



Community Colleges

Harnessing Innovative Engagement Strategies to Maximize Financial Aid Utilization

Financial Aid Utilization is a Key Challenge at Community Colleges

Finances and financial aid have always played a critical role in a student's decision to attend community college. Given the recent economic downturn and tuition increases, accessibility to financial assistance plays an increasingly important role in the decision to attend—and stay—in school. Record enrollment increases over the past few years may mask the issue that many students are still struggling to pay the bills, despite on-going efforts to keep tuition rates affordable.

Although aid is widely available for students who demonstrate need, many community colleges find that financial aid is still underutilized and financial needs are not being met. The current National Center for Education Statistics IPEDS survey indicates that aid utilization for first time degree/certificate seeking students is among the lowest for 2-year not for-profit institutions and the 2009 Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) shows that only 46 percent of students report that their college provides the financial support needed to afford their education.

Capturing Missed Opportunities

Missed opportunities for financial assistance create serious implications for both the student and the college. If students enroll without financial aid, the likelihood that they will stay enrolled decreases significantly. This also has a negative impact on the institution, which may be penalized for increasing drop-out rates or may not receive valuable federal funding. In 2004-2005, California community colleges alone missed \$220 million in potential Pell Grant funding because eligible students did not complete a FAFSA.

How Presidium Can Help

To engage and retain students, the CCSE study reports that in addition to providing funding, schools must provide students services and support (advising, career services, IT etc.) and help students cope with nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.). Through virtualized services, process redesign, and technology solutions, Presidium helps community colleges provide the support and services community college students need to be successful. Presidium helps address three critical components of an effective engagement strategy:

Customized Engagement Strategies

There are several “hot spots” throughout the financial aid process where students can lose interest and opt out—either voluntarily or inadvertently. Each of these hot spots is a critical touch point and an opportunity to re-engage with students to bolster interest or offer needed encouragement. Whether a student is at risk between semesters due to missing documents or the student doesn't apply because she's not aware of financial assistance, Presidium helps community colleges reach out to students to keep them actively engaged throughout the financial aid process.

Availability

Providing access to financial aid counselors after hours and during peak periods is the single most critical—and the most challenging—factor in making sure that students receive the information they need about financial aid. With recent legislative changes, the financial aid process has become more complex for students to navigate. In parallel, many financial aid offices are being forced to reduce the hours they are open to students so staff can process financial aid applications. The collision of these two trends creates more barriers for students who need personalized guidance the most.

By partnering to provide the appropriate level of support for routine questions during peak months, days, and hours colleges can meet student expectations and demand. Teams can also focus limited resources on core functions such as aid packaging and counseling.

About Presidium

Presidium is an education services management company and partner to hundreds of the world's most progressive education providers. Our market leadership is earned by driving client results in every major benchmark, including retention, enrollment growth, operational efficiencies, and financial aid utilization. We do this through virtualized services, education process redesign, and technology solutions.

One-Touch Service Experience

Access points to critical services are often splintered across multiple telephone numbers, web sites, and physical locations. Students—who are already facing competing work-life-school priorities—have difficulty accessing the resources they need to be successful learners. Waiting in line or on hold with questions about eligibility, deadlines, registration, or financial aid requirements can mean the difference between staying engaged or walking away. Connecting students with easy access to the services they need is a fundamental piece of the student success equation.

A Path to Student Success

Through hundreds of engagements with community colleges, Presidium understands the many complex reasons students do not take full advantage of financial aid—including lack of information, misinformation, and competing priorities. We help partner institutions improve each step in the financial aid process by identifying key leverage points for increased engagement, cost-efficiency, and student success. Incremental enhancements make an immediate impact on key engagement indicators, including the number of aid packages awarded and students enrolled—and create immediate value for students and the college alike.

Key Findings from 2009 Community College Student Engagement Survey

“Community college students also benefit from services targeted to assist them with academic and career planning, academic skill development, and other areas that may affect learning and retention.”

72% of students indicate that their college provides the support they need to succeed at the college either “quite a bit” or “very much.”

only **46%** report that the college provides the financial support they need to afford their education.

only **25%** report that their college helps them cope with nonacademic responsibilities (work, family, etc.) either “quite a bit” or “very much.”

Incremental Process Improvements Generate Significant Value for Student and Institution

Presidium partners with clients to improve efficiency and effectiveness throughout the financial aid process. Our performance is measured through the success of our clients, who have achieved extraordinary results.

Increasing aid utilization through improved engagement strategies increases the likelihood of student retention—and it all starts with a completed FAFSA.

Through virtualized services, Presidium helps Financial Aid offices balance packaging and counseling with daily responsibilities.

Customized inbound and outbound engagement strategies help increase the number of applications filed, packages awarded, and packages disbursed. This creates immediate value for the student and the institution.

Presidium has helped clients increase financial aid utilization in just a matter of months. Contact 888.383.4709 ext. 6 or visit us online at www.presidiuminc.com/community-colleges, to learn more about how we can help.