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# A FUNCTIONAL MODEL FOR A COMMUNITY-JUNIOR COLLEGE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE

*By Miles A. Eckert and Harold D. Murphy*

Although the prominence of financial aid administration has been evident in senior colleges since the late 1950's, the profession has been slow to develop in community-junior colleges. The traditional low cost of community-junior colleges left little need for elaborate student aid programs and their administration was usually relegated to one man operations, often performed in addition to other duties (Hinko, 1971).

Miller (1971), writing in the first volume of the *Journal of Student Financial Aid*, called attention to the fact that another tradition, open door admissions, brought to the community-junior college low income students who could not afford the "low cost" of attendance. Ferrin (1971), in surveying southwestern junior colleges, found the average yearly expense to cluster around the \$1500 a year figure—a large sum of money for any student!

Since the late 1960's, financial aid administration in community-junior colleges has been increasingly active. It has also become more centralized as pointed out by Puryear (1970) and Monroe (1972). During this time period, professional organizations in community-junior college financial aids were first organized. One of the first of these organizations, the California Community College Student Aid Officers Association, was first formed in the fall of 1968.

Despite these recent developments, research in the area of community-junior college financial aid administration has been extremely limited. A view of the literature disclosed less than 10 articles published in the area. Only six doctoral dissertations were completed in the area during the last six years. Most of this research and writing has been devoted to a description of the financial aid officer or the aid programs administered in community-junior colleges.

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As the area of community-junior college financial aid administration continues to develop, more research is needed to bolster its professional foundations. This need prompted the authors to construct a research project designed to identify the functions that should be performed by a model community-junior college financial aid office.

#### *Procedure*

The Delphi technique of refining group opinion was used to identify the functions of the model office. This technique involved the use of a panel of experts responding to a series of three questionnaires. The objective of the technique was to implement the following procedures:

1. Anonymous response—opinions of members of the group are obtained by a formal questionnaire.
2. Iteration and controlled feedback—interaction is effected by a systematic exercise conducted in several iterations, with carefully controlled feedback between rounds.
3. Statistical group response—the group opinion is defined as an appropriate aggregate of the individual opinions on the final round (Dalkey, 1969:v).

The features of this technique were obviously designed to restrain the biasing effects of dominant individuals, irrelevant communications, and group pressure toward conformity.

The national panel of 68 community-junior college financial aid officers was nominated by the 10 regional Senior Program Officers of the Office of Education, the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare. As a result of this nomination procedure, national representation was achieved and participants from 32 states were included in the study.

In January of 1973, the panelists were asked to list as many functions of a model community-junior college financial aid office as possible. After a return of 84 percent on the first questionnaire, each proposed function was carefully checked to avoid duplications and was then grouped in logical categories. This procedure resulted in 145 functions, categorized into 12 major classifications.

These functions composed the second and third questionnaires in accordance to the Delphi technique. On the second questionnaire, each participant was asked to rate each function on an agreement-disagreement scale. Upon return of 91 percent of questionnaire two, the median and quartiles 1 and 3 were computed for each function. This information, along with a new rating scale, was added to the second questionnaire and returned to the participants. Each panelist was instructed to change his ratings if he so desired in view of the added information.

#### *Findings*

Upon the return of 95 percent of questionnaire three, the functions of the model were then identified from the data. Of the 145 functions originally proposed, 99 functions were selected on the basis of high agreement (indicated by the median and interquartile range) for each function by the pan-

elists. These functions were classified into 10 categories. The categories of transfer problems and collections which were originally proposed were deleted. The selected categories and their functions are listed below:

**FUNCTIONS OF A MODEL COMMUNITY –  
JUNIOR COLLEGE FINANCIAL AID OFFICE**

**A. COUNSELING**

1. Be a resource center for all students having financial problems.
2. Be available to students at times beneficial for student use.
3. Counsel with financial aid students on budget management and other financial problems.
4. Assist parents with financial counseling.
5. Treat all financial aid applicants equally.
6. Insure strict confidentiality of all student counseling and information.
7. Counsel students on economic responsibilities relative to declaring emancipation.
8. Counsel with withdrawing students to determine if additional funding will change their minds.
9. Conduct meaningful exit interviews.

