

Fall 2008 Comprehensive Program Review

Name of Program: Business Office / Accounting
Name of Unit: Finance and Technology
Name of Area: Administrative Services
Date Completed: 12/01/2008

Program's Mission Statement

The Los Angeles City College Business Office provides an array of financial services to the college community including collections, refunds, disbursements, funds commitments, cash management, student transportation, and reporting.

The staff members of the Business Office provide our students with support and guidance relative to their financial needs and obligations to the college as a part of their successful learning experience. We treat our students and each other with respect and foster a high degree of collaboration with fellow employees from all corners of the campus, enabling ourselves to change and grow as technology and global realities provide to us a hope for the most educated and enlightened society we can achieve.

We promote the college's vision of an urban oasis of learning by consistently serving students in a respectful and caring manner, resulting in a positive effect on recruitment, retention, transfer, and graduation. We strive to make each student's contact with our office a pleasant experience.

Program Outcomes

The Los Angeles City College Business Office provides high quality service, guidance, and support to students, faculty, administrators, staff, and the community, in accounting, disbursing, cashiering and cash management, mass transit initiatives.

The function of Business Office is to facilitate student success by facilitating the following:

1. Providing students with a professional-level environment
2. Ensuring processes and procedures related to the collection and disbursement of funds from/to students are consistent with other District colleges and relatively easy to understand.
3. Providing faculty, administrators and staff with financial data necessary to the performance of their duties.
4. Serving as an integral part of the District accounting system.
5. Maintaining accurate, proper and accessible records of financial transactions.

Program's Characteristics, Performance, and Trends

The Los Angeles City College Business Office facilitates student success by ensuring correct interpretation and application of district and college policies, rules, and regulations in relation to the collection, distribution, and recording of all monetary transactions between students and the college/district.

The Business Office also provides effective and efficient services and guidance to faculty, administrators, and staff on business activities and transactions to support their duties and responsibilities to the college and students.

The staff reviews current procedures with a focus on automating processes and modernizing record-keeping so that electronic versions may replace and eliminate paper.

The staff participates with the other colleges and District financial staff to prepare for new and improved services to students which will make their attendance at our college successful.

Program's Strengths and Weaknesses

The following sections on the Los Angeles City Colleges Business Office strengths and weaknesses are supported by internal employee surveys, personal interviews and interaction with employees, and student surveys.

Strengths:

- An important and appreciated administrative service to the college community
- A multi-cultural working environment, which leads to a greater understanding and acceptance of diversity
- The office provides staff self-esteem because we value each other's contributions
- A working environment where employees are cross-trained to accomplish multi-tasking activities
- An environment where people are treated as family

Weaknesses:

- Lack of back-filling personnel has a negative impact on morale and support to the campus
- Lack of funding (budget cuts) has not allow us to provide adequate and appropriate equipment and supplies to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization
- Return to standard District configuration of Business Office and Accounting functions in one place requires some re-alignment of duties
- Need more internal meetings with management to keep informed and up-to-date on activities and financial status of the college, and how it will affect the Business Office.
- District Office does not appreciate or fully understand how the Business Office is affected by local activities and individuals in supplying reports back to the district

Program's Opportunities and Challenges

The following sections on the Los Angeles City Colleges Business Office opportunities and challenges are supported by internal employee surveys, personal interviews and interaction with employees, and student surveys.

Opportunities:

--The Bookstore has installed a new point-of-sale (POS) system that will directly benefit the Business Office by creating a data base for non-fee "offline" collections which are now maintained on paper log sheets.

--District Office provides continuous training sessions on SAP Financials, which allows our staff to be better trained, and thus become more efficient and productive

--More cross-training among our personnel will allow us more flexibility during rush periods and reduced staffing restrictions (freeze on new hiring and/or back-filling positions)

--Meetings with Student Services offices occur very infrequently, and since the Business Offices' processes are so intimately inter-twined with everything student services does, we can improve coordination by establishing regular contact with student services, across the "silos".

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Challenges:

--Not being able to back-fill critical vacant positions has taken a toll on employee morale (doing more with less)

--Lack of travel and training budget has had a negatively effect on employees trying to keeping up with new initiatives and skills

--Lack of continuous professional leadership (supervisor) in the Business Office has had a negative effect on morale and work accomplishment.

Evaluation of Program's Performance

The Business Office has been able to overcome lack of staffing and budget cuts to provide adequate service to the campus and the district office. The cross training of employees has been extremely helpful in meeting the challenges of a reduced workforce. Our dedicated employees have stepped-up to the challenge and have excelled in doing more with less. The Business Office has met the needs of the students, faculty, administrators, and staff in providing accounting and business services in a timely and effective manner.

Program's 3-5 Year Strategic Directions

The Strategic Plan for the Business Office will take the following directions:

1. More web payment of student activities and services (transcripts, fines, Metro passes, etc.)
2. Digital scanning of all stored documentation--this action will reduce or eliminate numerous storage cabinets and make it easier to retrieve information.
3. Incorporate the Business Office within the new Student Service Building to ensure one-stop transactions for all students
4. Back-fill and upgrade staffing of the Business Office to ensure maximum efficiency and service to the college community

Goal #1 Short term (1 year)

Status: in progress

Automate “offline” collections of cash which are now kept using a 30+ year-old cash register, paper log sheets, paper “auxiliary receipt” books, paper schedules and logs for parking and transcript sales.

Evaluation of Goal

Evaluation of Goal - These methods have not changed in the last 40-50 years, although the District, in the late 1990’s developed a truly web-based application which posted each transaction nightly to the District data base—this application was abandoned with the move to SAP financials. One possibility is to engage the District Office financial staff to provide updating directly to SAP, as was done in the 1990’s. If there is no support for that, the college can attempt a local pilot project, with minimal District IT participation.

