

## Administrative Activities Review (AAR) Guidelines

### Office of Student Financial Aid 2018

The review is an opportunity for your unit to reflect on its mission, the services you provide, your strengths and challenges, and your future plans. It will be used to inform decisions about resource allocations across the campus. This document should be used as a guideline and you should address only the sections that are applicable to your unit.

#### Basic Facts and Description of the Unit.

- a. Mission and goals.** Describe your unit's mission/role on campus and its near-term/long-term goals.

The Mission of The University of Akron's Office of Student Financial Aid is to provide fair and equitable access to financial assistance needed to support our students' educational endeavors. The office will accomplish this by:

- i. Adhering to state and federal regulations as well as University policies regarding the awarding of financial assistance
- ii. Being committed to removing financial barriers for those who wish to pursue postsecondary learning
- iii. Making every effort to assist students with financial need
- iv. Having an awareness of the issues affecting students and advocating for their interests at the institutional, state and federal levels
- v. Educating students and their families by providing quality consumer information
- vi. Respecting the dignity and diversity of each student by providing services that do not discriminate on the basis of race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, disability, age or economic status
- vii. Ensuring the confidentiality of student information
- viii. Assuring the uniform application of all needs analysis formulas consistently across The University of Akron's full population of financial aid applicants
- ix. Committing to the highest level of ethical behavior by avoiding conflict of interest or the appearance of such a conflict

Near-term and long-term goals include the timely and accurate processing of all financial aid applications and supporting documents that lead to the offering of financial aid awards to students. Employing a philosophy of continuous improvement that seeks to put the student at the center of all decision making while strictly adhering to federal, state, and University guidelines. Employing technology in the

most effective manner to enhance the student experience and achieve the most efficient completion of duties. Expanding and improving education and outreach to students, families, our constituents on campus, and the local community. Placing a focus on customer service that motivates us to seek out opportunities for training and improvement and enables us to deliver services in the manner desired by our customers.

- b. Services.** Describe the primary services provided by your unit, organizing them into major categories. Indicate how your unit prioritizes its services in terms of importance or effort. Describe the relative magnitude of the major categories (e.g., by department workload, students or customers served, revenue generated, etc.).

### **Education and Outreach**

The key to effective financial aid management is providing the right information at the right time. Providing education on financial aid opportunities, processes, responsibilities, etc. is critical to this function. Information must be clear, concise, and easy for the audience to understand and navigate. Staff must be motivated, personable, and forward-thinking to achieve the desired results. The impact of education and outreach efforts on our ability to attract, enroll, and retain students is great.

### **Processing and Awarding of Financial Aid**

The Office of Student Financial Aid manages the application processing for all student aid which includes the verification of data required by federal, state, and institutional sources, evaluation of all aid eligibility requirements including citizenship, satisfactory progress, selective service, etc., and the awarding of financial aid sources totaling over \$330 million annually in federal and state grants, federal work study, federal student loans and parent loans, private loans, institutional discounts and scholarships, private and endowed scholarships, fee waivers, and specialized funding from any source. This function has a critical impact on the University's ability to attract and retrain students. The proper execution of duties has a direct impact on revenue and is a high-risk area within the University.

### **Customer Service**

Effective customer service is critical to the success of students and The Office of Student Financial Aid. Advisors are seasoned and well trained, providing one-on-one counseling opportunities for all student and families. Staff are compassionate and dedicated to the success of our students which is demonstrated every day in their actions and execution of their duties. In addition, the Financial Aid Support Center is a highly effective tool that gives students access to advisors 24/7/365 by telephone or online chat. Students may browse numerous financial aid articles online from the Support Center website. The ability to deliver effective customer service, see students and families through complicated processes, and demonstrate a compassionate, supportive culture is key for the success of the University's financial aid programs.

### **Compliance**

Almost every aspect of the Office of Student Financial aid is regulated by federal, state, or institutional entities. Staff are required to possess an in-depth knowledge of financial aid regulations and to enforce them in their daily activities. Financial aid administration is a high-risk area and only the most ethical behaviors are acceptable. Staff are continuously evaluated and monitored to ensure proper execution of duties and federal, state, and institutional audits are performed regularly to verify compliance. Failure of staff to properly comply with regulations and perform in the most ethical manner jeopardizes the fiscal health of the University and poses a risk to its continued ability to provide financial aid opportunities to students.