**B. APPLICATION PROCESSING AND DETERMINATION OF AWARDS**

1. Provide students with financial aid application, explanatory sheet, and necessary ACT or CSS forms.
2. Develop concise, informative and easily understood financial aid applications.
3. Assist applicants in interpreting application questions.
4. Establish a packaging rationale.
5. Analyze all financial aid applications and verify eligibility according to state, federal, and/or local regulations.
6. Set a date and notify awardees and alternates of the terms and amount of their awards and a deadline date for acceptance.
7. Organize the distribution of funds so that students receive financial aid according to their need and the amount of funds available.
8. Allocate resources to applicants who are to receive aid.
9. Divide awards into semester allotments.
10. Promptly notify each student who fails to qualify for aid and give him reasons for his ineligibility.
11. Provide a method of appeal for students wishing to appeal their ineligibility.
12. Check completed forms to insure proper documentation.
13. Adopt a basic needs analysis system (ACT or CSS).
14. Evaluate the applicant's personal qualifications, academic records, and financial status in connection with programs requiring demonstrated need.
15. Advise each recipient of his responsibilities, obligations, and privileges regarding his aid award.
16. In case of absence of the director, have a qualified person available to determine the financial need of students.

### *C. PUBLIC RELATIONS*

1. Prepare catalog descriptions and current brochures relative to student financial aid.
2. Publicize the financial aids program in the college newspaper and other local news media.
3. Establish and maintain a strong working relationship with community agencies.
4. Communicate with legislators concerning upcoming financial aid bills.
5. Maintain contact with the United States Office of Education regional director and financial aid personnel.
6. Cultivate scholarship and grant donor resources to increase and perpetuate institutional funds.
7. Send scholarship sponsor an appreciation letter and an academic semester report of the recipient.
8. Contact banks and other lending agencies concerning their participation in student loan programs.
9. Conduct orientation sessions for supervisors of college work-study students.
10. Cooperatively maintain lines of communication with other college divisions such as the president, deans, admissions, registrar, bursar, business office, data processing center, and faculty.
11. Effectively articulate community-junior college student needs with financial aid offices of upper division colleges to assure continuity of assistance.

### *D. RECRUITMENT*

1. Identify and recruit students in financial need.
2. Visit secondary schools with information concerning the college's financial aid program.
3. Conduct financial aid workshops for high school counselors to acquaint them with the types of aid and procedures required to attain aid.
4. Conduct financial aid workshops at local levels for potential students and their parents.
5. Hold financial aid workshops or speaking engagements for guidance, civic, patriotic, and fraternal organizations.
6. Cooperate with schools and other colleges to encourage college attendance by all able students.

### *E. OFFICE MANAGEMENT*

1. Maintain a policy manual for the financial aid office.
2. Devise and implement an effective office procedures flow-chart for processing every student seeking and receiving financial aid.
3. Schedule deadlines for all phases of work.
4. Develop necessary forms for gathering and disbursing information.
5. Maintain all correspondence and communications relative to financial aids.
6. Arrange student appointments for the financial aid office.

7. Maintain a master file on all financial aid students.
8. Maintain a complete, accessible record system of both student applications and program operation which will satisfy all audits.
9. Authorize the business office to disburse funds to approved students.
10. Conduct annual internal audit using USOE check-off list.
11. Have books audited as a part of the regular school audit.
12. Distribute guideline sheet to all work-study students and employers on payroll procedures, student responsibilities, and employer responsibilities.
13. Release financial aid records and information only with the written consent of the student or parents.
14. File annual reports concerning student characteristics and program expenditures to the college administration.
15. File reports and requests with the college administration concerning staff and office needs.
16. Furnish financial aid transcripts for transfer students.

*F. OTHER FUNCTIONS RELATED TO FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL  
AID PROGRAMS*

1. Participate in a combination of at least two federal aid programs for packaging purposes.
2. Complete and submit applications for federal, state, and local funding agencies or groups for funds available to the college.
3. Complete and submit required fiscal year annual reports for each federal and/or state student aid program.
4. Complete and certify appropriate forms of the Federally Insured Student Loan Program.
5. Keep a list of banks and lending institutions who participated in the Federally Insured Student Loan Program.
6. Award local scholarships.
7. Participate in state loan programs.
8. Coordinate state scholarship activities with the college.
9. Maintain flexibility within all programs to insure maximum benefits to students.

*G. PLACEMENT*

1. Maintain liaison with college placement office for part-time jobs for students.
2. Organize college work-study assignments and place the students according to their college program or interests whenever possible.
3. Develop and administer college work-study program off-campus.
4. Maintain contact with public non-profit agencies for possible college work-study off-campus employment.
5. Visit all college work-study employers each semester for good will and job evaluation.
6. Inform students whose financial need is not totally met of other opportunities outside of the college.

