

Unit Strategic Plan**2016 - 2018**

Every two years, during spring semester, program/department/service units are asked to develop Unit Strategic Plans. These plans should be closely aligned with the Institutional Action Priorities, the college's long range goals, and five year strategic plan. The strategic plan incorporates and reflects the operation of that unit at all campuses. Each unit's budget needs to reflect the fiscal implications associated with the unit's identified goals and objectives.

Name of Program/Department: **Financial Aid**

Mission Statement:

The purpose of the Jefferson State Community College Financial Aid Department is to maintain integrity and fairness when providing the highest quality of service to undergraduate students in pursuit of their academic goals. The financial aid department strives to provide educational accessibility for students by reducing the students' financial barrier through State and Federal financial aid resources. We continue to utilize our expertise to update our technologies, streamline processes, maintain compliance with Federal and State mandates and effectively manage financial aid resources.

Summary of Access, Productivity and Effectiveness (including, but not limited to, program load, success rate, retention rate, completion rate, employer surveys and student surveys):

The Financial Aid department continues to have a steady number of FAFSA applications that are received in office each award year. In 2013-2014 the unit received 16,863 FAFSA applications. 84.6% (14,281) of the applications were reviewed for award. During the 2014-2015 award year, the unit received 15,953 FAFSA applications which was a 5.4% decrease from the previous year. Even though the applications decrease, the unit maintained a review rate comparable to the previous year; marked at 85.6% (13,657). Given the high cost of college relative to family incomes, financial aid is necessary for many families; however, most who apply may not meet the criteria for federal aid. Despite constant phone calls and emails, student applications have also been delayed due to missing information or lack of understanding. This

will be a primary focus of the unit to increase the community's knowledge of the financial aid resources available and the benefits of attending Jefferson State Community College.

Internal Conditions:

1. Technology

The constant advancements with technology will require the financial aid department to continue to develop standard process methods as well as software that will allow the department to streamline many of the procedures required to assist students applying for financial aid at all four campus locations.

2. Budget

Additional funding is necessary to ensure adequate resources are available to assist our department to meet the needs of the students. In previous years, the unit has developed plans to utilize technology to allow all campuses to function as one department. It remains essential that we provide the necessary resources to provide students with the access to the same services at all four campus locations. Suitable funding will also be required to ensure association memberships for all staff members as well as attendance to conferences for updates on federal and state regulations.

3. Staffing

Staffing is currently adequate; however the department will need to replace an Associate Director of Financial Aid to assist the Director with day to day operations. A Financial Aid Information Analyst was hired December 2014 and is currently working at the Jefferson Campus. The position was established to keep the department informed of software updates from Ellucian as well as serving as an interdepartmental IT person who assists with technological issues with programs and website updates. With the creation of this position, the director is able to focus on student services, and various administrative duties as needed. In addition to this

position, the unit also replaced the position of Financial Aid Specialist at the Jefferson campus and has also hired an additional full time Financial Aid Specialist for the Shelby Hoover campus in October 2015. With both new hires, the unit will be able to better serve the processing needs of all four campus locations and will also begin to cross train personnel to assist in other areas within the unit. The unit has also hired a part time Financial Aid Processor to work at the St. Clair-Pell City campus to assist students with financial aid needs two days a week. The Director hopes to provide a part time financial aid position at the Chilton-Clanton campus depending on enrollment in future reviews.

4. Resources

The Financial Aid department is utilizing the current technology options available to meet the needs of the students being served at the Jefferson, Shelby-Hoover, and Chilton-Clanton and St. Clair- Pell City locations.

5. Enrollment

The number of students requesting financial aid and receiving awards continues to increase.

6. Facilities

The Shelby-Hoover financial aid office recently relocated from the Health Science Building to a redesigned office suite in the General Studies Building on the first floor. The move allowed for the financial aid personnel at the Shelby-Hoover campus to be located in one space with ample office space to assist student's needs. The move also allowed for the unit to limit the heavy traffic that was in the lobby area when in the Health Science Building and provides a quieter working environment as well. The unit desires to create private office spaces for staff at the Jefferson campus. Having private spaces would allow student's the opportunity to discuss their personal information (income, social security information, account information) in private to prevent any type of fraudulent activity occurring.

7. Equipment

Computers will continue to be replaced in the financial aid office on a rotating basis each year for the full time personnel. The unit is preparing to replace the computers used at the front desk at Shelby-Hoover and Jefferson campuses and will also need to replace the computer and double monitors used by the part time financial aid processor at the Pell City-St. Clair campus. In the upcoming year, the unit would also like to make consideration in obtaining a copier which can serve as a fax and scanner for the Shelby Hoover financial aid office.