### **Training**

As part of the federal regulations on administrative capability, staff are required to regularly attend training and engage in federal and state instruction on financial aid administration. A qualified, competent, and highly trained staff is critical to delivering effective service and avoiding compliance issues which can negatively impact the institution. In addition, financial aid IT staff must engage in training on all aid programs and federal regulations in order to perform the highly specialized duties associated with the technology demands of the unit.

**Critical partners.** List your key partnerships with other units inside and outside of the University. Note if there is overlap or duplication of services with other units at UA.

- Prospective students and their families
- High school guidance counselors and personnel
- The Office of Admissions
- The Graduate School
- The School of Law

- All other University departments
- All Fiscal units of the University including the Controller and Bursar
- Community organizations and non-profit groups
- Businesses and corporations who provide funding for student scholarships
- The U.S. Department of Education
- The Ohio Department of Higher Education
- The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators
- The Ohio Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators

**Customers or end-users of your services.** List your customers (e.g., departments, divisions, organizations/groups inside and outside of UA, etc.) or types of students served and include some indication of the relative volume of service provided to each.

- **Students:** The Office of Student Financial Aid provides assistance and services to approximately 18,000 students annually.
- **High Schools:** All high schools in the five-county service area and beyond.
- **Office of Admissions:** Provide support to the Office of Admissions for any events they require including staffing information tables and formal presentations attended by thousands of students and parents throughout the year. Coordinate with staff on individual student visits to ensure proper financial aid support is available during their time on campus. Collaborate with Admissions staff on financial aid matters, specifically scholarship administration and outreach efforts.
- **Graduate School and School of Law:** Provide financial aid support to these constituents as needed including meeting with students, formal and information presentations and discussions, publications, problem solving, collaboration, etc.
- **All University departments:** Support the various departments with education and outreach services and publications. Assist with resolving student barriers as they arise.
- **Community organizations and non-profit groups:** Engage with our community and avail them of our financial aid services as needed. Attend special recognition events and generally position ourselves as the experts of choice for financial aid related activities.
- **Business and corporations:** Collaborate on the management and selection of scholarship recipients for various organizations.
- **The U.S. Department of Education:** Work daily with the Department as we serve as the vehicle through which federal student aid funds are applied,

management, disbursed, reconciled, and audited. Comply with all regulations and engage with them on training, guidance, program approval, etc.

- **The Ohio Department of Higher Education:** Implement all procedures related to the delivery of State aid programs, compliance, reconciliation, collaboration, etc. to ensure the efficient and expediate deliver of state aid funds to our students.
- **National and State financial aid associations:** Take an active, leadership role in these organizations, representing The University of Akron positively and helping to share the future of financial aid for all students.

**Key performance analysis.** Present the most important metrics (in charts, tables, etc.) you track to measure performance. Provide the most recent three-to-five years of results, targets, and comparisons to peer institutions, as available. For every metric, provide the corresponding analysis, including a comment on important trends, conclusions, or insights drawn from the data.

### Total gift aid vs loans

One metric that we use in the financial aid profession is to monitor the balance between gift aid and loans. Gift aid includes grants and scholarships that students do not have to repay versus loans that students will repay after graduation. The key is to strike a balance that demonstrates the University’s commitment to access and reducing the students’ borrowing by having at least as much in total gift aid that students are feeling the need to borrow in loans.

The table below illustrates how the ratio has changed through the years at UA. The balance experienced in 2015-16 was exactly where we want to be. The change in 2016-17 was due to the drop in enrollment experienced during a time of uncertainty when students with more options for higher education were not selecting UA. The goal is to right this in the coming years and strive to return to a healthy balance.