#### *H. COOPERATIVE FUNCTIONS WITH OTHER COLLEGE DIVISIONS*

1. Coordinate financial aid office activities with the business office.
2. Review each month's transactions with the business office.
3. Be aware of problems being encountered by the business office in relation to financial aids.
4. Interpret rules and regulations pertaining to financial aid to the administration, business office, and faculty.
5. Meet with data processing center periodically to formulate efficient data processing programs for financial aids.
6. Cooperate with the admissions office on the recruitment of students with financial need.
7. Promote and coordinate the counseling of students with other student personnel services.
8. Have access to all data in the student personnel records bank in order to gain background and information on financial aid applicants.
9. Cooperate with the institutional research office of the college.
10. Participate in meetings of the financial aid committee concerned with the development of institutional policies on financial aid.

#### *I. RESEARCH AND EVALUATION*

1. Prepare planning memorandums for future financial aid office activities.
2. Conduct research to determine impact of financial aid on both the students and the institution.
3. Use relevant research techniques to forecast the number of students needing financial aid for each new year.
4. Evaluate program by retention rates, growth of programs, and growth of the financial aid office.
5. Evaluate the financial aid programs continuously to insure that guideline criteria are being accomplished.
6. Predict the total dollar amount necessary to meet projected student needs.
7. Participate in an evaluation of guideline criteria with the financial aid advisory committee.
8. Establish plans to implement findings that emerge from student seminars on financial aid problems.

#### *J. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT*

1. Work to advance professionalism in the financial aid field.
2. Actively participate in financial aid organizations.
3. Participate in meetings and workshops in order to keep abreast of new developments in financial aid programs and needs analysis procedures.
4. Assist in the training of new financial aid officers.
5. Maintain contact with other financial aid directors in the state.
6. Organize and implement an in-service training and professional development program for office personnel.

7. Train staff in such matters as confidentiality of information and sensitivity to people.
8. Orient other college personnel to the philosophy of the financial aid office.

As soon as the model was completed, it was used to survey the performance of Texas community-junior college financial aid offices. Of the 50 Texas community-junior college financial aid offices asked to rate their offices' performance, 41 returned their questionnaires for a return of 82 percent. As Table 1 indicates, most of the Texas community-junior college financial aid officers felt they were performing the functions adequately.

**TABLE 1**  
Percentage Ratings for the Performance of Texas Community-Junior College Financial Aid Offices in Relation to Functions of the National Model

Major Classifications of Functions	Performance						Total Responses in Category
	Above Average		Average		Below Average		
	N	%	N	%	N	%	
Counseling .....	246	66.67	74	20.05	49	13.28	369
Application Processing and Determination of Awards .....	530	80.79	80	12.20	46	7.01	656
Public Relations .....	218	48.34	130	28.82	103	22.84	451
Recruitment .....	95	38.62	59	23.98	92	37.40	246
Office Management .....	458	69.92	119	18.17	78	11.91	655
Other Functions Related to Federal, State, and Local Aid Programs .....	287	77.78	41	11.11	41	11.11	369
Placement .....	144	58.54	48	19.51	54	21.95	246
Cooperative Functions with Other College Divisions .....	279	68.05	62	15.12	69	16.83	410
Research and Evaluation .....	157	47.87	94	28.66	77	23.48	328
Professional Development .....	192	58.54	74	22.56	62	18.90	328

A further examination of the data from the Texas survey revealed no significant patterns of differences in the performance of the model functions when compared on the basis of enrollment size.

### *Conclusions*

Despite the diversity of community-junior colleges, financial aid offices seem to function in similar fashion from college to college. This conclusion is evidenced by the high number of functions developed for the model office and the lack of significant differences found in different sized Texas community-junior college financial aid offices.

The functions developed for the model community-junior college financial aid office are principally bureaucratic, characteristic of the clerical chores of application processing, program accounting, and program reporting. Counseling was limited primarily to financial problems of students. For the most part, functions requiring more than routine office contact with students were rejected in the formulation of the model.



### *Recommendations*

This study was designed as one of the first steps in providing a foundation from which to base the development of further research in the area of staff and budget guidelines for community-junior college financial aid offices. It is hoped that this model will provide a means for others interested in community-junior college financial aids to investigate in these directions. In the meantime, the functions of the model should serve as an aid in the implementation of newly organized financial aid offices and the evaluation and improvement of those already in operation.

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