



Career Awareness Thought Force Final Report

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Executive Summary

The role of a financial aid administrator is often perceived as something other than a distinct and viable career path for would-be future professionals. Instead, it is frequently a position that talented individuals “fall into” by happenstance and then learn to love, grow, and find success. However, as NASFAA’s former President & CEO Justin Draeger [recently said](#), “If we’ve learned anything from this last year, it’s just how critical financial aid administrators are to ensuring students can access postsecondary education. Financial aid professionals are a vital part of the campus ecosystem, keeping students on track to graduate, ensuring the right taxpayer and donor dollars are going to the right students, and maintaining institutional eligibility for federal and state funds, and it’s equally vital they are recognized and fairly compensated for that work.”

In an effort to bolster the profession, NASFAA has historically focused on credentialing and certifying those professionals — in partnership with state and regional associations — to standardize training so financial aid administrators can demonstrate their mastery of professional concepts and content, and ultimately further their careers. NASFAA has also explored incorporating standardized training into university training on multiple occasions, further legitimizing the training and the profession. Taken together, these efforts underscore the need to take additional, targeted steps to change the perception of our profession from an accidental career to a chosen professional pathway.

The [Career Path Awareness for Financial Aid Administrators Thought Force](#) was convened by the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) in October 2023 to deliver a report containing recommendations that could develop a framework to amplify the visibility of the financial aid administrator role and liaise with other higher education associations to foster collaborations that would mutually promote the financial aid profession as a viable career path.

The thought force comprised a geographically diverse group of NASFAA members from most types of postsecondary institutions. Based on research and discussions, the thought force developed multiple recommendations for ways in which NASFAA can be instrumental in improving administrative capability on campuses as well as the visibility and opportunities for pathways into the profession of financial aid administration. Their three key takeaways and action items are as follows:

- Further explore how to establish a classification for the financial aid profession and/or higher education professions into the O*NET Resource Center, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration, and developed by the National Center for O*NET.
- Focus on the creation and implementation of a higher education academic course on financial aid.
- Focus on the development of resources listed throughout this report, prioritizing the ones that would best benefit individual institutions in their recruitment of new financial aid professionals. A summary of future considerations can be found in Appendix A.

Overall, the thought force puts forward for the following recommendations:

- Recommendation 1:** Develop two types of awareness campaigns for different populations on campus: internal/cross-departmental and external/student-focused.
- Recommendation 2:** Add messaging to NASFAA's association description to include language regarding the importance of the work of financial aid administrators. This additional information would provide greater context regarding the work NASFAA members perform.
- Recommendation 3:** Broaden NASFAA's student membership option from ["Graduate Research Students"](#) to the more general "Students" for interested students at non-member schools.
- Recommendation 4:** Form a task force to create a career awareness toolkit and pull together sample internship templates.
- Recommendation 5:** Consider creating a "Tips for Reclassification" document and publishing a series of white papers that outline successful reclassification efforts among various sectors. Initial suggestions for these documents can be found in Appendix D.
- Recommendation 6:** Focus on adding financial aid as a profession to the O*NET Resource Center, led by NASFAA staff.
- Recommendation 7:** Form a task force charged with the creation and implementation of a higher education course on financial aid.
- Recommendation 8:** For each of the two types of higher education association stakeholder groups identified in our work, the thought force suggests exploring the areas outlined in our Stakeholder Engagement section for future work and collaboration led by NASFAA staff. Prioritization should be given to resources and partnerships that would best benefit individual institutions and their recruitment of new financial aid professionals.
- Recommendation 9:** Explore a way to have higher education association career centers collaborate and show job seekers positions from multiple office types.
- Recommendation 10:** Bring together a working group of higher education associations that have identified competency areas for their profession — along with NACE, which has existing [Career Readiness Competencies](#) — to create an overall higher education competencies map that could highlight overlap between offices.

*Generative AI was used in the initial development of this report.

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Clarity and Insights

At the onset of its work, the thought force first took time to analyze the current perception and awareness levels surrounding the role of financial aid administrators among prospective candidates, including college students and professionals seeking a career shift. NASFAA's Research Department deployed two membership surveys, conducted a virtual focus group of undergraduate students, and conducted one-on-one virtual interviews with students currently enrolled in a master's of higher education administration program.

- The first survey focused on majors that financial aid administrators had prior to entering the field and the level of degree earned.
- The second survey focused on how financial aid administrators entered the field, how long they anticipated staying in their career, what they found rewarding and challenging.
- The undergraduate student focus group was focused on students' interactions with their financial aid office and awareness of the financial aid profession.
- The graduate student one-on-one interviews were focused on their desired careers after graduation, interactions with their financial aid office, and discussions in their master's degree programs on careers.

The results from each of these efforts are presented in Appendices B and C.