Award Year	Grants	Scholarships	Total in Gift Aid	Loans	Percentage Gift Aid/Loans
2013-14	\$40,730,602	\$60,708,815	\$101,439,417	\$125,499,921	44%/55%
2014-15	\$38,038,583	\$65,620,613	\$103,659,196	\$113,666,859	48%/52%
2015-16	\$34,926,173	\$68,925,571	\$103,851,744	\$98,137,440	51%/49%
2016-17	\$32,000,597	\$68,209,827	\$100,210,424	\$84,905,948	54%/46%

### Default Rates

Institutions of higher education are accountable for the number of their borrowers who enter repayment on their student loans and then default within three years. This is called a cohort default year. The University has managed its default rate and experienced slight ups and downs with the economy. With the implementation of stricter admissions guidelines, the impact should translate to lower default rates over time. The table below illustrates the most recent default rates for UA.

	FY11	FY12	FY13	FY14	FY15 (Draft)
Three-Year Cohort	13.5%	12.6%	13.2%	13.4%	10.8%

A significant drop is noted in the FY15 draft rate which is a very positive trend and reflects that University’s commitment to educating borrowers, retention, persistence, and graduation. Students who graduate from the University are unlikely to default. Defaulters are typically those students who begin and then cannot persist beyond their first year.

### Processing and Awarding Metrics

The Office of Student Financial Aid is very attentive to the number of students who apply for financial aid and are awarded and sent their financial aid “package.” Specifically, new students require particular attention to ensure that we remain competitive and demonstrate access to education through our financial aid offers.

Below is a comparison of the new students in fall 2018 to fall 2017 in regard to FAFSA applications and packages:

As of August 2, 2018

Aid Year	New students confirmed	Number who submitted a FAFSA	Percentage	Number who submitted a FAFSA and have been offered financial aid	Percentage
2018	4,218	3,474	82%	3,090	89%
2017	4,778	3,909	82%	3,546	91%

As illustrated, the percentage of new students completing a FAFSA is holding steady in comparison to last year. The number packaged is slightly down but still at a very high rate. This is where you expect this group to be at this time of the year.

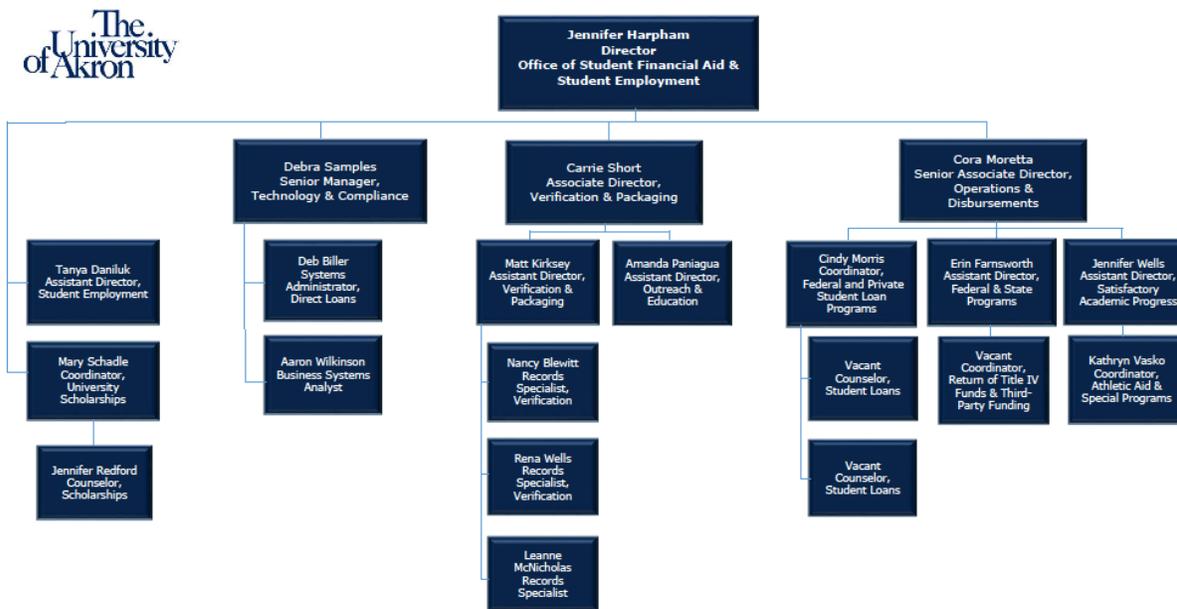
**Brief assessment.** Highlight (in a couple of sentences) any noteworthy strengths, challenges, or opportunities.

