2019-2020: Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships

Definition of Unit:

Providing Department:
Financial Aid

Department/Unit Contact:
Mary McCaskey

Mission/Vision Statement:

The Office of Financial Aid at Tennessee Technological University (OFA) is committed to helping students achieve their educational goals in accordance with federal, state, and institutional policies.

The primary purpose of student aid is to provide financial resources to students who would otherwise be unable to pursue post-secondary education. In order to accomplish this stated purpose, the following is an outline of the Philosophy of the Tennessee Tech Financial Aid Office. We will make every effort to meet the demonstrated needs of all students at TN Tech to the extent funding will permit in an ethical manner. We will award all aid on the basis of demonstrated financial need except where funds are specified for recognition of special talents. We will exercise adequate controls to insure that need-based awards do not exceed the documented need.

We must recognize that the primary responsibility for financing post-secondary education rests with the student and his/her family. Financial assistance from TN Tech and other sources is only intended as supplementary to the efforts of the family. We will help students seek, obtain, and make the best use of all financial resources available. We will provide consumer information in a clear and concise manner describing all Direct and Indirect costs. We will inform students of all conditions under which an award is granted at the time the offered award is made.

We will refrain from and discourage others from making any public announcement of the amount or the type of financial aid awarded a student in order to protect the confidentiality of the economic circumstances of the student and his/her family. We will respect the confidentiality of student records. Information will be released only with the written consent of the student and/or his/her family. We will never administer aid to accomplish disciplinary objectives.

Goal 1: Provide Premier Service

Define Goal:

Provide premier service (timely and kind) and financial aid support to students, faculty, and staff that improves student success.

Intended Outcomes / Objectives:

Objective 1.A. Examine the survey administered to similar institutions (administered in FY15) in preparation for possible readministration

Objective 1.B. Train departments in an effort to award at least 45% of scholarships administered by the Office of Scholarships by a target date of March 15th

DRILL DOWN----------
RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Assessment Tool for Objective 1.A: Prepare Survey for Readministration

Frequency of Assessment:

Five-Year Cycle

Rationale:

Gathering information from peer institutions allows us to set a level of expectation for services offered at this institution (Threshold of Acceptability: N/A)

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Results for Objective 1.A: Prepare Survey for Readministration

Results:

The committee established for refining the survey to be administered again in FY21 met on March 11, 2020. At the time, all committee members were in agreement that re-administering the survey seemed like a good idea. The original survey questions and a table of the responses were emailed to the committee members after the meeting for input. No major changes were suggested by the committee.

Attachments:

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Modifications for Objective 1.A: Prepare Survey for Readministration

Program Changes and Actions due to Results:

Make minor edits to the survey to get ready for re-administering.

Link to Assessment:

The committee (established as a modification from FY19) did not recommend any major revisions to the survey, The committee's next meeting will focus on minor edits.

DRILL DOWN----------
RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Assessment Tool for Objective 1.B: Award Scholarships by Target Date

Frequency of Assessment:

Annually

Rationale:

To track scholarships posted by date and department. To also assist the Office of Scholarships with spotting questionable offers (Threshold of Acceptability: Minimum Acceptable Goal)

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Results for Objective 1.B: Award Scholarships by Target Date

Results:

The Scholarships Team offered two ScholarWeb training sessions this year on January 9, 2020 and January 15, 2020. Over 30 staff/faculty members participated, representing almost 25 different departments/areas. The following departments/offices participated: Accessible Education Center, Agriculture, Chemistry, Civil & Environmental Engineering, College of Education, College of Engineering, Computer Science, Earth Sciences, English, EXPW, Financial Aid, Foreign Languages, History, International Education, Library, Math, Military & Veteran Affairs, Multicultural Affairs, Music, Nursing, Physics, School of Art, Craft, and Design, Sociology & Political Science. The ScholarWeb Report run on March 30th showed that 69% of scholarships had been awarded.

Attachments:

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Modifications for Goal 1.B.: Award Scholarships by Target Date

Program Changes and Actions due to Results:

Having met and exceeded the minimum acceptable rate of scholarships being awarded, no substantial modifications will be made for FY21. Scholarships plans to continue training efforts to meet the goal.

Link to Assessment:

Goal 2: Assist Students Achieve Academic Goals

Define Goal:

Assist qualified students to achieve their academic goals through education, support, and utilization of various financial aid and scholarship opportunities

Intended Outcomes / Objectives:

To create, employ, and improve tools to better communicate with students in an effort to help them build their proficiency in monitoring their financial aid account and resolving issues

DRILL DOWN----------

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Assessment Tool for Objective 2.A: Improve Communication

Frequency of Assessment:

Annually

Rationale:

To have a uniform way for students to receive information concerning aid distribution through tracking requirements. Further, by empowering students with information, Tech may see increased retention (Threshold of Acceptability: Performance Currently)

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Results for Objective 2.A: Improve Communication

Results:

Though not articulated as a modification in FY19, FA and Scholarships implemented a new system this year to assist with FWS and UAS students called TimesheetX/JobX. This system provides students with tips for interviews, career, and networking. It also provides students the ability to search for the jobs they are interested in and apply.

FA has utilized Text Messaging through TechConnect. FA has also worked with Dynamic Forms to begin getting standard forms available through this means. FA Authorization Forms were restructured and made available through EagleOnline to be electronically submitted.

FA worked with Admissions on communicating with those who had applied to Tech but not submitted a FAFSA and those who had indicated Tech on the FAFSA but had not yet applied to the university. There were technical issues with these emails getting to the intended recipients and so were discontinued for FY20.

Attachments:

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Modifications for Objective 2.A: Improve Communication

Program Changes and Actions due to Results:

Dynamic Forms will have more potential in the upcoming year to have an impact on the efficiency for students and the FA Office.