Below is a report detailing the findings, including the current landscape of the financial aid administrator role, awareness levels, perception challenges, and potential target demographics for recruiting new professionals.

Major Findings:

Rapid Response Network members¹:

Most entered the field with a bachelor's degree and earned their master's degree while in the profession.

The most common undergraduate majors were business- or education-related.

NASFAA members who had recently entered the field (*identified by the thought force as those who indicated they worked in a financial aid office as a full-time employee for less than three years*):

- Most entered the field from outside of higher education (33%) and some were working on a college campus in a different office, and transferred into the financial aid office (29%).
- Most respondents did not indicate their pathway into working as a full-time employee in the financial aid profession was through student employment². Overall, only 16% of respondents were student employees, and among those who had worked less than three years, only 11% were.
- When asked how long they intended to stay in the field of financial aid, one-third indicated they have no intention of leaving this profession until retirement (33%) and one-third said they were undecided (39%).
- Most respondents felt helping students and their parents was the most rewarding part of their job, and high workloads, changing regulations, low salary, and having difficult conversations were the most challenging.

Undergraduate students:

- Most are interested in entering a career they feel is related to their undergraduate major, and anticipate a starting salary of \$60,000 - \$80,000.
- Students in this sample had not considered working on a college campus in any capacity as a potential career field upon graduation.
- Most valued close relationships with their assigned advisors in the financial aid office, and desired to only work with their assigned advisor.
- When asked what skills they felt someone who worked in a financial aid office needed, most shared skills that were related to working directly with students, including: empathy, patience, professionalism, and clear communication.

Graduate students currently enrolled in a higher education administration or student affairs master's degree program:

- Most participants were interested in a career that "directly interacts with students daily" and "helps" them in some way, and anticipate a starting salary of \$45,000 - \$70,000.
- When asked, almost all participants felt they had a sense of what type of full-time position they were hoping to obtain when enrolling in their master's degree program, even if they were unsure of the exact office.
- Participants in this sample set expressed that the financial aid office does not come up in conversations related to internships/practicums or career placement.
- Many cited they had no interest in working in the financial aid office because they did not want to work in a position where they had to have "hard conversations" daily, and did not want the "responsibility" of making the decisions they felt were made by financial aid professionals.

¹ NASFAA's [Rapid Response Network](#) is a volunteer Task Force of members expected to be available to respond with requested feedback within a reasonable amount of time. There is some inherent bias in this group, as they sign up to actively participate and often have a higher level of experience or position title than the average NASFAA member. However, the intention of surveying our Rapid Response Network is to provide preliminary information that can inform a conversation and aid NASFAA in surveying the entire membership with more refined questions at a later date.

² For the purposes of this report, student employment is defined as 1) an undergraduate work-study/student worker worker in the financial aid office and/or 2) a graduate student who worked in the financial aid office.

Strategy and Framework for Raising Awareness

Based on analysis of the current perception and awareness levels surrounding the role of financial aid administrators, the thought force has put together resources and suggestions to raise awareness of the financial aid profession.

The work of the financial aid office can be overlooked and underappreciated by campus partners and the student body. Drawing attention to the critical impact financial aid has on the business of higher education and the success of students is important. There are varying levels of awareness campaigns, from an elevated project that is cross-functional with other departments on campus, to sharing one-pagers with critical financial aid information, to offering and conducting training. Campaigns can focus on a specific topic, or a general awareness to elevate an office's role in student success across campuses.

When developing an awareness campaign, consider the following factors:

- Audience – Who are you communicating with? Internal or external stakeholders? Colleagues or students?
- Purpose – Why are you sharing this information? What is the overall message you'd like to convey?
- Level of Detail – Are these subject matter experts? What does the audience need to know to understand your overall message?
- Action Items – Are there any actionable takeaways you'd like the audience to walk away with? How will you emphasize these items?
- Delivery System – How will you share this information? What systems or platforms do you have available?

Recommendation for Institutions

Develop two types of awareness campaigns for different populations on campus: internal/cross-departmental and external/student-focused.

Campaign 1:

The cross-departmental campaign would aim to ensure that other offices and partners on campus know how the work of the financial aid office impacts the entire campus.

Campaign 2:

The external campaign would increase exposure of the financial aid profession to students and interested job seekers, so they may consider pursuing it as a viable career option in the future.

The thought force also recommends the creation of national awareness campaign materials, as later outlined in our Stakeholder Engagement section. Many of those materials draw from materials across the two campaigns above.

