

Executive Summary and Action Plan

Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) Self-Assessment
Financial Aid at Community College of Denver
2015

The Self-Assessment Process

The Self-Assessment was coordinated by the Financial Aid Director. The review committee consisted of:
Rachel Davis, Advising Director
Khara O'Connell, TRIO EOC Director
Lynn Wilson, Business Faculty

Starting in November 2014 the Financial Aid CAS Review committee (FA CAS) was assembled and prepared for the review process. Each member was provided with the CAS Standards and guidelines for review of financial aid programs. Beginning in January, the FA CAS met for a hands-on session to evaluate Part 1: Mission. During the meeting the committee members set a schedule and methodology for the review of each part. Prior to each meeting, the Financial Aid Director would create a narrative for the part, provide any evidence demonstrating the financial aid programs reflect CAS standard and include a rating sheet for the part. All materials were placed in the G: drive under Financial Aid/CAS and each FA CAS committee member was granted access to the folder to review materials at their convenience. One complicating factor is that FA CAS had all the CAS materials from 2006, but the standards and evaluation measures had been changed in the most recent FA CAS standards. Since FA CAS did not have any other materials from the updated CAS standards, we used the old rating sheets as they applied to the current standards.

Component Areas Overview

Part 1: Mission

The primary areas of concern for FA CAS in this part was that the Financial Aid Office does not have a standardized mechanism for reviewing goals and mission in order to update them in-line with CCD's goals and mission. FA CAS did not feel as if the Financial Aid program "functions as an integral part of the host institutions overall mission." There was no evidence showing that the development and review of goals and mission for the financial aid program was a collaborative process extending beyond financial aid staff. FA CAS also mentioned that they would like to see more input from executive staff in development of FA program goals.

Part 2: Program

FA CAS found it difficult to properly evaluate the FA program with respect to the guidance offered by CAS. There was acknowledgement by FA CAS that the Financial Aid program is significantly regulated and in the context of financial aid as transactional for most students, it is difficult to measure a true student learning outcome or gauge the level of development the financial aid can offer and measure. FA CAS did note that the Financial Aid program is exceptional in federal and state compliance measures. FA

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CAS recommended that the Financial Aid program could be developed for measuring SLO's and student development through leveraging relationships with other faculty and staff to develop a coherent set of offerings within the FA program to students who choose to access the Financial Aid Offices services. Currently the FA program centering on Financial Aid Awareness and Debt Management are individually well-developed but are not representative of a comprehensive strategy to impact student development.

Part 3: Organization and Leadership

In the review of the organization and leadership within the Financial Aid program, FA CAS affirmed that the Financial Aid Office and program are well led and organized with respect to the institutionalized functions, internal communications and qualified staff of Financial Aid. Much of the assessment for CCD staff lies within the HR process. The FA CAS also identified that a leadership communication assessment or plan could be further developed or formalized for the FA program in general. This was in response to little evidence showing FA program information extended past the Financial Aid Office. FA CAS noted that there is a potential for conflict in the current structure and hierarchy of the FA program if enrollment initiatives override sound financial aid process. Additionally, there was a brief mention by one of the FA CAS members focused on aligning and guiding the Financial Aid programs to be more integrated with educational and administrative processes.

Part 4: Human Resources

Based on the FA CAS review, this part of the CAS standard is exceptionally well met. FA CAS found that the Financial Aid program is well staffed and staff members have the appropriate credential and level of training to conduct the business of financial aid. There were two deficiencies found in this Part by FA CAS related to professional development opportunities and the appropriate technology being available to the FA Program. Both of these deficiencies were acknowledged as budget item issues with little control at the FA program level.

Part 5: Ethics

This Part was determined by FA CAS to be well met. The FA program adheres to the Statement of Ethical principles published by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators. In all measure of this part the FA program was able to show appropriate and ethical treatment within the FA program and among staff members interfacing with students, CCD community or extra-institutional agencies. FA CAS made special mention of the FA program strict adherence to protocol in sharing of personally identifiable information.

Part 6: Law, Policy and Governance

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The Financial Aid program is heavily regulated by state and federal law. FA CAS made note that this Part is somewhat reflective of the CAS Part involving Leadership and Organization. FA CAS identified that while the Financial Aid program is doing a good job of managing Law, Policy and Governance, the access to timely legal advice specifically is muted by the necessity to circulate legal questions to the Colorado Community College System office.

Part 7: Diversity, Equity and Access

FA CAS found that the Financial Aid program offered by CCD does promote and is responsive to a variety of students from various backgrounds and ability levels. While limits to technology available institution-wide do impact accessibility for some students, FA CAS stated that the FA program's ability to be flexible to create access is very good as is delivery of financial aid. FA CAS also mentioned significant guidelines in Title IV federal student aid which do not allow for discrimination in federal student aid awarding or aid delivery to specified student populations. Inherent in financial aid are discriminatory structures based on socio-economic level which allow a significant level of aid to be routed to the highest need students and this is acknowledged broadly in Financial Aid programs as meeting the differential in costs and ability to pay within lower socio-economic students and families. Although interesting to note, this fundamental disparity in awarding aid is not in the purview of this measure.