The Office of Student Financial Aid is an efficient and responsive operation. Processing timelines are kept at a minimum during both non-peak and peak service times. Processing is performed quickly and with a high level of accuracy. This can be attributed to the elimination of unnecessary barriers normally encountered with financial aid processes that are within our scope of control. The highly trained and seasoned staff have the required knowledge and experience to run a dynamic operation. Federal, state and independent audits continue to demonstrate administrative capability and expertise. Staff stay up-to-date on training and regulations to facilitate the expected level of performance and remain committed to keeping student needs at the center of our operations and to the mission of the University.

**c. Resources.** Describe your resources as outlined below. Highlight (in a couple of sentences) any noteworthy strengths, challenges, or opportunities related to your resource allocation.

The Office of Student Financial Aid currently has twenty one full-time staff positions. Of those twenty one, three are dedicated solely to IT activities. This leaves 17 staff including counselors, records specialists, assistant directors, associate directors, and the director to provide the extensive services detailed previously. Currently there are three staff vacancies which are in the process of being filled. Student financial aid is typically a high turnover area due to the difficult and emotional nature of the work. To ease the administrative burden on the department and to help improve customer service, the University recently partnered with Blackboard Student Services for the operation of the Financial Aid Support Center. This allows us to meet our near-term and long-term goals more efficiently. A threat to these goals continues to be our ability to keep and attract highly skilled and seasoned financial aid professionals as a result of lower wages and salaries being offered in comparison to similar positions across the State.

**Personnel.** Include an organizational chart of your unit, supplemented with a table that includes titles, a short description of the key functions of each position-type, and the number of people in each position-type (including number of FTEs, if applicable). (The appendix should include an org chart showing how your unit fits into the larger University structure.)



5/3/2018

Title	Responsibility	Total FTE
Director	Oversees all financial aid operations	1
Senior Associate Director	Acts as director in her absence, oversees Federal Student Loans, Return of Title IV Funds, State aid programs, Satisfactory Academic Progress, management of athletic aid, and disbursement of all aid funds.	1
Associate Director	Oversees the financial aid packaging and verification process including importing FAFSA applications, all communications with students, review of all required verification documents, special circumstance reviews, dependency status appeals, and activities related to education and outreach including social media.	1
Senior Manager, IT and Compliance	Responsible for overseeing all technology utilization including People Soft setup and management of financial aid modules, programming, queries, development of	1

	new initiatives, the electronic exchange of information, ensuring compliance with all federal and State financial aid rules through the use of technology, document imaging, technology upgrades and equipment, etc. This is a highly specialized position that requires an in-depth knowledge and training in financial aid administration.	
Assistant Director	Serves in a supervisory capacity overseeing the daily work and activities of staff and critical functions	5
Coordinator	Coordinates specific programs and oversees the daily work and activities of staff associated with those programs	4
Counselor	Entry level staff who perform functions directly associated with their assigned programs including the awarding and posting of aid and counseling of students	3
Records Specialist	Responsible for the timely processing of incoming documents related to verification of student data	3
Systems Administrator	Oversees department and staff access to critical systems including federal, State, and institutional programs, websites, student information systems, etc. This is a highly specialized position that requires an in-depth knowledge and training in financial aid administration.	1
Business Systems Analyst	Responsible for overseeing the generation and maintenance of the department's communications and working with other areas such as Admissions to streamline the financial aid award notification process. This is a highly specialized position that requires an in-depth knowledge and training in financial aid administration.	1
Total		21

The Office of Student Financial Aid reports to the Associate Provost of Enrollment Management.



**Financials.** Provide a line-item summary of the unit's budgeted and actual expenses (and revenues, if applicable) over the past five years. Briefly explain key takeaways (e.g., causes of budget deficits, trends in expenditures).