Campaign 1: Internal/Cross-Departmental Campaign Suggestions

- Review the [sample financial aid awareness campaign](#) from Western Governors University.
- Create one-pagers to share with colleagues outside of the financial aid office. Focus on what financial aid does, why it's important to them, and how it helps them. The information shared may vary based on the audience. For example, consider what would be helpful to share with campus practitioners versus campus leadership.
 - Refer to NASFAA's Advancing the Profession Toolkit, which includes several resources.
 - [What Financial Aid Does at Your Institution - By the Numbers](#)
 - [Transparency on What Financial Aid Staff Does](#)
 - [Relationship and Coalition Building: Communicating and Managing Up](#)
 - Develop an annual financial aid report that institutions can use.
 - A downloadable, [editable template](#) is available
 - Sample Report: [2022-23 Annual Report](#) created by Purdue University

- Create infographics to highlight specific programs/initiatives.
 - Sample: [WGU's Top 5 FAFSA Facts](#)

Take a screenshot of your FSA Partner Portal with ISIR data, disbursements and originations.
- Work with your campus to schedule presentations for all professionals to learn about the other offices within the division/department, with financial aid as one of the topics.
 - Actively reach out to other departments to schedule regular updates or training on financial aid and how it impacts their department (minimally annually, perhaps once per semester or during training). Financial aid offices could consider conducting Financial Aid 101 sessions and other optional learning sessions.
 - Partner with student affairs (or the division that is most appropriate on your campus) to create a one-day learning mini-conference and utilize the materials proposed in the Stakeholder Engagement Section.

Campaign 2: External/Student- Focused Campaign Suggestions

- As recommended in the Stakeholders Engagement section, find strategic places to partner with campus career services offices to develop information about working in a financial aid office to create awareness for students seeking career advice about potential career opportunities.
 - Refer to career center resources:
 - [The Ultimate Career Fair Planning Guide for Employers](#)
 - [Handshake Virtual Engagement Kit](#)
- Create a career awareness toolkit for use at career fairs, and when working with campus career centers and academic advisors. Consider including:
 - Infographics and a PowerPoint presentation for ease of use.
 - Data on degrees/majors that enter the financial aid profession; emphasize the diversity of background and skills required by financial aid administrators.
 - Highlight the skills and knowledge needed to work in financial aid. Consider recreating the following resources to be geared more toward students.
 - [Transparency on What Financial Aid Staff Does](#)
 - [Competency Model Infographic](#)
 - [What Financial Aid Administrators Do Infographic](#)
- Promote benefits of working in higher education, and more specifically within financial aid. (See benefits section below.)
 - Pull together testimonials from financial aid administrators highlighting their professional experience.
- Provide information on where to find financial aid job postings: NASFAA Career Center, Higher Ed Jobs, LinkedIn, Career Center job boards, etc.
- Share common career paths of financial aid administrators within an office, and externally. Highlight transferable skills.
 - Internal example: Counselor → Assistant Director → Associate Director → Director → Vice President/Dean
 - External example: A financial aid administrator may move into a state or federal government role, work for a non-profit organization like NASFAA, work for a scholarship organization, move to an industry partner — including loan servicers or software and technology companies — or transition into consulting.

- Connect with GEAR Up grants and TRIO partners for both student employment and Federal Work-Study opportunities, as well as long-term employment.
- Augment or develop a financial aid ambassador program, similar to admissions/recruiter ambassadors.
 - Partner with the admissions/recruitment office to hire student ambassadors to help with recruitment and specialize in financial aid and student funding.

Additional Recommendations

In addition to the more targeted awareness campaign outlined above, the thought force also has put together broad recommendations for financial aid practitioners to raise awareness for students.

Highlight the Benefits of Working in Higher Education

The benefits of working in higher education, specifically within financial aid, are vast, but often overlooked. As we saw in the focus groups, many undergraduate students focus on compensation as an important decision point in their career search, and may underestimate the importance of the other benefits available. The thought force believes highlighting additional benefits that come with working in financial aid is important to attract new professionals to the field. In May of 2024, NASFAA's communications team highlighted what [NASFAA's Most Valuable Professionals \(MVPs\)](#) find the [most fulfilling and rewarding](#) about working in financial aid, which compliments this work. Benefits to highlight include:

- High self-satisfaction and gratification as a result of positively impacting someone else's success.
- Financial aid administrators impact future generations by helping to mold teachers, doctors, lawyers, politicians, designers, innovators, activists, business owners, leaders, etc.
- Tuition assistance for pursuing advanced degrees. Tuition assistance can range from 50% to 100%, resulting in significant savings. Tuition benefits may be transferable to spouses and dependents.
- Public Service Loan Forgiveness available for most institutions.
- Generous benefits in most cases, especially when it comes to vacation and/or sick time.
- Giving back to the community.
- Diversity and opportunity — there are a plethora of jobs and careers to choose from matching many different skill sets. Many of the roles allow for engagement with people from all walks of life.
- Lifelong learning opportunities — working on a college campus affords you the opportunity to grow and learn professionally, personally, and culturally.
- Inspiration — when you see others succeeding, making change, and being creative, it inspires you.
- Flexible schedules, in some cases.
- Discounts may be available. For example, airlines, ticketed events, restaurants, child care, summer programs, car insurance, and many more.
- Free or discounted gym membership for employee, spouse, and dependents.
- Professional travel opportunities, depending on position.

