Part I: Department Background

Section 1: Mission

State the department's formal mission:

The Financial Aid Office at CLC is committed to assisting and educating our community and stakeholders in securing funding for higher education. We are committed to providing guidance through the entire financial aid process while being responsive to the needs, confidentiality and diversity of all students and stakeholders. The Financial Aid Staff is dedicated to remaining compliant with laws and regulations to pertain to federal, state, institutional and privately funded programs.

The Financial Aid Office at the College of Lake County expects its students and stakeholders to provide accurate information with regard to their finances and relevant information in order to enable the staff to process documentation in a timely manner.

The Financial Aid Office at the College of Lake County will continue to be at the forefront of educating the community regarding financial aid opportunities. Through the use of new technologies, the Financial Aid Office will promote excellence in customer service while exceeding the expectations of students and stakeholders.
How does the department mission align with CLC’s institutional mission, vision, values, and goals?

The Financial Aid Office works to remove financial barriers to accessing higher education through the effective administration of federal, state, and institutional aid programs. As advocates for students, the office educates students and their families about the FAFSA and other options for financial assistance. The office partners with the CLC Foundation to ensure stewardship of scholarship funds and impactful awards. The office supports the college’s goals through effective partnerships with other departments across the college to evaluate and improve enrollment processes and the student experience.

Section 2: Duties and Functions of the Department
The Financial Aid Office provides a wide variety of duties, functions, programs and services.

- Guiding, supporting and counseling the community through the financial aid process
- Review of student FAFSA results (ISIR)
- Counseling students about their rights and responsibilities regarding loans
- Counseling students about the financial aid process
- Veterans Assistance
- Reviewing, awarding, & reconciling Federal and State grants
- Reviewing, awarding, & reconciling Student Loans
- Reviewing, awarding, & reconciling Institutional Scholarships
- Reviewing, awarding, & reconciling Private Scholarships
- Reviewing, awarding, & reconciling Federal Work Study
- Review of Senior Tuition Waiver Applications
- Review of Satisfactory Academic Progress
- Dependency Override Evaluations
- Special Circumstance Evaluations
- Verification review
- Completing FISAP and ECAR reports each year
- Completing yearly audits that are required by the Department of Education
- High quality customer service to all stakeholders
Why are these duties, functions, programs, and services important for the college?

All of the duties, functions, programs and services are important for the college so that students have the option to fund their education through grants, scholarships, work-study, and loans. Students are counseled on student loans to minimize educational debt as much as possible. For many students, the use of financial aid is the only means that they have to be able to afford an education, allowing for additional skills and better paying positions. Students are also able to start their education more affordably before moving on to completing their bachelor's degree at a 4 year institution.

How do these duties, functions, programs, and services compare to those offered at peer institutions or to industry best practices?

The duties, functions, programs and services offered through the Financial Aid Office are very comparable to the same offices at peer institutions. All financial aid offices have the same guidelines from the US Department of Education and IBHE/ICCB/ISAC for administering financial aid. The differences between peer institutions may be in the procedures and tools that are used to deliver financial aid to students.

One area of distinction for the College of Lake County is the Welcome and One Stop Center. At CLC, financial aid functions have been integrated into the one-stop student experience while some of our peer institutions have pulled their financial aid out of this center and returned it to be a stand alone department. This success can be attributed to the collaborative relationships between all of the departments in the WOSC and consistent and systematic training of the front line staff.

The Financial Aid Office staff routinely meet with other community colleges in the northern region of Illinois to discuss best practices and discuss issues that may occur and potential solutions. This collaboration with peer institutions contributes to a high quality student experience that is grounded in best practices and an increase in the quality of the work completed by the department.

Are there any functions that the department could offer that is does not currently offer? Please explain.

The Financial Aid Office routinely reviews changes in policies and funding options to make adjustments as needed. One recent adjustment was to the coverage of the inbound call center for financial aid. In November, the department started a pilot with a 3rd party provider to serve students calling financial aid in an effort to increase answer rates and student satisfaction levels. This project is under review for full scale in the next year.

