Proposal for OSFA CRISIS Counselor (Coordinator for Retention, Interdepartmental relations, Student Intervention, and Support)

National and local data shows an increase in the demand for financial aid staff support demonstrated by the number of students applying for financial aid and an increase of students reporting economic hardships. The Department of Education recently reported an increase of more than 20 percent over last year in the number of Free Applications for Federal Student Aid submitted for the 2009-10 application-processing year. To date, the Office of Student Financial Aid (OSFA) has seen a 17 percent increase in 2009-10 applications for financial aid.

UA students have identified a need for expanded staff support as well as increased access to funding based on the 2009 Student Services Fee Survey results. Arizona Board of Regents reported for FY 2008, of the 37,217 students enrolled, 30,442 received $363 million in aid in the form of scholarships, grants, loans, federal work study, assistantships, and tuition awards.

Over the past two academic years, the number of UA students, and parents of dependent UA students, indicating a reduction in their wages or adjusted gross income increased by 30 percent. Non-resident students had a much higher reporting rate; 57.6 percent of non-resident students reported changes in their financial situations over the past two years. This percent increase does not take into consideration students experiencing financial difficulty who did not contact OSFA.

Many students were not able to register for classes this spring as a result of past due balances. Prior to the start of the fall 2008 semester, there were 1,815 students registered for classes with AR holds unable to add classes or obtain transcripts. Of those students, 581 owed more than $200 and were prevented from further registration activity; over 280 UA students have withdrawn from their studies in spring 2009 with a balance on their account.

In an effort to meet students’ identified priorities in the 2009 Student Services Fee Survey, OFSA’s proposal is to increase services for students in financial crisis. Funding from the Student Services Fee would provide resources for OSFA to develop a position, OSFA CRISIS Counselor, with the primary responsibility of identifying and counseling UA students experiencing financial difficulty and at-risk of withdrawing from the university.

The OSFA CRISIS Counselor will: counsel students in financial difficulty, liaison with other departments within Student Affairs, academic advisors, and admissions staff in order to identify and direct student to available resources, counsel students and parents experiencing financial difficulty, track student data, and compile reports on the results of additional funding. The effectiveness of the OSFA CRISIS Counselor will be measured by: the number of students served by this new position, a decrease in number of students who withdraw with balances, increased student retention, and student feedback on future Student Services Fee Surveys.

Utilizing student fees to establish the OSFA CRISIS Counselor position will meet the needs of our student population by providing essential services to students at risk of withdrawing from UA. The cohesive support provided through funding of this proposed position, would increase student retention, decrease unpaid balances, and promote financial literacy for our students. The benefits of this position go far beyond the scope outlined; this position would support students, staff, and the University community as a whole.
Proposal for OSFA CRISIS Counselor – Supplemental Information

UA Student Identified Priorities Met

- Priority #2: need for expanded staff support
- Priority #5: increased access to funding

Statistics Used for OSFA CRISIS Counselor Justification

- Over 20% increase in the number of Free Applications for Federal Student Aid (FAFSAs) submitted for the 2009-10 application-processing year as reported by the Department of Education (DOE).
- Almost 3 million applications for federal student aid for the 2009-10 award year were processed by the DOE by the last week in February.
- DOE reported increases in loan volume for both the Direct Loan and Federal Family Education Loan programs this year compared to the same period last year.
- Arizona Board of Regents reported for FY 2008, of the 37,217 UA students enrolled, 30,442 received $363 million in aid in the form of scholarships, grants, loans, federal work study, assistantships, and tuition awards.
- Estimates for UA FY 2009 financial aid are over $380 million.
- UA has seen a 17% increase in 2009-10 applications for financial aid.
- 30% increase in the number of UA students, and parents of dependent UA students, reporting a reduction in their wages or adjusted gross income over the past 2 years.
- 57.6% of non-resident students reported a reduction in their wages or adjusted gross income over the past 2 years.
- Prior to fall 2008, there were 1,815 students registered for classes with AR holds unable to add classes or obtain transcripts.
- Prior to fall 2008, 581 students owed more than $200 preventing registration activity.
- Over 280 UA students have withdrawn from their studies in spring 2009 with a balance on their account.

OSFA CRISIS Counselor Rationale

- Economic decline and reduced state appropriations have increased the number of students facing financial crisis.
• Current OSFA program coordinators do not have the time to set aside hours dedicated to counseling UA students facing economic hardship.

• The current student to coordinator ratio is on average 3,000 to 1.

• OFSA proposes to increase services for students in financial crisis by creating a OSFA CRISIS Counselor position.

• The OSFA CRISIS Counselor will meet student’s identified priorities in the 2009 Student Services Fee Survey.

• Until state appropriations recover, wages increase, and unemployment numbers begin to decline there will be an increase in UA students in need of intensive OSFA support.

• It will be several years before economic improvements will begin to reverse the trends currently seen in the financial aid related data.

• By funding this position for up to three years, OSFA will be able to fully measure the impact of this position on meeting student needs and retention.

Role and Responsibility of OSFA CRISIS Counselor

• Counsel students in financial difficulty

• Liaison with other departments within Student Affairs, academic advisors, and admissions staff in order to identify and direct student to available resources

• Counsel students and parents experiencing financial difficulty

• Promote financial literacy

• Track student data

• Compile reports on the results of additional funding

• Decrease the number of students who withdraw with balances

• Increase student retention

• Improve student feedback on Student Services Fee Surveys