Develop Materials for Working with Human Resources Offices

Reclassification is the process undertaken by a department or division on a campus to examine current job titles and/or salaries and determine if there are any inequities as compared to peer departments or divisions. Once a reclassification takes place findings can result in salary and/or job title changes, or they may result in changes depending on the recommendations of the report. Some financial aid directors have expressed interest in initiating a reclassification but uncertainty on where to begin and how to effectively manage the process.

- Consider creating a “Tips for Reclassification” document and publishing a series of white papers that outline successful reclassification efforts among various sectors. Initial suggestions for these documents can be found in Appendix D.
- To further assist reclassification efforts the thought force recommends NASFAA explore how to add financial aid administration (or higher education as a whole) as a career in the O*NET Resource Center, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration, and developed by the National Center for O*NET. This work would require work by NASFAA staff due to its complexity, given O*NET is a federal resource.

Enhance Pathways for Student Workers

Making the financial aid office an attractive place to work on campus may lead to higher retention of student workers post graduation. Increasing their exposure to the profession and making their experience meaningful may have a large impact on their perception of financial aid as a career. The thought force suggests implementing a few opportunities for student workers.

1. Develop internship opportunities that focus on specific projects within the financial aid office. Career centers on most campuses have robust internship programs, or regularly conduct internship opportunities with students. Financial aid offices could connect with their campus career center to create an internship program, and embed it into various departments on campus. Many master’s programs focused in student affairs or higher education administration also require the completion of internships and/or practicums and often have a research methods class that require students to complete a data analysis project.
 - a. Internships could be customized based on the student’s major or other interests. Many of the examples below also fit into master’s programs. A few examples:
 - i. Data analytics/computer science based majors - Review systems efficiencies and industry trends
 - ii. Communication majors - Develop outreach interventions for students at risk of termination for SAP
 - iii. Marketing majors - Develop an outreach campaign to promote financial wellness to students
 - iv. Political science/public policy majors - Review office policies and procedures and compare them to the current regulations
 - v. Business administration/HR - Review organizational structure and employee satisfaction in financial aid office
 - b. Resource: [Employers Internship Toolkit](#) developed by West Michigan Strategic Alliance and Detroit Regional Area Chamber of Commerce
2. Develop a financial aid rotational career program so student workers can learn various aspects of financial aid administration in various areas of a financial aid office.
3. Add student workers/interns to the institution’s NASFAA roster to provide them with membership benefits, including access to Today’s News, webinars, research papers, etc. Being able to experience the vastness of the profession may encourage students to view financial aid as a viable career option³.

³ Adding students to the membership roster is free, no additional cost is associated.

Recommendations for NASFAA Implementation

The thought force believes that NASFAA could make small enhancements to be more accessible to students interested in working in financial aid.

Recommendation: Add messaging to NASFAA's association description to include language regarding the importance of the work of Financial Aid Administrators. This additional information would provide greater context regarding the work NASFAA members perform.

- Existing NASFAA description: The National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) is the only national, nonprofit association with a primary focus on information dissemination, professional development, and legislative and regulatory analysis related to federal student aid programs authorized under Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended. Our membership consists of more than 29,000 financial aid professionals at nearly 3,000 colleges, universities, and career schools across the country. NASFAA member institutions serve nine out of every 10 undergraduates in the United States.

Additional proposed text: Student financial aid provides billions of dollars nationally in the form of grants, loans, and student employment for students to pursue postsecondary education. Financial aid administrators help students achieve their educational potential by helping award and disburse monetary resources and providing guidance and support throughout the process.

- Update the ["About NASFAA"](#) web page where the description is used to include the additional language.
- Ask NASFAA presenters, including staff and board members, to incorporate this messaging into their remarks during conferences and other presentations to remind attendees of the importance of their work.

Recommendation: Broaden NASFAA's student membership option from ["Graduate Research Students"](#) to the more general "Students" for interested students at non-member schools.

Recommendation: Form a task force to create a career awareness toolkit and pull together sample internship templates.

Recommendation: Form a task force charged with the creation and implementation of a higher education course on financial aid.

Financial Aid Academic Course Development

The thought force identified the development of an academic higher education coursework as a strong potential avenue for raising awareness of the financial aid profession. While significant work still needs to be done to fully implement this concept, this subgroup of the thought force endeavored to outline why this is important to develop and what some of the obstacles may be to adding such a course to an established academic program.

