manner.

SCC Financial Aid Office continues to strive to remain steadfast in our business practices to sustain, innovation, efficiency, professionalism, patience, and understanding as we service students. We recognize the step to obtaining financial aid is a learning process for students similar to other processes at the collegiate level. To that end, staff will integrate training techniques to adapt effective communication strategies to our current and prospective students to enhance the current exceptional service to students.

It is overwhelming to reflect on this successful transformation. The shift for students toward a standardized on-line financial aid application process has not only increase business efficiencies and service satisfactions; it has purposefully acclimate students to complex online business practices as preparations for their future endeavors. Consistent to surveys in previous three years, this year's respondents continue to report that they are likely to conduct businesses online via the Internet in the future to include but not limited to just filing their FAFSA and/or BOGW. The hype of optimism towards conducting

business online is a direct result of completing the FAFSA application online. In this year's survey, students report that this experience has increased their comfort and skill level with conducting business via the internet.

In moving forward, the Financial Aid Office is dedicated to continue its tradition to innovatively integrate technology as core component in the development and preparation of SCC students for post-collegiate life. We believe that our SLO will persist in help students in transitioning to four-year institutions, participating in e-commerce, and completing strenuous financial related processes such as loan applications, mortgage applications, and preparing income tax returns.

Conclusion—SCC Financial Aid Office continues to maintain the highest levels of service intended to meet the specific needs of each individual student and strive to exceed the expectations of our students, staff, and community. Our staff will continuously set the bar for excellence in services to students, innovation in services, and effective administration of financial aid amongst California Community Colleges. Staff is committed to continuously develop as professionals by attending cutting-edge year-round training, association conferences, and seminars sponsored by regional, state, and national organizations.

The conclusion of this SLO has directed the Financial Aid Office to once again access technology to enhance services to students. In a district wide collaboration, the SCC Financial Aid Office launched the Financial Aid Book Advance Program (FA~Link System) for Fall 2011. This program directly links students' financial awards to the bookstores POS system at both SCC and SAC to provide students with the opportunities to purchase books for classes charged against their disbursement starting the first day of instruction.

Beyond regulatory compliance, successful implementation of the FA~Link system has other anticipated institutional advantages to include but not limited to:

- Forces students to accept their award online which in turns ties to SLO
- Eliminates duplicate data entry
- Eliminates paper-based systems
- Eliminates the errors from a manual system
- Streamlines and shortens process
- Last but not least, it allows our students to have their books immediately to ensure persistence and retention

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