



**Memorandum**  
**Senior Vice President**  
**Strategic Initiatives & Administrative Services**

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**TO:** Michael D. Richards, Ph.D.  
President

**FROM:** Patricia Charlton  
Senior Vice President

**SUBJECT:** Update/Report – Financial Aid

**DATE:** February 16, 2015

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In response to the NSHE Board of Regents request for an update on actions taken by CSN to address improvements in its Financial Aid Department, the following synopsis is provided. Over the past 18 months, the College of Southern Nevada has undertaken a comprehensive operational review of its Financial Aid Department. In concert with the College's own efforts, we have engaged with the Department of Education and contracted with professionals from Ciber Consulting to review workflows, overall processes and procedures and remediation activities within MyCSN (PeopleSoft).

**Operational Assessment**

During fall semester 2013, CSN engaged the services of an external evaluator to complete an assessment of the Financial Aid Department. At the June 2014 Board of Regents meeting, the College reported that the majority of the recommendations as proposed by the external reviewer had been completed and were closed. Several items are ongoing in nature, e.g., training of staff, maintaining currency of Department of Education requirements, and timely resolution of external audit recommendations. The remaining two items are either not applicable, or are outside of CSN's current ability to resolve; these two items were closed. Provided below is a summary of the status of recommendations:

- Total Recommendations: 69
- Items Completed/Closed: 64
- Items Not Applicable/Closed: 2
- Items in Process: 1
- Items Ongoing: 2

Items in Process and/or Ongoing

Privacy – Planning for renovation of student support areas at the three campuses to accommodate the installation of modular furniture in both Registrar and Financial Aid Departments to ensure sensitive communication between staff and students has been completed. Installation is scheduled for June 2015.

Staffing - Additional staffing to support the Financial Aid Department will be an ongoing effort. CSN has added three positions over the past 18 months. Through the addition of funds received from increased student fees, the College will be adding four more positions in FY 2015-16 and FY 2016-17 each for a total of eight additional positions in the next two fiscal years.

In addition, Financial Aid's organizational structure continues to be enhanced through a systematic and thorough review of job descriptions and work performance standards. During the current fiscal year, four classified staff converted from classified to professional status to facilitate expanded job duties, responsibilities and oversight.

Outsourcing - The departmental staffing enhancements are in addition to support services that have been outsourced which include verification, call center (specialized financial aid support), and technology improvements.

### **Technology Improvements**

CSN engaged the services of Ciber, an external consultant, to assist with facilitating a comprehensive analysis of MyCSN (PeopleSoft), particularly the Financial Aid Module. This review initiated with a discovery phase, work plan development, and currently is in the implementation phase of a majority of their recommendations.

The Work Plan addresses five sets of priorities and includes:

1. Audit Findings;
2. Current Issues;
3. Compliance;
4. Long-Term Issues, and
5. Technology Improvements.

The tasks and objectives within each priority are subdivided into specific areas of process review and improvement. Technical improvements are completed through analysis of the system set up, work process flows, enhancement and improvement redesign, testing, and implementation. Upon completion training and documentation will be incorporated into the Financial Aid Department processes and procedures.

A comprehensive list of process improvements is available upon request.

### **Audit Findings**

The 2012-13 A-133 report included nine recommendations and findings for CSN. These findings were systematically reviewed and process improvements were implemented.

The 2013-14 A-133 report and external audit produced a significant improvement. Of the nine prior year findings, only one item was noted for CSN. A second finding pertaining to system set up and security was identified; these areas are outside of CSN's realm and under the purview of NSHE System Computing Services.

### **Training & Staff Development**

Training of all staff is ongoing and comprehensive in nature. To date it has included:

- Monthly staff meetings and training;
- Participation in regional association workshops;
- PeopleSoft training (Higher Education User's Group (HEUG));

- Staff participation at the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators Conference;
- Participation at the Department of Education Financial Aid conference; and
- Staff team building training and workshop for financial aid staff.

### Department of Education Resolution

CSN undertook a Verification Review of the 2011-12 Award Year. The results of this review included the following:

1. An anticipated return of funds to the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) of approximately \$1.2 million was identified. This was the result of over awards made due to incorrect verification processes and/or records of Title IV funds (Pell). CSN has been working in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Education to resolve the balance associated with the over awards of Title IV funds to students. We continue to work with the U.S. Department of Education's San Francisco Regional Office to receive their final guidance to achieve resolution of this item.
2. An additional \$51,000 of under awards was also noted for select students. The under awards have been disbursed to students and a portion of the proceeds are included in the figure noted above and part of the CSN final close-out of the 2011-12 Award Year with the UDSDOE. .
3. The verification review also noted that funds amounting to \$175,000 associated with Direct Loans needed to be returned to the USDOE. The return of these funds was completed in August 2014.

Once the over awards for 2011-12 Award Year were discovered, CSN immediately initiated a comprehensive review of the 2012-13 Award Year to proactively review and address any outstanding issues that may have resulted due to incorrect student awards. This review resulted in corrections/modification to students in the amounts of \$858,000 (over awards) and an additional \$66,000 was identified of under awards. The latter amount was funded by the Department of Education.

These funds have been settled with the USDOE since the 2012-13 Award Year was still open at the time the incorrect student awards were identified. The corrections were processed through and this Award Year is considered closed.

### Summary

Award Year 2011-12 Over Awards:	Estimated \$1,200,000 (Institutional Reserve) - Pending
Award Year 2011-12 Under Awards:	Estimated \$51,000 (Institutional Reserve) - Completed
Award Year 2011-12 Direct Loans:	\$175,000 (Institutional Reserve) - Completed
Award Year 2012-13 Over Awards:	\$858,000 (Institutional Reserve) - Completed
Award Year 2012-13 Under Awards:	\$66,000 (DOE Funds) – Completed

### Conclusion

Utilizing recommendations of the external evaluator at the onset, the ongoing expertise of technical consultants from Ciber, and the dedicated commitment of the CSN Financial Aid Department staff and institutional leadership, the results reported here are the culmination of 18 months of dissection and reorganization of CSN's Financial Aid Department—its processes, policies and procedures, staffing. The process has oftentimes been grueling, but the dedication and commitment of CSN Financial Aid staff and associated departments has been truly commendable.

Please let me know if you have any questions or require additional information.

PAC:mte