Justification for Academic Course Development

The financial aid profession is not one that job seekers tend to pursue with forethought or intentionality (see the Rapid Response Network survey results in *Appendix B*). Some financial aid professionals start as work-study students, or as employees in higher education in other areas, but many others simply “land” in the field as part of a more general job search for positions requiring their skills. Given how many begin work in financial aid without having considered it specifically as a field of interest beforehand, it is notable that more than one-third of respondents intend to remain in the profession indefinitely. However, it is also of note that the largest group of respondents — almost 40% — have been in the field for three years or less. With many opportunities for advancement likely to become available for this group of newer professionals in the near term, it is important to be sure others enter the field, seeing it as a viable, rewarding career option.

A key potential career pathway is to provide more academic resources about the financial profession. This seems like a pathway particularly likely to be successful given that more than half of survey respondents moved into the field through a connection, direct or indirect, to higher education. Academic educational resources would include discussion of financial aid’s history, principles, current issues and challenges, and its role within the enrollment management, student success, and overall higher education frameworks.

It should be noted that academic course development differs from professional development courses and industry-based certifications offered by NASFAA, such as the NASFAA U courses and the Certified Financial Aid Administrator® (CFAA) program, which provides the FAAC® designation. While these professional development offerings provide valuable technical training in financial aid, focusing on practical skills and current industry standards, the proposed academic coursework offers a distinct yet complementary approach. Professional development courses typically prioritize immediate applicability and skill mastery, whereas academic coursework delves into theoretical frameworks, historical contexts, and broader conceptual understanding. By engaging with academic coursework, students gain a deeper appreciation for the underlying principles and ethical considerations shaping the financial aid profession. This theoretical foundation equips future professionals with the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate evolving industry landscapes and contribute to long-term systemic improvements.

Many who might find financial aid a fulfilling profession do not even consider it as a career option because they know little to nothing about it, or what they do know is incomplete or unappealing. By raising awareness of its breadth and connectedness to so many different knowledge and practice areas, potential professionals may see how they could fit in the field in ways they would not have previously considered. For example, someone interested in information technology might never have realized its key role in financial aid, including the unique way in which it is utilized in problem-solving and providing financial aid information to students, not to mention that this is a niche type of position that is typically well paid.

Academic education resources can be made available to many audiences, and in many contexts, including but not limited to:

- Undergraduate students
 - Training course(s) available for financial aid student employees
 - General non-credit course(s) available in career centers for students interested in student services
 - Inclusion in non-credit course(s) available in career centers for students interested in related careers
 - Educational component of credit-bearing internship course(s) at financial aid office site
- Graduate students
 - Training course(s) available for financial aid student employees and graduate assistants
 - General non-credit course(s) available in career centers for students interested in student services
 - Inclusion in non-credit course(s) available in career centers for students interested in related careers
 - Educational component of credit-bearing internship course(s) at financial aid office site
- Current higher education staff
 - Workshops and online modules made available to “get to know” offices on campus
- Current financial aid staff
 - Training programs for incoming and newer staff
 - Institutional badges and microcredentials
- Degree programs in higher education administration
 - Class session(s) as part of a broader course in enrollment management, higher education finance, or related areas
 - Full-semester course(s)
- Non-degree programs and certificates
 - For- and non-credit options
 - Topics can be more focused on areas like enrollment management, including financial aid, rather than on higher education more broadly
- Degree programs in areas of study outside of higher education
 - Class session(s) as part of a broader course in a related field, such as public policy, finance and business models, psychology of money, financial wellness, and others

The thought force has developed two course framework options with enough flexibility to be utilized for all these audiences and contexts (see Course Development and Rationale below, and Appendices D and E).

Course Development Rationale

The thought force subgroup has been diligently working to develop academic offerings to stimulate interest among higher education students in a career within the financial aid profession. A significant part of this initiative has been the initial development of curriculum components designed to effectively introduce students to financial aid.

The thought force subgroup grappled with balancing the need to establish a program that would be recognized for its academic rigor while also addressing the practical skills necessary for financial aid staff. Despite recognizing the importance of these practical skills, the committee made a strategic decision to focus on foundational theories and policy analysis to ensure the program’s alignment with academic standards. This decision was made to enhance the program’s credibility and facilitate its acceptance in academic circles. It is important to note that this choice does not diminish or seek to replace the critical contributions of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) in developing specialized certifications and credentials. The committee respects and values NASFAA’s efforts and views this academic program as a complementary pathway that enriches the broader educational landscape of financial aid.