Section 3: Structure

Upload a current department organization chart: NADR FA Organizational Chart 04042019.docx
How does your department structure/organization compare to that of peer institutions or industry best practices?

The structure of the Financial Aid Office is very comparable to our peer institutions. Several peer institutions have adopted a Welcome and One Stop model for delivering student services while some peer institutions continue to maintain separate offices. Most peer institutions consist of a Director, Assistant Director, and various specialist, technical, and support staff. The reporting lines are typically to the Dean of Enrollment Services or to a Vice President depending on the model of the institution.

List key internal collaborative relationships:

Our key internal relationships are with:

- Admissions
- Records
- Welcome and One Stop
- Finance
- Faculty
- Counseling and Advising
- Adult Education
- Various Student Services throughout campus
- CLC Foundation
- WPDI

List key external collaborative relationships:

Our key external relationships consist of:

- Illinois Student Assistance Commission (ISAC)
- Other State agencies (IHBE, ICCB)
- US Department of Education
- Veterans Administration
- Great Lakes Naval Base
- University Center of Lake County

How does your department assess stakeholder satisfaction?

The process for assessing stakeholder satisfaction is currently done through annual IEPR student satisfaction surveys and through NSO (New Student Orientation) surveys each registration cycle. Students who withdraw from classes citing financial related issues and early alerts for veteran students as reported by instructors are both followed up with by financial aid staff. An informal process exists through communication and collaboration with stakeholders on a case-by-case basis. The Financial Aid Office has a goal to build a survey to track our stakeholder satisfaction in a more formal process during the next fiscal year.

Part II: Resources

Section 1: Human Resources

Staffing Table Template
Upload the Staffing table:

How do your department staffing levels compare to those at peer institutions and industry standards?

At the start of this review, a survey was sent to the financial aid departments at our peer institutions in the Northern Illinois area. There were 9 responses. When reviewing on a student to staff ratio, College of Lake County had the 3rd highest ratio of 1,236 students to one staff member. We also ranked as the 2nd highest in the number of students served. The average of our peers was a student ratio of 460 to 800 students per financial aid employee.

On a national level, the FAO reviewed the results of a NASFAA (National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators) survey which showed that on average, institutions had 2.4 FTE for each 1000 aid applicants. The College of Lake County had 6,862 applicants (enrolled students FY18) and an 12.5 FTE. Based on the national average, the FAO’s FTE should be at 16.5 FTE.

The FAO at the College of Lake County has a dedicated compliance officer and business analyst while some peer institutions do not. This intentional commitment of specialized resources has had a significant benefit to the college. First, the college has had few, if any, audit findings over the past 5 years. This can be attributed to dedicated quality control and compliance enforcement staff. Also, having a business analyst dedicated to the FAO has resulted in enhancements in technology use within the department through custom communications to students and an enhanced student experience in PeopleSoft after the recent upgrade.

Do you anticipate staff turnover in key positions over the next 5-years?  
Yes
List new and replacement staffing needs for the next review cycle (5-years). Rate the urgency of each on a 1 (least urgent) to 5 (most urgent) scale.

Within the next five years, the following staffing changes are anticipated:
- Assistant Director - 5 - currently under search due to retirement
- Compliance Officer - 5 - pending retirement within two years
- 1 Full-time FA Specialist - 5 - currently under search due to relocation of incumbent out of state
- 2 Part-time FA Specialists - 5 - currently vacant due to pending reorganization request to full-time classification
- 1 Full-time FA Specialist - 5 - pending reorganization request to move incumbent from part-time to full-time classification
- Without approval of the reorganization of part-time positions to full-time, the FAO will face repeated turnover in the specialist positions.

Any need to replace staff becomes critical for the department because it directly impacts student service.

Section 2: Technology, Systems, Equipment, and Facilities Resources

Upload the Technology, Systems, Equipment, and Facilities Inventory table:

Upload Technology, Systems, Equipment, and Facilities Inventory.docx

Based on the data provided on the Inventory, is your department adequately equipped to fulfill the department mission, duties, and functions listed in Part I? Explain.

