Financial Aid Assessment

A working group was charged to meet and review current aid processes

• One-Stop, Enrollment Operations, Communications, Admissions, IT, Institutional Effectiveness and Financial Aid were all represented

• The goal of the review was to assess current practices and assess the student experience with the process

• The group met each day from 10-3, November 11-15

• The topical agenda attempted to recreate how a student would experience the aid process
## Assessment Agenda

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
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<tr>
<td>communication, verification, loan processes, acceptance, self-service</td>
<td>and communication methods and messages. Staff roles and processes with</td>
<td>promissory note, entrance counseling, in-cycle adjustments, balance</td>
<td>external. Renewal processes, stacking, removing. Associated timelines and</td>
<td>advisors. Pell limits and associated processes. Teach grant. Professional</td>
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<td>and disbursement. Tracking requirements. Cost of attendance and Blazer</td>
<td>each step. Role of Operations/Counselors. Work flow and internal</td>
<td>notices, projected vs. actual adjustments.</td>
<td>communication internally and externally.</td>
<td>judgment.</td>
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<td>Bucks for Books.</td>
<td>tracking.</td>
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<td>generated by Banner, staff and on-line.</td>
<td>versus electronic. Verification processes which take the longest versus</td>
<td>and acceptance. Work study: awards, balance, placement and employer</td>
<td>and impact based on approval or denial. In-school repayment processes.</td>
<td>past balance, Loan limits, R2T4, programs/status eligibility, part-time,</td>
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<td>those which are efficient and quickly resolved by applicants.</td>
<td>employer eligibility and outreach.</td>
<td>UAB Resource form.</td>
<td>etc. Internal Communication. Outstanding issues.</td>
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*UAB THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA AT BIRMINGHAM*

Knowledge that will change your world
Assessment Findings

1. Questions
   • Issues that were identified that need additional clarification

2. Proposed Changes
   • Areas that a change in process or delivery that would simplify the process for students or staff

3. BIG Issues
   • Rethinking the verification process, SAP process changes and new tools to help students navigate the process

4. Possible Working Groups
   • Issues identified that may require a larger discussion to develop a meaningful solution
Questions

The following questions were identified for review by the oversight group:

1. **Loan limits reached prior to disbursement**
   - How can we communicate this more effectively?

2. **Staff view of the student profile in BlazerNet**
   - Can we show which aid has been accepted by the student?

3. **Document status presented in BlazerNet**
   - It is possible for a status of pending to be shown?
     - This would let students know that documents have been received and are being evaluated
4. Students being informed they are not admitted due to on-going packaging within term.
   • Can admission term be a consideration when packaging is being run during a term so students admitted for the next term are not informed that they are not admitted?
   • RORRULE will allow specification of terms to which rules are applied.

5. Staffing assignments role-based versus student based
   • What is the rationale for this methodology, and does it provide the highest level of student service?
Questions continued...

6. **One-Stop Counselors handle a large number of documents that would satisfy a requirement daily.**
   - Is it time to look at update capabilities for various requirements that do not require assessment?
   - Where does update access make sense?

7. **Packaging possibilities are now prepared for students with summer aid eligibility.**
   - Would a summer financial aid application focus staff efforts on those who are most likely to attend?
Questions continued...

8. Financial Aid Staff manually zero out aid that has been offered and accepted for those not enrolled.
   • Should this be automated to occur after the drop/add deadline each term?

9. The net price calculator does not have current scholarship levels or cost of attendance figures.
   • How and when is this information updated?

10. SAP calculation is done in Banner each term.
    • How are remedial courses handled? Do students in these courses require different messaging or should they be included at all?
Proposed Changes

The following changes were identified for review by the oversight group:

1. **Dependent versus independent status is an issue that causes confusion, delay and significant staff processing time.**
   - The group proposed developing a dedicated site to clearly define definitions, processes and outline required steps for students unsure of their status.
   - Treat this change similarly to the residency process.
Proposed Changes continued...

2. Obtaining a tax transcript is not a familiar process.
   • Provide simple, detailed instructions with screenshots and images of what not to send

3. Daily load processes are very manual and require significant staff time
   • Work with Banner Priorities Group to continue work on automation of this process

4. Posting the Title IV funds form as a requirement
   • Make “opting in” simple with a link to a simple explanation
Proposed Changes continued...

5. Tracking requirements often lead to questions
   • Provide simple, detailed instructions of exactly what the student must provide to complete the requirement.

6. Students that have not been admitted receive a tracking requirement
   • Notify non-admitted students that their FAFSA has been received and to contact admission to complete the process.

7. There is a delay between completion of verification processes and communication.
   • Develop an automated trigger that informs student of timeline
Proposed Changes continued...

8. Communicating with students as the process evolves
   • If additional required documentation moves a student from “pending” to “discrepancy”, a communication is sent referring them to BlazerNet with a detailed description of what is needed.

9. UAB institutional scholarship application is a PDF
   • Using existing data this could be a pre-populated form that includes required data and picture.
     • This form should also be presented to only those students who are award eligible at an established baseline.
 Proposed Changes continued...

10. **Students place on academic probation during their first term receive communication from Financial Aid, Registrar and Scholarships.**
   - These students should be identified and a letter should come from Enrollment Management outlining the areas of concern.