The thought force subgroup has developed a comprehensive three-hour class session designed as an introductory primer to financial aid. This session can be flexibly integrated into either a summary course on higher education or as a segment in a higher education finance course. The session is also adaptable enough to fit into a plethora of the less academic settings outlined above. The content covers fundamental financial aid concepts, the types of aid available, the application process, and the role of financial aid in enhancing access to and success in higher education. It also highlights the critical role played by financial aid professionals. (See Appendix E.)

Additionally, the thought force subgroup has outlined a full-semester course aimed at providing a thorough introduction to financial aid. This course is structured to provide in-depth coverage through modules focusing on financial aid policy, administration, and the use of technology in the field. The curriculum includes case studies, guest lectures by seasoned financial aid professionals, and project-based learning opportunities that allow students to tackle real-world issues in financial aid. The course is designed to equip students with a deep understanding of financial aid systems, the necessary skills for a career in this field, and an appreciation of the sector's challenges and opportunities. (See Appendix F.)

In its review of other higher education programs and course offerings, the thought force subgroup found no similar courses currently available. Courses reviewed in higher education either do not address financial aid at all, or provide simply a cursory overview without exploring fundamental issues of access, ethics, and strategy in the administration of financial aid. This uniqueness further underscores the value of the proposed offerings. Meetings with several academicians have also affirmed the value of these courses. These academicians provided insights into the lengthy and intricate processes required for curricular approval, emphasizing the need for careful planning and consultation, but also called out significant interest in the program offering.

These academic enhancements are aimed at cultivating an informed and competent pool of future financial aid professionals. By incorporating these educational components, we hope to foster a deeper interest and understanding of financial aid among students, thus effectively preparing them for careers in our vital sector.

Potential Obstacles

Navigating the complexities of integrating financial aid courses into academic programs poses challenges, including convincing program administrators of its benefits and navigating the politics of curriculum approval. Additionally, time constraints hinder comprehensive course design, requiring strategic collaboration and innovative approaches to overcome.

Incentivizing academic programs to incorporate financial aid courses poses a significant obstacle to programs adopting financial aid-specific coursework. While the importance of financial aid in higher education is undeniable, higher education academic programs may prioritize other topics perceived as relevant to more obvious career paths in higher education. Convincing program administrators to allocate resources and curriculum space to financial aid courses requires demonstrating the direct benefits to students' professional development and the broader educational landscape. Additionally, aligning financial aid content with program objectives and accreditation standards can enhance its appeal to graduate programs seeking to enrich their offerings.

Negotiating the politics of curriculum approval presents another hurdle in the journey to develop effective financial aid academic offerings. Higher education institutions operate within complex bureaucratic structures, where curriculum decisions are influenced by various stakeholders, including faculty, administrators, accrediting bodies, and

sometimes external agencies. Introducing new courses, especially those addressing specialized topics like financial aid, often entails navigating layers of approval processes and addressing competing interests. Building consensus among stakeholders, highlighting the interdisciplinary relevance of financial aid education, and emphasizing its alignment with institutional missions can help overcome resistance and streamline approval procedures.

Furthermore, time constraints pose a practical challenge in designing comprehensive financial aid courses. Developing high-quality educational materials that cover the diverse facets of financial aid requires significant time and expertise. Faculty and instructional designers estimate quality course design takes 40-60 hours. Those best equipped to undertake the work of course design, such as faculty education programs or financial aid practitioners, face competing demands on their time, like teaching responsibilities, research obligations, and administrative duties. Leveraging existing educational resources, relationships between higher education academics and financial aid practitioners, and fostering interdisciplinary collaborations can ensure the timely development and implementation of financial aid offerings in academic spaces.

Next Steps

Recommendation: Form a task force charged with the creation and implementation of a higher education course on financial aid.

If NASFAA forms such a task force, they should consider the following action items.

Initially, targeted outreach to higher education institutions and key stakeholders is crucial to promote the inclusion of financial aid coursework in academic programs. This could involve presentations at academic conferences, publishing in educational journals, and engaging directly with university curriculum committees. Alongside these efforts, the task force should develop a clear value proposition that emphasizes the career opportunities and the critical role of financial aid in student success, which will underscore the importance of these courses.

In terms of curriculum development and standardization, it is essential to devote additional time and attention to the development of the proposed three-hour class session and the full-semester course, ensuring they are adaptable across various educational settings and learning styles. Collaboration with financial aid professionals and academic experts will be vital in creating comprehensive course materials that include case studies, multimedia resources, and interactive learning modules.

Establishing partnerships with educational institutions and professional organizations will help pilot the financial aid courses. These partnerships can provide preliminary data on the effectiveness of the courses and their reception by students. Furthermore, integrating financial aid topics into existing courses in other academic departments — such as business, public policy, and psychology — could increase the interdisciplinary appeal of the subject.