The Financial Aid Office is equipped with the appropriate equipment and supplies for our current needs. Adding additional staff over time will require workstations and computers for the new staff.

There is a need for document imaging automation at the institutional level.

As budgets allow, an additional scanner may be a good resource to have to allow Veteran Services to scan and quality control/link their own files for imaging.

There may be a request to add a 2nd monitor to the financial aid workstation in Lakeshore due to the amount of data staff needs to review at the same time. The use of two monitors is subject to staff preferences. The Financial Aid Office does not "own" the office space it uses at Southlake and the assigned staff member there has said they can work without it.
How do your department technology, systems, equipment, and facilities levels compare to those at peer institutions and industry standards?

Our technology, equipment and facility needs are very typical as compared to our peers. We all work with the cycling of older equipment and the rotation of upgrades and updates. As additional positions are identified and needed for reporting requirements that come from the US Department of Education, the placement of staff and the equipment needed is reassessed.

List your department's technology, systems, equipment, and facilities needs for the next review cycle (5-years). Rate the urgency for each on a 1 (least urgent) to 5 (most urgent) scale.

Technology needs and facilities will vary depending on the direction financial aid continues to take. In the immediate future:

- Replacement of older CPU's - 5
- Continued software updates (typically handled by IT already with updates being pushed out) - 3
- Cubicle space for new staff if added - 5

Section 3: Financial Resources

Describe your department's major funding sources (i.e. revenues; e.g. student fees, grant funding, fundraising, etc...).

All of the FAO's funding comes from the General Fund for operation. Student financial aid is provided through Federal (Pell, campus based funds and Direct Loans) and State (Monetary Award Program) resources, as well as the CLC Foundation and other private scholarship providers. There are institutional allocations for athletic scholarships and some scholarship funds reserved from the student comprehensive fee.

Attach a copy of your department's most recent budget document outlining major expenditure categories:

Current FA Dept Budget.PDF

Upload a current budget process manual/map for your department:

FA Budget Process.docx
What cost-saving steps has your department taken over the past 5-years?

The Financial Aid Office has utilized some of the following steps towards cost saving initiatives:

- More correspondence sent over email. The financial aid office has a tremendous amount of communication that we need to do with students in the course of processing financial aid. By reducing the paper communications to just the first piece and following with electronic communication thereafter, it has been a cost savings measure.

- Book vouchers being an electronic process over set values. Students are able to charge against pending Pell Grants that exist above their tuition and fees based on actual enrollment. This listing is updated 4 times daily to provide the most up-to-date information based on the student's actual enrollment. This minimizes a student charging books to their account and not having enough funds to pay for them. This reduces balances owed on tuition statements.

- Moving from a paper scholarship application to online applications;

- Outsourcing financial aid verification and SAP processing. The FAO is piloting outsourcing of inbound financial aid calls from students.

What is your department's contingency plan for reduced revenues? How will you decide which areas to make cuts in your budget, if necessary, in the future?

The Financial Aid Office has identified contingency plans for reducing expense as needed. Although a majority of the department's expenses are for staff, there are options that exist to cut expenses if needed. These include: cutting back on travel (pending mandatory training), utilizing more electronic communication versus paper communication with students, and carefully watching our overtime costs. Office expenses are tracked and regular reviews are conducted to ensure that items ordered are truly needed or can be obtained at a better price, prior to ordering.

Many of the forms that students need to submit are available for them to download at home, complete, and return reducing the cost for the office to produce. This also eliminates waste when forms printed by the department are no longer needed at year end.

Part III: Quality

Section 1: Policies, Procedures, and Processes

IEPR Website - Process Mapping Resources
Financial aid has numerous policies and procedures that are updated on an annual basis. Most of these already contain step-by-step procedures. As documents are updated for following years, flowchart mapping is added to meet HLC requirements.