Part 8: Institutional and External Relations

As a part of the Enrollment Services Division at CCD, the Financial Aid program is integrated into the function of the entire division. Financial Aid staff members also participate in a wide variety of meetings with campus constituents and regularly attend campus activities in an effort to serve students and remain current with recent campus initiatives. The Financial Aid program is also well-represented in state and federal associations and organizations geared toward student financial aid. FA CAS found the Financial Aid program is exceptional in both internal and external relations.

Part 9: Financial Resources

FA CAS took this section in two pieces since it is open to interpretation if this section involves aid to students or operational funds. The primary drive in this section is likely more related to operational funding. FA CAS found that funding for professional development and training was lacking in relation to this being a part of the Financial Aid program goal and mission. FA CAS was unclear how to evaluate the dollars spent on ECMC for delinquency and default management given cost and program details for other similar vendor based programs which have various services and methods. ECMC services are notably redundant with the staffing model for the Financial Aid program which includes a Financial Awareness Manager and a Default Prevention Specialist. Other operating costs are well budgeted and managed. The secondary look at this Part by the FA CAS reflected a look at how dollars were spent in programs geared toward students. While federal and state aid are awarded to students and reconciled in a uniform manner, institutional scholarship lacks organization. The FA program has developed and operates a significant institutional scholarship dollar pool of funds. FA CAS expressed concern over the

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variety of scholarships offered from CCD as an institution and a lack of organization in how institutional scholarships to students are created and proper structure in place to manage these funds.

Part 10: Technology

FA CAS acknowledged that the state of technology within the FA program could use some improvement through updated equipment. This is generally relegated to the IT department for periodic updates to computer equipment based on their schedule. CCD IT support for US Department of Education applications is good. The FA program has also purchased vendor services from ECMC and AcademicWorks to help manage delinquent borrowers and scholarship applications. These services have a separate cost, but do help supplement the FA program operations. During the review, FA CAS also made note that Banner support by CCCS appears to be significantly limited in terms of generating reports geared toward managing the FA program as well as modifications to FA program processes outside of compliance related releases/updates

Part 11: Facilities and Equipment

FA CAS stated that the facilities used by the FA program are well-suited for access, flexibility and interface to students. Work areas are mostly private and separate offices ensure a degree of confidentiality between student and FA program staff. The facilities and equipment can also be closed and locked away to ensure security except for the front desk area. Upon closing every day, all personally identifiable information is brought into the Front Desk Supervisor's office. Computers on the front desk are not locked and this poses a security risk for theft, especially given the large "barn" doors do not function to secure the front desk area.

Part 12: Assessment and Evaluation

FA CAS found in the context of evaluation of overall program, the Financial Aid program needs more work on regular assessment in relation to CAS standards. It should be noted that fiscal and federal/state compliance within the FA program are strengths as reflected in clean audits and FSA program reviews in the recent past. The FA program utilizes regular reconciliation of funds and Federal Student Aid assessments to evaluate the administrative capability of the Financial Aid office. CAS assessments center on student development and learning outcomes stemming from the FA program. This key difference is quite clear in the FA programs lack of cohesive, organized strategies and assessment of student development and learning outcome based programs. These are somewhat novel for the FA program and more development and support of the elements subject to a CAS review is warranted.

Judgment of Performance

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IDENTIFY AREAS OF STRENGTH

IDENTIFY AREAS OF MEETS STANDARDS

IDENTIFY AREAS OF WEAKNESS NEED IMPROVEMENT

FILL IN NUMBER CORRELATING TO JUDGEMENT AND FILL IN RATING (STRENGTH, MEETS, ETC).

CAS Component Area	Judgment	Rating
Part 1: Mission	67%	Meets
Part 2: Program	68%	Meets
Part 3: Organization and Leadership	90%	Strength
Part 4: Human Resources	80%	Strength
Part 5: Ethics	86%	Strength
Part 6: Law, Policy and Governance	88%	Strength
Part 7: Diversity, Equity and Access	85%	Strength
Part 8: Institutional and External Relations	100%	Strength
Part 9: Financial Resources	79%	Meets
Part 10: Technology	78%	Meets
Part 11: Facilities and Equipment	78%	Meets
Part 12: Assessment and Evaluation	56%	Needs Improvement

Prioritized Action Plan

1. FIRST ACTION ITEM-DESCRIBE ACTION PLAN, BULLET MAIN POINTS, WHO WILL COMPLETE, AND DEADLINE/DATE.

- Develop a list of FA program offerings oriented toward student development and student learning outcomes. Review each program as far as alignment with the FA Program and college mission. Develop assessment tools to evaluate program development and positive outcomes for students. Incorporate third-parties outside of the FA program to offer input and feedback.
 - Deadline 12/15/2016
 - Performed by FA Programming Committee consisting of FA Directors and Managers

2. SECOND ACTION ITEM

- Develop template for priority communications with FA staff and leadership. Identify and refine reportable data elements pertinent to tracking and success of the FA program. Attach/identify individual markers for CAS Standards in the communication structure. Ensure and track response/follow-up evidence (collect evidence from Executive staff meeting minutes, etc)

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- Deadline 12/15/2016
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