Pursuing formal accreditation for the new courses will ensure they meet educational standards and are recognized by academic and professional bodies. Working closely with accreditation bodies to align the courses with approval criteria will be critical for gaining formal recognition and credibility.

To raise awareness among students about the opportunities in the financial aid profession and the new educational pathways available, the task force should develop robust marketing materials and campaigns. Utilizing social media, student newsletters, and campus events will help promote the courses and highlight career success stories in the financial aid field.

Implementing a system for ongoing evaluation of the course offerings is also crucial. This involves collecting feedback from students, instructors, and academic administrators to continually refine and improve the curriculum. Monitoring the career paths of students who participate in these courses will help assess the impact of the education on their professional development and entry into the financial aid field.

Lastly, the task force needs to develop strategies to navigate the political and administrative challenges of curriculum approval. This includes building consensus among stakeholders and aligning the courses with institutional missions. Innovative approaches to overcome time constraints in course design, such as using modular designs or blended learning formats, will also be necessary to ensure the timely development and implementation of these vital educational offerings. These comprehensive steps will enable the committee to effectively promote financial aid as a viable career path and integrate it into higher education curricula, enhancing both the professional landscape and the educational opportunities available to students.

Stakeholder Engagement

The thought force identified higher education associations that they felt would be appropriate for collaboration, brainstormed possible areas for engaging with these groups, and established a dialogue to capture their feedback and insights on the viability of potential strategies for collaboration on financial aid profession career awareness. What follows are the identified associations, areas for collaboration and future work, and feedback from some of the associations listed.

Identifying stakeholders: Initially, the thought force members reviewed the membership list of the [Washington Higher Education Secretariat](#). The group felt associations fell into two distinct categories:

Group 1: Associations whose membership may be interested in a career in the financial aid profession themselves. Associations within this group were those with student members. Examples include:

- Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA)
- American College Personnel Association (ACPA)
- National Student Employment Association (NSEA)

Group 2: Associations whose membership worked with individuals who may be interested in a career in the financial aid profession. Associations within this group were most often those members who worked directly with students or professionals in advising, career services, or job placement environments, or who may interact with students in a more customer service role. Examples include:

- American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers (AACRAO)
- American Association of University Professors (AAUP)
- College and University Professional Association for Human Resources (CUPA-HR)
- Council for Opportunity in Education (COE)
- Council of Graduate Schools (CGS)
- National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC)
- National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO)
- National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)
- National Career Development Association (NCDA)
- State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO)

- National Academic Advising Association (NACADA)
- National College Attainment Network (NCAN)

Building awareness and strengthening partnership:

Recommendation: For each of these two types of higher education association partners identified in our work, the thought force suggests that NASFAA explore the following areas for future work and collaboration:

Group 1:

NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. Through a partnership with NASPA, multiple avenues may be explored to increase awareness of the financial aid profession. Moreover, the work and reach of NASPA is broad and offers opportunities to increase awareness across both Group 1 and Group 2. While this section will detail possibilities for enhancing Group 1 awareness, NASPA's alignment with Group 2 will also be discussed later in this report. Specifically, when considering by what means a NASPA partnership would support Group 1 objectives, the thought force suggests exploring participation in NASPA's various student engagement channels and raising awareness of the financial aid profession for current student affairs graduate students. Opportunities could include:

- Participation in [The Placement Exchange](#): Presented by NASPA and ACUHO-I, The Placement Exchange (TPE) serves as a career hub for student affairs, assisting both candidates and employers through various events and resources. TPE is also present yearly at NASPA's annual conference. The thought force recommends partnering with NASPA and TPE to present a session featuring financial aid as a career during NASPA's annual conference. Additionally, the thought force recommends working with TPE to explore the inclusion of financial aid job openings within the [TPE Job Board](#).
- Collaboration with [Graduate Associate Program \(GAP\)](#): NASPA currently has a program for graduate students in student affairs called the Graduate Associate Program (GAP). The aim for this program is for GAP ambassadors — composed of graduate students in student affairs — to conduct outreach to other students who don't have association awareness or involvement but want to be more engaged or are wanting to explore available career pathways. The thought force suggests connecting with NASPA to encourage GAP ambassadors to share additional information about the financial aid pathway through various avenues. These could include blogs, social media "takeovers," or video campaigns, among others. The GAP ambassadors also connect with TPE ambassadors once a month for professional development. This would provide an opportunity for NASFAA to connect with both sets of ambassadors to share more information about the financial aid profession, which can then be included in their own materials/campaigns for their programming.
- Participation in [NASPA Communities](#): The thought force recommends exploring how financial aid administrators could participate in NASPA Communities. The [Knowledge Communities](#) are networks which allow NASPA members to "explore key topics, professional functions, and personal identities alongside other student affairs educators." Specifically, related to Group 1, the thought force recommends incorporating materials related to the financial aid profession into the New Professionals and Graduate Students Knowledge Community.
- Creation of Financial Aid Student Groups: Another area of opportunity is the creation of a financial aid professionals student group that could gather at various annual conferences, including NASPA. The formation of such a group would allow current students to explore career pathways within financial aid, as well as the larger student affairs sector.