Benefits or Improvements – Students wait in long lines now during rush periods because of slow, antiquated redundant recording on paper of simple payment transactions. Waiting time could be significantly reduced for student, and the accuracy of recording and facility of retrieval improved for staff.

Objective #1.1 Status: in progress

As a “satellite” of the Bookstore, the Business Office will make use of one cash register from the Windows Prism POS system recently installed. This will create a data base of transactions so that each student’s record of payments of “offline” (non-registration) fees can be retrieved and daily collections will post to the accounting system, eliminating recapitulating collection data into a spreadsheet which is later entered into SAP at the District Office, days and sometimes weeks after the transaction takes place.

Goal #2 Long term (2-5 years)

Status: in progress

Continue to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of the District SAP accounting system.

Evaluation of Goal

Evaluation of Goal - The SAP Financials system went live in 2002, and many end users of financial data are still unfamiliar with the system. This makes monitoring of expenditures and balances difficult, and creates a knowledge gap. More access can be provided to academic and administrative end users, along with basic training that the Business Office could provide, to enable monitoring and control throughout the year.

Benefits or Improvements - In the current extreme financial position of the District and the State, monitoring of accounts is vitally important to maximize efficiency and savings. More access can be provided to departments both via direct data base inquiry and through web-based tools such as BW.

Goal #3 Long term (2-5 years)

Status: in progress

Establish an innovative process to facilitate registration by maximizing web-based payments of student transcript and other incidental fees.

Evaluation of Goal

Evaluation of Goal – Students expect immediate response from us when making payments, particularly emergency transcripts, and want to pay remotely, on the web. Currently, only enrollment, tuition, health and ASO fees can be paid this way. Our system should be expanded to include all types of fees students and others want to pay on the web. A new SIS system is in early development stages, and we have an opportunity to help guide the District IT staff toward the needs of the campus by participating fully in this process.

Benefits or Improvements – Waiting in lines will be reduced for students, and unnecessary trips to the campus simply to make payments will be eliminated. This will increase student satisfaction and free us to do higher level accounting functions.

Objective #3.1 Input to Committee Status: in progress

Our responsibility is to provide the Business Office representative to the SIS (LATTC CFA) development committee with items for enhancement of the new system compared to the current system, and also to fix existing glitches as we identify them.

Goal #4 Long term (2-5 years)

Status: in progress

Create an investment program process for fiduciary activities, which we have cash management responsibility.

Evaluation of Goal

Evaluation of Goal - Investments of liquid assets should be constantly scrutinized to ensure that revenue is maximized. Currently, entities such as the ASO do not have a comprehensive program to promote this practice.

Benefits or Improvements - greater revenue realized for local financial entities, particularly ASO, Trusts and scholarships.

Objective #4.1 Status: in progress

Meet with ASO advisor to develop continuing strategy for investment review.

Goal #5 Short term (1 year)

Status: in progress

Institutionalize a Business Office process for record retention using a digital scanning program

Evaluation of Goal

Evaluation of Goal – The Business Office still maintains paper copies a multiple documents and reports, necessitating large storage areas and making retrieval difficult. Use of a product such as Web Extender, already in use in student services offices, will enable us to more systematically retain all necessary documents and free up floor space in our crowded office.

Benefits or Improvements - Records will be kept in accordance with District-established retention values and be available to students, staff, or other interested parties, on demand.

Goal #6 Long term (2-5 years)

Status: in progress

Maximize the Business Office's professionalism and friendly manner in order to present a more positive image to our customers

Evaluation of Goal

Evaluation of Goal – We can always make improvements on our service to our students and other customers. Part of this is making sure that information flows to us from the administration, so that we have correct, up-to-the-minute information to disseminate. Another factor is simply common courtesy, along with an appreciation of the various cultures at LACC and how they might act and react differently to the same situation.

Benefits or Improvements – Improvements in our customer-care skills will make the Business Office experience, which all students have at least once each semester, a pleasant one. It will also make our work day more pleasant for us, because the good (or negative) feelings and vibrations go both ways. Word-of-mouth is important in recruitment and retention of students, and we want our students to be our best advertisement of what a great institution Los Angeles City College is, and to spread the word.

Objective #6.1 Seminars Status: in progress

At least annually, staff should be updated with information from outside sources, such as seminars, workshops, classes, to see what “the rest of the world” is doing. Staff Development funding is available to classified staff, although it is not well known or well promoted among us. Also, notifications of such resources could be more broadly disseminated by HR, or simply websites and other sources of information made known.

Goal #7 Long term (2-5 years)

Status: in progress

Re-align the staffing of the re-combined Business Office and Accounting units, which were separated for several years, and re-united without the necessary planning around the changes in duties which then came about. Loss of four positions over the last three years is also felt by the staff, and administration promises to upgrade individuals who took on higher-level duties remain unfulfilled.

Evaluation of Goal

Based on models outside the LACCD, the traditional Business Office was divided into two offices in 2001, and certain functions moved to another floor, as the "Accounting Unit". Recently, the two offices were re-combined, and some duties are now in need of re-alignment, particularly with the loss of two Accounting Technician positions and the single Office Assistant position, which remain vacant. One of the two supervisors is also on extended illness leave, and her duties reside elsewhere. The change from the traditional Bursar (CFA) position to an Associate Vice President has meant a loss of professional level accounting experience and knowledge, which the college is aware of and feels at various levels.

Individuals Who Participated in Developing this Plan

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