Key Policies include:

- Daily procedure processes - importing of applications, assigning of needed documents/forms from students, awarding of aid, and program reconciliation
- Special Conditions (Dependency overrides, income adjustments)
- Verification review of FA Files
- Return of Title IV Funds (R2T4)
- Satisfactory Academic Progress
- Overawards resolution
- Uncashed check returns

What percent of your department's key policies, processes, and procedures have been formally documented and shared (e.g. manuals, process maps, etc..)? 80%-89%

Upload a copy of your department's cycle/plan for reviewing and updating key processes (e.g. which process are updated when and by whom):

FA Department Review of Policies and Procedures.docx

Upload a copy of the department's current performance assessment plan:

FA Performance Assessment Plan.docx

Section 2: Measurement, Analysis, and Assessment

Upload the Goals worksheet:

FA Goals Worksheet.docx
What are the department's key performance indicators?

Key performance indicators for financial aid are:

- Financial aid files being reviewed timely and processed for awarding
- Timely disbursement of financial aid
- Reconciling all programs, resolving discrepancies
- Review of over award and authorization failure reports weekly before disbursements
- Regular review of awarded loans, verification, and Return of Title IV Fund files for accuracy.
- Meeting with all traditional incoming students for New Student Orientation (NSOs) financial aid appointments
- Use of the SARS system for tracking appointments, meetings, and walk-ins with students.
- Regular 1:1 meetings between team members and supervisor
- Clean audits through VA and annual audits
- Number of CLC students completing the FAFSA.
- Number of CLC students applying for scholarships.
- Number of unawarded scholarships.
- Number of students sent to collections.
- Persistence, retention and graduation rates for low-income students.
- Credit hours earned for low-income students.
What methods and tools are used by the department to assess its performance (e.g. surveys, data sets, systems, etc...)

The FAO uses data from PeopleSoft to assess its performance on the above items. Through queries and data analysis, many of the performance metrics are calculated by FAO staff.

Financial aid also uses a series of double checks consisting of 2nd and 3rd checks to ensure the proper processing of the verification and awarding process. This involves a 2nd look at verifications and loan processing prior to aid being awarded and disbursed. At the time of disbursement, reports (authorization failure) are provided to various staff to review reasons why aid is unable to disburse for additional checks. Over awards are also identified and reviewed within this process.

Describe how department leaders use the results of your department assessments for decision-making. How has the department used the assessment results to make improvements?

Financial Aid Supervisors review strengths and weakness to determine additional training needs of the staff. Training may be conducted through one-on-one sessions, webinars, workshops or conferences. Supervisors are meeting with staff regularly for one-on-one meetings to discuss current training needs also. Staff error rate is monitored regularly to ensure accurate process of student aid files.

Surveys from IEPR help support where initiatives, such as NSO (New Student Orientations) are reported to be appreciated and beneficial to the student that has gone through the sessions.

As the department shifts its focus from operational items to activities that promote student access and equity in outcomes, key performance indicators will show the impact of strategies implemented and guide further program and outreach development.

Co-Curricular Areas Only:
Describe any quality improvements or modifications made since the last review period.

The Welcome and One Stop Center (WOSC) has been implemented. Financial Aid staff are resources to assist with inquiries from the WOSC, take appointments/walk-ins based on student inquiries, and assist in staffing during peak times of the term. The implantation of the WOSC reduces the number of places a student needs to go to for questions on Cashier, Admissions, Registration and Financial Aid, often being able to quickly redirect the student concerns correctly versus referring to another office as in the past.

AcademicWorks is a scholarship software platform that assists in scholarship processing. Students are able to complete a general application and matched with a variety of different scholarship opportunities based on their responses. This makes a simpler process for the student to apply and provides an electronic method for reviewers of scholarships to see the applicants matched to their scholarship. It also aides in communicating with the student for the status of their application and needed "Thank You" notes.

The recently created financial aid coach position will integrate financial supports into the student experience in a way that will optimize and destigmatize the utilization of services. Measures of performance through these efforts will directly link to the college's enrollment and student success goals.

Part IV: Strategic Planning

List the department's student learning outcomes:

Based on the current review, what are the department's strengths?

The Financial Aid Office has demonstrated several strength areas:

- NSO financial aid appointments, explaining the financial aid process to incoming, traditional students.
- Financial aid information being presented and explained to students through various meetings and groups throughout campus.
- New Borrower appointments show a reduction in default rates. Students being better informed about loan needs and repayment.
- Compliance with federal and state regulations resulting in clean audits.
- Leveraging limited resources in creative ways to solve problems.

