

Appropriations Committee Budget Hearings

Standard RBA Questions for All Agencies

Program Name: Connecticut Community Colleges
Financial Aid Services

1. What is the quality of life result to which the program makes the most important contribution?

Financial Aid Services provides for these quality of life results for Connecticut residents:

- A stable, educated workforce
- Economically-sufficient families
- The development of mature, independent individuals with the potential to be active citizens of the State of Connecticut

2. What is the program's purpose?

The purpose of the Financial Aid Services program at the Connecticut Community Colleges is to provide access to a quality postsecondary education to the citizens of Connecticut at a low cost. Our goal is to provide students of all socio-economic levels the opportunity for success.

In particular the purpose of the program is to develop comprehensive financial aid strategies to assist low-income students and first-generation college students.

3. Who are the programs' major customers?

Students, particularly from low-income and diverse backgrounds, are our major customers.

4. What measures do you use to tell if the program is delivering its services well?
How are you doing on the most important of these measures?

- The Connecticut Community Colleges have developed a nationally-recognized model for the delivery of financial aid services to students. We have created an infrastructure at our System Office that supports the

financial aid activities at our 12 colleges. Using one database we use technology to offer a “service bureau” approach to the campus-based financial aid offices.

- Daily monitoring of financial aid operations by System Office staff allows continuous assessment of our campus financial aid activities. Since the development of our financial aid services office in the 2000-2001 academic year, we have experienced phenomenal growth in applications and financial aid awards to students. We continue to maximize our use of federal student aid dollars to benefit our students. We have not increased our financial aid staffs but rather have intelligently used our technological acumen to develop and maintain a virtual 24/7 financial aid office for our students.
- Financial Aid applications continue to increase on an annual basis. Thus far in 2008-2009, the CCC Banner Financial Aid System has processed 43,042 applications. This represents a 13% increase over 2007-2008, a 35% increase over 2004-2005, and a 108% increase over 2000-2001.
- Approximately 46% of all students attending Connecticut Community Colleges receive financial aid.
- Nearly one half (49%) of Connecticut Community College Financial Aid recipients attend as full-time students.
- The rate at which CCC students are completing Financial Aid applications is increasing more rapidly than CCC headcount enrollment. Thus far in 2008-2009, there are 8.5 Financial Aid applications filed for every 10 students enrolled. This represents an 18% increase from just five years ago, and suggests Financial Aid applications will soon outnumber student headcount enrollment.
- In 2008-2009, analysis of those students for whom a valid federal needs analysis has been calculated has yielded the following:
 - 31% of students/families possess zero financial resources to contribute towards a CCC education
 - 57% of students/families possess financial resources insufficient to finance direct costs (tuition, fees, books) of a CCC education
 - Only 9% of students/families for whom a valid federal needs analysis exists possess financial resources sufficient to cover all costs associated with attending a Connecticut Community College for one year as measured by average cost of attendance figures
- Thus far in 2008-2009, 90% of CCC students receiving need-based grant funding have a household income lower than Connecticut’s median household income as derived from U.S. Census Bureau data.
- Thus far in 2008-2009, 26% of all students who received need-based grant aid lived below federally defined poverty levels.
- For the last 2 years (2007, 2008) our federal compliance audits (A-133) conducted by the Auditors of Public Accounts have reported no compliance issues in the administration of the federal financial aid programs.

5. What measures do you use to tell if the program's customers are better off?

How are you doing on the most important of these measures?

- The purpose of our financial aid services program is to provide access and opportunity to students. With that opportunity comes responsibility. Students must advance toward a certificate or degree from one of our colleges. In accordance with federal regulations, we have a stringent satisfactory academic progress policy that applies to all students receiving financial aid from any source. Students not making progress lose their financial aid eligibility.
- Simply, as once voiced by the Reverend Leon Sullivan, the founder of the Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America, "We help those who help themselves."
- Our providing students with ACCESS to our colleges already makes them better off. These students now have the OPPORTUNITY to work with dedicated counselors and faculty to make themselves better off – however s/he may define this term.

6. Who are the partners with a major role to play in doing better?

- Our major partners in the delivery of financial aid services are the federal and state governments. Approximately 65% of our funding is derived from the federal student financial aid programs authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act.
- Our strategies for program success and the delivery of financial aid services are always constructed with exacting federal & state compliance and accountability in mind.

7. What works, what could work, to do better, or to do the least harm in a difficult financial climate?

- Improve our technical infrastructure by increasing our use of automated processes
- Further develop & customize our financial aid student self-service platform
- Enlarge our self-service platform to include new and advanced technologies
- Further standardize and develop common business practices among our 12 college financial aid offices
- Development of imaging technologies to enhance our document processing activities at the 12 colleges

8. What do you propose to do over the next 2 years? Focus on 1) no-cost and low-cost actions, 2) actions to reduce the harm of budget reductions, and 3) reallocation of existing resources to obtain best results.
- Work closely with the U.S. Department of Education and members of Congress to improve access to the financial aid system. We are very involved in the Free Application for Federal Aid (FAFSA) simplification processes being discussed by ED staff.
 - Work with the above entities to reduce the unnecessary compliance burdens based upon college financial aid offices.
 - Improve college financial aid business practices that place obstacles in the path of students seeking access to financial aid services.
 - Examine thoroughly and improve where needed our System Office financial aid model of service and support in light of budget and staff reductions. How can we improve and expand our practices to better serve our college financial aid staffs?