External Conditions (such as state funding, accrediting agencies, advisory committees, ACCS policy changes):

2013-2014 Accomplishments:

- The Unit was found in compliance with the SAA/ Department of Veteran Affairs
- Staff members attended the AASFAA Conference in Mobile , Alabama
- The Unit was found in compliance in all areas by the SACS Accreditation Board
- The Director attended the 2013 FSA Conference
- The Director & Assistant Director attended the SASFAA Conference
- The Unit received new desktop computers and double monitors for staff members
- The unit continues to develop methods to index files on a daily basis
- Students continue to receive emails regarding updates to their financial aid status

2014-2015 Accomplishments:

- Financial Aid Systems Analyst position was established to ensure department technological needs and updates are met
- VA representative travels to Shelby Hoover campus twice a week to support Veteran students with VA and Financial Aid questions
- The Assistant Director attended the 2014 SAASFA & FSA Conference
- Staff members attended the AASFAA conference in Auburn, AL
- Financial Aid Processor hired to assist with student processing needs
- VA Coordinator attended the AVAA Conference in Montgomery, AL
- Financial Aid Systems Analyst attended the ALBUG Conference in Florence, AL

- Financial Aid Department and IT Department began process on the AUTOMIC automation system for the Financial Aid Department.
- Financial Aid staff members volunteered with various community agencies assisting with financial aid presentations to high school students

Considerations for Development of Unit Strategic Plans:

1. What can be done to improve the operation of the unit?

Training is essential in all aspects of operation of the unit. It is important that staff members continue to attend local, state, regional and national conferences that will provide updates on changes in the federal student aid and veterans affairs process. The unit will also need to continue to participate in conferences to develop continuous networking opportunities as it relates to policy and procedural changes and updates.

2. What are the desired Student Learning Outcomes/Program Learning Outcomes/Service Unit Outcomes for each unit?

The financial aid office will continue to make students be aware of deadlines and reviewing their JSCC pipeline and email accounts to stay abreast of any information pertinent to their financial aid award. The unit will continue to provide updated information to the financial aid webpage to include important dates needed to assist students with awarding and processing needs.

3. What equipment/resources are needed to accomplish the unit's goals and objectives?

Equipment and resources needed to accomplish the unit's goals and objectives are accessibility to technology and office equipment that assist with the financial aid process. It is important that our computers and other technology remain current and up to date. Furthermore, adequate electronic equipment is highly important for staff and students to guarantee timely submission of data.

4. Are there any goals or objectives that were not completed from previous years that should be included in the new plan?

The objectives and goals of this unit are continuously updated yearly based on revisions of regulations by the Department of Education and Department of Veteran Affairs. An Associate Director of Financial Aid is needed to fulfill the duties related to scholarships, work study, and managing the Shelby-Hoover Campus. A new processor (position or equipment) would also be required to assist with daily operational and processing needs at the Shelby-Hoover campus.

5. *Can the performance of the unit be addressed by professional development?*

Attendances at local, state, regional and national conferences are available for employees to attend throughout the year and are essential stay informed on new regulations that change often with Federal Student Aid and the GI Bill programs. Such workshops include, but not limited to: USA Funds, AASF AA Fall Workshop, ALBUG, AVAA and PeopleSkills.

Unit Goals (plans for the unit for the next two years):

- 1. Objectives – the activities through which the goal will be achieved. Each Unit Goal should have at least one objective.**
- 2. Method of Assessment – how the unit will determine if the objective has been met.**
- 3. Additional Funding Requests – provide an estimate of the cost of achieving the objective. Also, include a description of how these funds will be used to accomplish the objective.**

2015-2016

Goal 1: Provide adequate personnel to staff and support the student aid process at the four campus locations.

- 1. Objectives**
 - a. A financial aid processor will be housed at the Shelby- Hoover campus to assist with the processing of student applications, increasing the output of student files completed daily. With the hiring of an additional Financial Aid Processor, it will increase work productivity tremendously and will allow students to be informed in a timely manner of the requirements needed to complete their application. This position will also allow more one on one counseling for students at the Shelby-Hoover and Jefferson campuses as it will disburse the work load evenly to all Processors. This position will allow ample rotation with Processors as it relates to participation at high school visits, college fairs and community events to provide financial aid information.

- b. Hiring the Associate Director of Financial Aid would provide on campus supervision at the Shelby-Hoover campus and will provide assistance to the Director of Financial Aid with daily operational functions for all campuses.

2. Method of Assessment

- a. A review of the number of files processed and ready for award by all personnel as compared with prior years.
- b. Feedback from students on the financial aid process in its entirety through surveys as well as monitoring the volume of complaints would be essential in determining the success of the unit's goal.

3. Additional Funding Requests

- a. Funding estimated to employ additional financial aid staff @ \$38,000.00 (E3 position plus benefits approximately \$17,000.00).
- b. Funding estimated to employ the Associate Director of Financial Aid @65,000.00(C3 position plus benefits approximately \$17,000.00).

Goal 2: Continue to research new ideas to keep the Financial Aid office current with trends and practices regarding federal and state regulations.

1. Objective:

- a. Monitor and stay current with financial aid trends and best practices as it relates to the Department of Education, Department of Veteran Affairs, industry standards, and peer institutions.
- b. Continue to send staff to local, state, regional and national seminars and conferences.