FA may work with Admissions again over the summer with email communications if the technical difficulties can be addressed.

FA is working with ITS on a new program called Ocelot. It's an automated question and answer BOT. Students will type a question and the logic behind the BOT will answer the question in an effort to provide students with immediate responses when possible and improve the student experience.

FA and Scholarships are currently participating in a Banner Back2Basics Workshop which will help identify areas of improvements and efficiencies that could potentially help us better serve students

Link to Assessment:

Goal 3: Distribute Aid

Define Goal:

Successfully distribute accurate and available financial aid while keeping the long-term implications, and thus, the best interest of the student, at the forefront of all efforts.

Intended Outcomes / Objectives:

> **Objective 3.A.** Maintain the University's federal student loan cohort default rate below the national average with a target of at or below 5%

DRILL DOWN----------
RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Assessment Tool for Objective 3.A: Maintain Student Loan Cohort Default Rate

Frequency of Assessment:
Annually

Rationale:

Our federal cohort default rate provided through a federal report allows us a peer-to-peer and a national comparison and helps us identify goals for our 3rd party servicer, HigherEd Solutions (Threshold of Acceptability: Minimum Acceptable Rate)

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Results for Objective 3.A: Maintain Student Loan Cohort Default Rate

Results:

Tennessee Tech's default rate (4.8%) fell below the national rate (10.1%) when looking at the most current published data.

Attachments:

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Modifications for Objective 3.A: Maintain Student Loan Cohort Default Rate

Program Changes and Actions due to Results:

None

Link to Assessment:

Goal 4: Support Recruitment and Retention Efforts

Define Goal:

Support recruitment and retention efforts through active participation in activities that will benefit the student, the families, faculty, staff, and the community.

Intended Outcomes / Objectives:

Objective 4.A. For at least 50% of staff to participate in SOAR "Ask A Question" sessions.

Objective 4.B. To explore opportunities for community/campus outreach events

Objective 4.C. Manage the service scholarship program and its renewals, ensure students are meeting renewal requirements, and track those on probation.

DRILL DOWN----------
RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Assessment Tool for Objective 4.A: Participate in Campus Events

Frequency of Assessment:
Annually

Rationale:

To assess if target was reached (Threshold of Acceptability: Minimum Acceptable Rate)

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Results for Objective 4.A: Participate in Campus Events

Results:

Only 40% of staff participated in SOAR “Ask A Question” sessions this summer. Many changes were made to SOAR in both scheduling and set-up due to COVID-19 safety precautions which factored into the participation levels of the FA Office.

Attachments:

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Modifications for Objective 4.A: Participate in Campus Events

Program Changes and Actions due to Results:

Many modifications had to be made in FY20 “on the fly” due to COVID-19. Considering that next summer’s SOAR sessions may also look different than normal years, the FA Office’s plans are to remain as flexible and available as possible.

Link to Assessment:

DRILL DOWN----------
RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Assessment Tool for Objective 4.B: Explore Opportunities for Outreach

Frequency of Assessment:

Annually

Rationale:

To create a baseline of information from which to set goals for community/campus outreach (Threshold of Acceptability: Performance Currently)

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Results for Objective 4.B: Explore Opportunities for Outreach

Results:

Using the baseline data from FY19, FA and Scholarships included a few additional activities this year to better serve the community and campus. They include:

- an Averitt Lunch and Learn which was presented with Admissions on 9/6/2019
- presentation in the Black Cultural Center on 10/10/2019
- presentation for Cookeville High School student in the IMPACT mentoring program on 10/25/2019
- an event with Admissions called Tech After Dark on 11/12/2019
- FWS/UAS Supervisor Training for the new JobX/TimesheetX system conducted via MS TEAMS on 8/6/2020

Attachments:

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Modifications for Objective 4.B: Explore Opportunities for Outreach

Program Changes and Actions due to Results:

The Scholarships Team is interested in speaking to the professional advisors about the scholarship application and process.

The Scholarships and FA Offices are expecting less in-person outreach events in FY21 due to COVID-19.

There will be 3 Preview Days in FY21 instead of 2.

FA and Scholarships Director may participate in advising exchanges to discuss financial aid, CPoS, impacts on students who drop/add courses, etc.

Link to Assessment:

The spreadsheet created shows improvement in this area. The need for further modifications comes from campus/community input and COVID-19 impact.

DRILL DOWN----------

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 1

Assessment Tool for Objective 4.C: Manage the Service Scholarship Program

Frequency of Assessment:

Each Semester

Rationale:

To establish scholarship budgets for future years and ensure scholarship dollars are being used effectively to recruit and retain high ACT/GPA students (Threshold of Acceptability: Performance Currently)

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 2

Results for Objective 4.C: Manage the Scholarship Program

Results:

Though not articulated as a modification in FY19, a new system was implemented in FY20 called JobX/TimesheetX from NextGen Web Solutions. This system allows Scholarships to track students' service hour completion throughout the semester and to collect more accurate and timely supervisor approvals at the end of the semester. In addition, Scholarships requested that ITS build a new ARGOS form to batch enter SGASTDN scholarship activity tags in part to reduce manual data entry.

Attachments:

RELATED ITEM LEVEL 3

Modifications for Goal 4.C.: Manage the Scholarships Program

Program Changes and Actions due to Results:

Scholarships plans to work with ITS to update the ARGOS reports used for scholarship renewals/cancellations/probations to incorporate the changes to the JobX/TimesheetX system. Scholarships also intends to use the new ARGOS batch form created to add tracking tags to students in large batches pertaining to probation and cancellation.

Link to Assessment: