

SOMOS UNO TASK FORCE – FINANCIAL AID RECOMMENDATIONS

The overall recommendation that encompasses these expected outcomes is to have a specific work group to implement the approved recommendations composed of subject matter experts. This general recommendation is consistent with the framework of Somos Uno.

As a general comment, some of the actions provided below focus on enhancing existing processes to achieve consistent and aligned outcomes supporting student success and compliance.

Outcome 1: Enhanced Student Access and Communication

Goal: Ensure students receive consistent, timely, and accessible information from Financial Aid and related offices across the district.

Chancellor's Priority #1 – Improve employee engagement and morale and nurture a more responsive, service-based culture to improve the employee and student experience across the district.

Chancellor's Priority #5 – Identify and remove barriers in the student and employee experience, including identifying duplicative or inefficient processes and/or systems.

Chancellor's Priority #6 – Facilitate collaborative efforts across the district such as implementing legislative mandates, streamlining procedures, and improving professional development opportunities.

Actions:

1. Adopt/optimize a shared chatbot in Financial Aid for regulatory updates consistently districtwide. Consider adopting the same for other departments supporting students such as Admissions & Records and Counseling.
2. Adopt a workflow to process all student financial aid applications without missing any student application. Review the current process in ISE to ensure all students are auto-packaged upon receipt of their FAFSA data. Some applications are not processed even though the students have submitted all documentation. Reviewing the weekly disbursement report is necessary to identify students with majors that are not eligible for financial aid.
3. Align inconsistent deadlines and processes districtwide.

4. Implement a districtwide phone tree for Financial Aid and Admissions & Records and standardize auto-reply to messages and response expectations.
5. Train staff in customer service including tips on how to respond to upset students focused on a caring campus philosophy.

Outcome 2: Reduced Student Loan Defaults

Goal: Ensure consistent support to all students in managing student loan defaults to comply with Title IV regulations and accreditation requirements on student loan defaults.

Chancellor's Priority #5 – Identify and remove barriers in the student and employee experience, including identifying duplicative or inefficient processes and/or systems.

Action:

1. Review processes of managing student loan defaults and adopt a consistent process districtwide.

Outcome 3: Improved Operational Efficiency and Process Alignment

Goal: Streamline systems, forms, and workflows across campuses to reduce processing time, ensure compliance, and maintain high-quality service.

Chancellor's Priority #1 – Improve employee engagement and morale and nurture a more responsive, service-based culture to improve the employee and student experience across the district.

Chancellor's Priority #5 – Identify and remove barriers in the student and employee experience, including identifying duplicative or inefficient processes and/or systems.

Chancellor's Priority #6 – Facilitate collaborative efforts across the district such as implementing legislative mandates, streamlining procedures, and improving professional development opportunities.

Actions:

1. Standardize document management tools (such as CampusLogic, AdobeSign, Cornerstone). Shared system can eliminate discrepancies in how each campus handles student employment or financial aid workflows. Enhancing efficiency relies on workflows, templates for assignment cards. Improving communication needs the use of a tool such as Campus Logic to push updates, deadlines, or requirements. Determine which tools are necessary and for what purposes.
2. Align data integration, including the matching rules between CCCApply, CADAA, CCPG, and FAFSA. This includes fixing the data load/import.

3. Shift student-hiring processes to HR for consistency and for coordinating student employment to ensure consistent processes and timelines in hiring.
4. Maintain a shared SharePoint process hub.

Outcome 4: Strengthened Staffing and Support Capacity

Goal: Ensure sufficient, specialized staffing and technical infrastructure to support financial aid compliance, operations, and student services.

Chancellor's Priority #1 – Improve employee engagement and morale and nurture a more responsive, service-based culture to improve the employee and student experience across the district.

Actions:

1. Develop district coordination to oversee and support shared financial aid functions across both campuses. The focus of this role would be to strengthen consistency in processes, ensure compliance with Title IV regulations, and promote alignment with district-wide policies. Strategic oversight, help standardize procedures, and improve efficiency and regulatory compliance across the district.
2. Employ functional financial aid analysts for Banner/SQL/Argos systems.
3. Engage a financial aid consultant districtwide for technical assistance to assist with functions outside the scope of the financial aid staff and ETS and for producing manuals and standard operating procedures.
4. Review classification and job duties to support parity to ensure consistent functions, currency on job functions, and roles are classified accordingly and to some extent enable cross-training among student support services. This approach supports cross-training, professional development, and collaboration, while also helping to prevent burnout, boost morale, and address compensation concerns.

Outcome 5: Increased Scholarship Awards and Enhanced Processes for Scholarship

Goal: Increase scholarship uptake and engagement through targeted outreach, user-friendly tools, and structural equity supports.

Chancellor's Priority #1 - Improve employee engagement and morale and nurture a more responsive, service-based culture to improve the employee and student experience across the district.

Actions:

1. Have a districtwide scholarship coordinator to oversee processes for awarding scholarships funded through the FHDA Foundation for streamlining workflow and creating capacity for financial aid staff.
2. Re-align existing scholarships into broader categories to encourage applications; review existing donor financial minimums in establishing scholarships.
3. Launch annual outreach plan with ambassadors and staff engagement to increase scholarship applications by students and encourage readers for reviewing.
4. Enhance scholarship review process by having a portal for outreach, application submission and review, award, and notification.