Goals Worksheet Template

Based on the current review, what areas for improvement has the
Continuing to work with the WOSC for supporting and providing a better financial aid experience for the student.

Calculating student loans accurately that fall under the SULA regulations.

Working more in concert with other departments to provide better customer service to our students through the WOSC.

Utilize Perceptive Content/ImageNow and our intake documents to make it easier to locate forms submitted by students needed for review. Expand the utilization of this tool for the department.

More cross training for all FAO staff on various items from scholarships, veteran programs, to 3rd party tuition payments.

What structure and personnel changes will your department need to make in order to achieve its goals for the next 5 years?

In order to meet these goals over the next few years we will need the following:

- Shift from part-time staffing model to full-time specialist staff.
- Support from ITS on document imaging functions: setup, workflow, security and maintenance.

What financial support will your department need in order to achieve its goals for the next 5 years?

Financial support that will be needed is for continued funding of the 3rd party phone answering service if it is successful. This funding has been initially provided through the President's Innovation Funds and will need to be worked into budgets if it continues.

A commitment to providing full-time staff instead of part-time staff to support the department's work with students.

Institutional investment in training and/or consulting to effectively utilize ImageNow (document imaging software) at the enterprise-level.

Additional resources will depend on how initiatives work. There is a chance of needing more workstations if staff should expand. Even if we expand with student workers, we have to carefully watch that we do not overlap schedules in order to have space for them to work. Private office space for student appointments can be limited at certain times.

What additional resources (e.g. technology, equipment, space, systems) will your department need in order to achieve its goals for the next 5 years?

Summary
What factors (internal and external) could impact your department's ability to meet its goals for the next 5 years?

Factors that can impact meeting these goals are in the form of:

- Success of 3rd party phone answering
- Regulatory changes and adapting quickly
- Changes in staffing
- Major projects that are added into the scope of current daily work.

Please detail all major findings resulting from the current review.

Based on the review of the past NADR reports, there are no major findings of a negative nature.

Many items are directly related to customer service levels and enhancing the experience. The past review had goals in the following areas:

- References to New Student Orientation
- A new scholarship software system and redesign
- Integrate financial literacy programming with financial aid
- Participate in the transition to the One-Stop enrollment center model
- Leverage technology to increase efficiency of office operations
- Bookstore charging
- Maintain compliance with federal and state financial aid program regulations
- Monitor student service levels and make changes as needed to improve the student experience
- Maintain relationships with internal and external stakeholders

All of these goals were reached. However, these goals will continue to be improved and worked on due to staffing changes, updates and changing in rules, regulations or processing updates, and the student experience/feedback.

Customer service to our students, parents and other stakeholders will continue to be in the forefront. Staff is always reviewing changes in regulations for compliance in processing. In the next evaluation cycle, the FAO will shift from an operational focus to being an active contributor to the college’s student success goals through intentional, proactive efforts.
Please detail action steps to be completed in the future based on this review with a timeline and/or anticipated dates.

The following action plans will be implemented for our goals during the FY20 year:

- Improve financial aid component in NSO
- Promotional campaign, workshops, and financial aid "myth busting" activities
- Target setting for recruitment student success team
- Aggressive outreach to students who need to submit information to complete their file
- Evaluate forms and processes for barriers to completion
- Expansion of hours at the Lakeshore Campus
- Plan and execute scholarship marketing campaign to promote awareness of available scholarships and eligibility requirements
- Design and implement a micro-grant/emergency fund program to assist students with unexpected life events
- Partner with retention team members to assist students who express financial concerns
- Timely follow up with students who withdraw from classes and indicate financial reasons
- Targeted outreach to enrolled students who cancel their payment plans

Part V: Division Dean or VP Response

The division dean or VP should complete this section after reviewing the responses provided in Parts 1-4 and discussing the NADR with department leadership.

Please select ONE of the following three options:

Provide a narrative explaining the basis for each exception in the space below:

Signature