



# NORTHERN VIRGINIA COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Date: December 15, 2009

To: Elizabeth Harper, Chair  
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From: John T. Dever  
Executive Vice President

Subject: Financial Aid Restructuring Initiative

Thank you for your willingness to serve as a member of the team charged with reviewing and making recommendations for the restructuring of processes associated with Student Financial Aid at Northern Virginia Community College.

Financial aid has been identified by the college as a major resource and strategy for achieving its strategic goals for student access and success. Particularly in this prolonged period of economic hardship, financial aid makes it possible for many residents of Northern Virginia to obtain the benefits of higher education, thereby positioning themselves for university transfer or direct entry into the workforce. In anticipation of significantly increased demand for financial aid in the 2009-10 year, the college in spring of 2009 approved the addition a number of financial aid positions (see Proposal for Enhancing Financial Aid Services at NOVA). Along with the proposed positions, a number of expected outcomes were identified. The positions were very helpful in responding to the exceptional increase in demand that has occurred with the 2009-10 year (as of December 7, 59% more applicants with accepted awards than at the same time last year).

The campus-based and college-wide financial aid staff have done a tremendous job in responding to this high demand. At the same time, however, major issues have been

identified with processes that have resulted in confusion and frustration for a number of students. Particularly prominent have been concerns about clear communication (students understanding where they are in the financial aid process and what steps are still needed to complete it) and document processing (students bringing in documentation required for verification and not being adequately assured that the documents are successfully transmitted from campuses to the central office so that their applications are expeditiously moved forward). These concerns, in turn, have revealed underlying issues with the use of technology (both SIS and the imaging system) and with the organizational relationship between campus-based Financial Aid Services and the Central Financial Aid Office. It is critical that substantial improvements are implemented for the 2010-2011 year and that long-term restructuring occur that enables financial aid to become exemplary in its functioning as a major college unit.

Making major improvements in processes for Student Financial Aid is one of several restructuring projects authorized by Dr. Templin and the Administrative Council. For all these projects, certain key components have been identified, all of which need to be part of the team's review and addressed in the final report:

Data driven analysis and decision making

- Outcome performance measures
- Customer service indicators
- Benchmarking against "best in class"

Directed at enhancing outcomes, productivity and quality

- Application of technology
- Education/training of frontline workers
- Empowering front-line workers
- Eliminating duplication of effort
- Reducing transactions or steps in process
- Increasing customer self-service
- Contingency plans for "surge" periods

Processes

- Examines processes and policies across departments
- Involves customers in analysis/assessment

Dr. Harper and Ms. Zanders have done a great deal of preliminary work to see that the team can get off to a fast start in focusing on the major processing issues and ensuring that all components of the restructuring initiative are addressed. The collective effort of the team is now required for comprehensive review and recommendation of major steps to ensure substantially improved operations. I ask that the final report be ready for review by Administrative Council by March 16.

Please let me know if I can be of assistance as the team completes its work. Again, thank you for being part of this major project that will bring great benefits to many NOVA students.