**Budget Period 2014**

Acct	Description	Budg Trn	Budgeted Amt	YTD Amount	Remaining Balance	Jrnl Trn	Pre Encumb	Encumb	Expended	Revenue Collected
5100	Administration		373,888.67	373,888.11	0.56		0	0	373,888.11	0
5200	Full Time Staff		507,614.83	507,614.33	0.5		0	0	507,614.33	0
5240	Staff Overtime		0	1,404.93	-1,404.93		0	0	1,404.93	0
5400	Student Assistants		32,766.25	28,435.00	4,331.25		0	0	28,435.00	0
5600	Fringe Benefits		411,451.17	411,451.17	0		0	0	411,451.17	0
5700	Supplies & Services		89,011.20	89,160.29	-149.09		0	0	89,160.29	0
6300	Communications		18,053.52	18,053.52	0		0	0	18,053.52	0
6600	Movable Equipment		0	0	0		0	0	0	0
7000	Travel & Hospitality		7,173.17	7,173.17	0		0	0	7,173.17	0
									<b>1,437,180.52</b>	

**Budget Period 2015**

Acct	Description	Budg Trn	Budgeted Amt	YTD Amount	Remaining Balance	Jrnl Trn	Pre Encumb	Encumb	Expended	Revenue Collected
5100	Administration		322,428.23	322,428.33	-0.1		0	0	322,428.33	0
5200	Full Time Staff		480,077.68	480,078.60	-0.92		0	0	480,078.60	0
5240	Staff Overtime		47	47	0		0	0	47	0
5400	Student Assistants		31,420.71	26,955.62	4,465.09		0	0	26,955.62	0
5600	Fringe Benefits		349,479.57	349,479.57	0		0	0	349,479.57	0
5700	Supplies & Services		84,226.11	80,190.86	4,035.25		0	0	80,190.86	0
6300	Communications		19,000.00	17,486.44	1,513.56		0	0	17,486.44	0
6600	Movable Equipment		0	0	0		0	0	0	0
7000	Travel & Hospitality		6,577.80	6,577.80	0		0	0	6,577.80	0
									<b>1,283,244.22</b>	

**Budget Period 2016**

Acct	Description	Budg Trn	Budgeted Amt	YTD Amount	Remaining Balance	Jrnl Trn	Pre Encumb	Encumb	Expended	Revenue Collected
5100	Administration		446,346.01	446,346.05	-0.04		0	0	446,346.05	0
5200	Full Time Staff		450,407.53	450,405.97	1.56		0	0	450,405.97	0
5240	Staff Overtime		3	2.91	0.09		0	0	2.91	0
5400	Student Assistants		39,816.48	28,560.50	11,255.98		0	0	28,560.50	0
5600	Fringe Benefits		370,016.42	370,016.42	0		0	0	370,016.42	0
5700	Supplies & Services		72,416.46	67,962.51	4,453.95		0	0	67,962.51	0
6300	Communications		19,000.00	15,652.31	3,347.69		0	0	15,652.31	0
7000	Travel & Hospitality		9,000.00	8,865.86	134.14		0	0	8,865.86	0
									<b>1,387,812.53</b>	

**Budget Period 2017**

Acct	Description	Budg Trn	Budgeted Amt	YTD Amount	Remaining Balance	Jrnl Trn	Pre Encumb	Encumb	Expended	Revenue Collected
5100	Administration		413,100.07	413,100.08	-0.01		0	0	413,100.08	0
5200	Full Time Staff		452,434.84	452,436.26	-1.42		0	0	452,436.26	0
5240	Staff Overtime		1,005.19	1,005.19	0		0	0	1,005.19	0
5400	Student Assistants		23,317.69	25,302.89	-1,985.20		0	0	25,302.89	0
5600	Fringe Benefits		423,280.89	423,280.89	0		0	0	423,280.89	0
5700	Supplies & Services		79,917.43	54,331.05	25,586.38		0	0	54,331.05	0
6300	Communications		19,000.00	15,652.32	3,347.68		0	0	15,652.32	0
7000	Travel & Hospitality		12,147.38	13,306.69	-1,159.31		0	0	13,306.69	0