2. Method of Assessment

- a. Staff members will remain abreast on various ideas and updates by researching and reviewing federal documents/reports /notices sent to personnel and networking opportunities with colleagues. This will assist the unit in assuring servicing students effectively.

3. Additional Funds Request

- a. With many federal conferences, sponsored by the Department of Education, as well as local seminars provided by such groups as USA Funds, the only expenses

would include lodging, meals and travel as the registration fees are of no charge. Many state and regional conferences provide a registration fee that range from \$150.00 to \$350.00. The estimated expenses for all federal, regional and state conferences are \$10,000.00.

Goal 3: Work extensively to ensure the reduction of JSCC's loan default rate

1. Objective

- a. Work closely with students to provide adequate knowledge of the federal student loan program and a better understanding on default rates, repayment and borrowing issues that are currently affecting student education.
- b. Develop pamphlets and workshop information on the loan default prevention.
- c. Consult with loan default agencies on services and software that will assist in lowering the student loan default rate.

2. Method of Assessment

- a. Monitor the default rate information provided by the Department of Education to ensure the information programs are successful.
- b. Monitor the number of students attending workshops and provide a survey to determine if information is effective or informative to student's needs.
- c. Consult various loan default prevention companies on preventative measures required to ensure the rate decrease.

3. Additional Funding Request

- a. No additional funding needed outside of the current budget.
- b. No additional funding needed outside of the current budget.

Goal 4: Continue to provide early notifications to financial aid recipients.

1. Objective

- a. Continue to notify students regarding courses not required for their program of study to ensure an effective graduation plan based on recent financial aid regulations.
- b. Issue warning notification to students regarding their academic progress.

2. Method of Assessment

- a. This can be monitored through reports provided by the IT department that provides information on students taking courses outside of their degree plan.
- b. This is data is monitored by ARGOS reports developed by the IT department.

3. Additional Funding Requests

- a. There is no additional funding needed outside of the current budget.

2016-2017

Goal 1: To continue to work closely with the Information Technology Department to ensure that Automic (UC4) is working efficiently and effectively to assist with the processing needs in the financial aid department.

1. Objectives

- a. Continue to work closely with the Information Technology Department to ensure that all financial aid processes are automated to be run multiple times per day.
- b. Continue to contact other schools who are also utilizing the Automic system to get ideas on improving functionality of the software.

2. Method of Assessment

- a. The Financial Aid Systems Analyst will monitor such sites as E-Community and BPOST as well as networking with various schools and the Information Technology department on updates needed to ensure we are knowledgeable.

3. Additional Funding Requests

- a. There is no additional funding needed outside of the current budget.

Goal 2: Continue to attend all local, state, federal and national conferences to remain abreast of the ever changing federal student aid and GI Bill regulations.

1. Objectives

- a. The unit must continue to increase the knowledge of all staff members on the student federal aid process as well as stipulations on the GI BILL educational program for veterans.
- b. The unit will also provide means for staff members to network with fellow peers and build relationships to gain knowledge of various ways to implement policies by the Department of Education and Veteran Affairs.

2. Methods of Assessment

- a. Continue to encourage staff members to take an active role in state and regional organizations
- b. Continue to send staff members to local, regional and state conferences.

3. Additional Funding Requests

- a. Funding estimated to attend local conferences: no cost is required
- b. Funding estimated to attend state and federal conferences: \$13,000
- c. Funding estimated for memberships in state, regional and national organizations: \$5,000.00

Goal 3: Monitor the number of students assisted at all campus locations to ensure adequate staffing needs are met

1. Objective

Continue to monitor the financial aid student activity at all campus locations; this would include students on skype, walk-ins and those who make appointments to see counselors to ensure that sufficient personnel provided

2. Method of Assessment

Comparison of students coming in to each campus location and the assistance needed. This would be monitored by a sign in sheet for each location.

3. Additional Funding Requests

There is no additional funding needed outside of the current budget.

Goal 4: Ensure that staff has sufficient office equipment to handle day to day operations necessary to meet student awarding needs.

1. Objective

- a. To ensure that staff members continue to have computers updated every two years, software information remains updated essential to processing student federal aid and to ensure each financial aid office has scanning, faxing, printing and copying accessibility to be able to assist students in a timely manner.

2. Method of Assessment

- a. The Office Manager at the Jefferson Campus will maintain a list that compiles all computer and software installing dates and serial numbers to be able to keep all office equipment rotated appropriately.
- b. To obtain a copier for all financial aid offices; currently the Shelby-Hoover campus is without a copier that will allow them to provide copies with students quickly, especially during peak times instead of traveling to another area. The copier will also serve as a scanner to assist with the transmitting of documents to on and off campus personnel.
- c. The unit requires multiple functioning printers in the office to print student information, reports and notification letters for students that must be sent.

3. Additional Funding Requests

- a. Funding estimated for two (2) Desktop computers and software @\$1666.27 per computer
- b. Funding estimated for two(2) Laptop computers for the Director and Associate Director @ 1666.27 per computer
- c. Funding estimated for two(2) office printers at \$526.62 per printer