11. **Student have difficulty assessing their current rate of completion**
   - Develop a calculation that is displayed in BlazerNet that shows rate of completion and have an indicator of green, yellow and red to increase student awareness of status.
12. The Financial Resource form is now required for all students
   • Does this form achieve its intended goal and should it be required?

13. Reduce reliance on paper through alternative electronic means of document submission
   • Develop an web-based dropbox for required financial aid documents
     • USC has an extensive list of options for submitted documents electronically
     • Student instructional videos are also provided on the site
My Financial Aid & Documents

Log in and use our secure online system to:

- **Submit Documents**
  - Upload electronic documents - *the quickest, most efficient way to submit materials to our office.*
  - Print customized cover and closing sheets to fax documents.

- **Check your financial aid status**
- **View your financial aid award or other awards if you are not a financial aid applicant**
  - Award information for the 2014-2015 academic year will become available as follows:
    - New undergraduate students: Early April.
    - Continuing undergraduate and graduate students: Beginning in July.
    - New graduate students: On a rolling basis.

**Continuing Undergraduate and Graduate Students**

Log In to myUSC

How to Log In
You will need the username and password you use for your USC e-mail account.

View a brief instructional video about this process.
BIG Issues

The working groups spent a significant amount of time on two key areas:

1. The verification process
   - A new process is proposed which increases automation and simplifies the steps and requirements involved.

2. The SAP Appeal process
   - The proposed process changes some of the current processes in place and expedites the process for students.

3. Utilizing Financial Aid TV
   1. Examining use of this service to provide students with short videos that walk through various steps of the aid process.
The Verification Process

The current verification process is very time intensive for both students and staff.

- The following changes are proposed:
  - Move the process inside of BlazerNet
  - Create a checklist driven by verification group
    - Mark steps complete as student move through the process
  - No longer require signatures for those classified as independent
    - 40% of those selected for verification are independent students
    - Have data pre-populated on the form from Banner
  - Have specific upload mechanisms by document
    - Upload would create a document with a B0 number and document type
Proposed Verification Checklist in BlazerNet

• Your FASFA has been received
  • *If no, go to FAFSA.gov to apply with UAB’s School Code*
• Resource Form *(optional)*
  • *Explain the purpose and who needs to complete the form*
• Title IV Form *(easy opt in with link to explanation)*
• Verification requirements driven by group
  • *List only requirements for that group with an explanation, directions and a link to the form and upload process*
• Discrepancy listing *(only added if needed)*
• Your aid has been packaged
The current appeal process has little automation and creates significant challenges for students and staff.

- The following changes are proposed:
  - Move the SAP appeal from to BlazerNet
    - Pre-populate the form using Banner data and indicate failing SAP areas
    - Require a series of radio buttons as a means of agreeing with the requirements of the process
    - Allow electronic submission of the statement of circumstances
    - Initiate the SAP appeal process within BlazerNet with a list of requirements
  - Notify advisor of pending appeal
  - E-mail copy to the student of the terms and conditions of the appeal
SAP Appeal Process continued..

- Once the appeal has been submitted, the advisor is notified and must verify that the student:
  - Is enrolled in the correct courses and successful completion would return them to good standing
    - Approval would be indicated in BlazerNet or the advisor could require a meeting with the student.
  - Once approved, students must agree to the terms indicated by the advisor in BlazerNet
  - Students are also required to register with the University Academic Support Center to develop an academic success plan by 10th class day
    - A list of students that require a plan would be forwarded to the UASC.
Financial Aid TV

• Customized content
• Updated as programs change
• Reduce phone call and e-mails
• Analytic tools to determine what students are using the most and where they are accessing it
• Educate Veterans on various programs
• Push messages to students at various points in the process if they are not completing requirements
• Integrate FAFSA4Caster into the admissions process
Possible working groups?

During the review, several issues came up that were beyond the scope of the exercise.

1. **Can the existing Financial Aid page in BlazerNet be reconfigured for easier navigation?**
   
   - The current “out of the box” Banner navigation could be greatly improved.
   - While we want to avoid modifications, can it be presented in a different manner?
   - This would involve One-Stop, Financial Aid and the Banner Team to review.
Possible working groups?

2. Reconfiguration of the what is available to students in My Offer.
   - Adding an accept function and a link to terms and conditions would be helpful for students.
   - Review the “expiry date” language and update with more clear terminology.
   - Can we add a May 1 extension radio button option?
   - List dollar amounts associated with award where possible.
   - Can there be a print function at the point of award?
Possible working groups?

3. Achieving greater continuity with how awards are entered into Oracle by the Schools through a standardized process?
   - Develop a method for payment requests to have a specific fund code that posts in Banner the following day.
   - This will provide immediate notification in the case of an over award.
   - Those with out a fund code are processed through Student Accounting which causes delays.
   - If fund codes were standardized/required, it would expedite the associated processes.
Possible working groups?

4. Communication and web-site
   - The format, content and purpose of many tracking requirements need to be reviewed and integrated into other efforts.
   - Model sites exist such as:
     - The University of Oregon, USC
   - What communication is mailed, e-mailed or contained within BlazerNet needs to be determined
   - Some contacts should result in a communication with a counselor rather than an automated message
Questions??