**1,398,415.37**

**Budget Period 2018**

Acct	Description	Budg Trn	Budgeted Amt	YTD Amount	Remaining Balance	Jrnl Trn	Pre Encumb	Encumb	Expended	Revenue Collected
5100	Administration		422,081.69	422,177.24	-95.55		0	0	422,177.24	0
5200	Full Time Staff		448,987.51	449,407.13	-419.62		0	0	449,407.13	0
5240	Staff Overtime		263	262.08	0.92		0	0	262.08	0
5400	Student Assistants		43,443.44	19,502.54	23,940.90		0	0	19,502.54	0
5600	Fringe Benefits		428,877.19	428,877.19	0		0	0	428,877.19	0
5700	Supplies & Services		158,038.64	158,038.64	0		0	0	158,038.64	0
6300	Communications		13,172.90	2,384.77	10,788.13		0	0	2,384.77	0
7000	Travel & Hospitality		10,000.00	8,702.49	1,297.51		0	0	8,702.49	0
7040	Hospitality		525.46	525.46	0		0	0	525.46	0

**1,489,877.54**

The Office of Student Financial Aid has maintained relatively the same operating budget for the past five years with decreases in some categories. Fluctuations in administrative costs and benefits are due to new staff joining the team and others leaving. Travel expenses have increased slightly over the years as training and engagement has improved. The notable increase in expenditures in 2018 in the supplies and services line is due to the partnership with Blackboard Student Services and the operation of the Financial Aid Support Center.

**Equipment and technology.** If applicable, describe the equipment and technology critical to your unit’s operations.

The Office of Student Financial Aid requires a variety of equipment to meets its mission including:

- Personal computers and dual monitors for all staff
- Scanners for use with the Nolij document imaging system
- High speed copiers and printers
- Fax and scanning capabilities
- Television, overhead projectors, and whiteboards
- Scanner for student check-in

**Space.** If relevant to your unit's operations, describe your unit's location(s) and space allocation.

The Office of Student Financial Aid is located in Simmons Hall Room 202. Currently, there are sufficient private offices, work rooms, and meeting space to accomplish the mission of the office and provide open and accessible service to students.

**II. Future Plans.** This section should provide insight into the future of your unit, based on your mission and goals, opportunities you intend to pursue, and/or emerging trends that will likely impact your operations.

**a. Potential changes.**

During the coming years, the Office of Student Financial Aid will continue to quickly adapt to changing regulations and effectively administer all financial aid programs. A greater collaboration with our internal and external partners can be expected and will place us at the forefront of best practices in financial aid. We will explore new technology to further improve the timeliness of awarding and staff productivity. A new, more adaptive document imaging system is desired and will lend greatly to efficiency if procured. We will explore opportunities to maximize the effectiveness of our private/endowed scholarships, moving them to the beginning of the scholarship awarding cycle and reducing the burden on the general fund. We will continue to maximize the efficiencies gained through our partnership with Blackboard Student Services and the Financial Aid Support Center. There is a desire to develop a dedicated financial aid counseling staff who will be assigned to students. These counselors would perform outreach and be the continual contact for students as they progress through their degree. Additional staff would be required to accomplish this endeavor including an Assistant Director and three Financial Aid Counselors. This would further improve efficiencies and customer service by allowing counselors to focus on students and processors to focus on the timely awarding of aid.

**b. Trends.** As you think about factors external to your unit (at UA, in your field/industry, or nationally/globally), are there emerging trends that will significantly impact your unit (and are not addressed above)? How do you plan to respond?

We will respond to the ever-changing landscape of financial aid with professionalism and enthusiasm, always finding a way to translate the changes for good on campus. National trends in the financial aid world in the coming years will include the alignment and elimination of some federal aid programs, greater attention to the methods of delivering financial aid products and funds (social media, apps, debit cards, etc.) and the continued need for advocacy at the federal and state levels both for students and institutions of higher

education as they seek to administer aid programs. We will face these challenges through continued participation in federal and state organizations, continuing to keep our students at the center of our decision making, strategically align financial aid resources to lessen the impact of eliminated financial aid programs, and enhance our focus on social media and other outlets for reaching our students.