American College Personnel Association (ACPA). Similar to a partnership with NASPA, collaborating with ACPA would allow NASFAA to connect with various groups, due to the diverse membership that ACPA serves. ACPA's membership hovers around 6,000, with individuals ranging from undergraduate students through retired college presidents. Given their reach, a partnership with ACPA would allow for opportunities to increase awareness of the financial aid profession across both Groups 1 and 2. In partnership with ACPA, the thought force suggests the following to connect with Group 1:

- Participation in [Entity Groups](#): The thought force recommends exploring how financial aid administrators could participate in ACPA's [Entity Groups](#), which provide members with professional development, networking, and leadership opportunities. There are four categories of entity groups, including involvement by functional area and interests, personal identity, career level, and geographical location. Through involvement with these various entity groups, awareness of the financial aid profession can be enhanced. Possible options to explore include blog posts, video campaigns, and/or presentations with these groups.
- Graduate Student Connections: One of ACPA's largest membership groups is graduate students. The thought force recommends creation of materials/campaigns tailored to this audience — focusing not only on establishing awareness of the financial aid profession as a career pathway in general, but also highlighting the transferable skills and competencies that students are already developing through their graduate programs, assistantships, internships, etc. This could help students visualize themselves in a financial aid role by understanding the direct correlation between what they are doing/learning already and the work completed within our profession. Students may not feel like they have the agency to apply for financial aid roles without this clear connection.

National Student Employment Association (NSEA). This organization is a volunteer-run association that provides professional development for student employment professionals. NSEA spearheads an annual National Student Employment Week, which may provide avenues for involvement at the national or regional level to further engage student workers in the financial aid office.

Group 2:

NASPA—Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. When considering by what means a NASPA partnership would support Group 2 objectives, the thought force suggests exploring participation in NASPA's various professional channels and raising awareness of the financial aid profession for current student affairs professionals and other campus partners. Opportunities could include:

- Participation in [SA: Voices from the Field Podcast](#) and [Blog](#): NASPA's podcast and blog provide a direct way to reach members and raise awareness of the financial aid profession. The thought force proposes that NASFAA coordinate with NASPA to participate through guest speaker(s) and guest writer(s) through both channels. Potential topics may include personal stories and experiences related to career pathways, the work of a financial aid administrator, benefits of working in financial aid, etc.
- Participation in [Careers in Student Affairs Month: Careers in Student Affairs Month \(CSAM\)](#) is a month-long initiative that takes place each October, which NASPA explains is "...dedicated to the celebration of a career in student affairs, education and awareness in the profession, and engagement with professional associations and peers in the field." Within a virtual setting, various programming is provided, including a mixture of synchronous and asynchronous sessions, and a blend of student and professional participants. Event submissions have a priority deadline of September 15. The thought force recommends presenting a session/event during CSAM to enhance awareness of the financial aid profession and connect with students and current professionals interested in student affairs-related work.
- Participation in [NASPA Communities](#): The thought force recommends exploring how financial aid administrators could participate in NASPA Communities. [The Knowledge Communities](#) are networks which allow NASPA

members to “explore key topics, professional functions, and personal identities alongside other student affairs educators.” Currently, one of the communities is [Student Affairs Partnering with Academic Affairs](#); this could potentially be expanded more broadly as “Student Affairs Partnering with Other Partners,” which could include financial aid. There could even be a specific community created for “Student Affairs Partnering with Enrollment Management.” The thought force suggests collaborating with NASPA on the formation of such a community.

- **Faculty Programming:** NASPA’s annual conference includes programming geared toward faculty. The thought force suggests that NASFAA present a faculty-geared session to raise awareness of financial aid as a profession, which can then be shared with the students in their courses/programs or considered when working with students on job placement.

American College Personnel Association (ACPA). In addition to a connection to Group 1, a partnership with ACPA offers avenues for enhancing awareness of the financial aid profession among Group 2. Mid-level professionals comprise the largest membership group, along with several faculty and scholar-practitioners situated within ACPA’s network. Opportunities could include:

- **Participation in [Entity Groups](#):** The thought force recommends exploring how financial aid administrators could participate in ACPA’s [Entity Groups](#), which provide members with professional development, networking, and leadership opportunities. There are four categories of entity groups, including involvement by functional area and interests, personal identity, career level, and geographical location. Through involvement with these various entity groups, awareness of the financial aid profession can be enhanced. Possible options to explore may include blog posts, video campaigns, and/or presentations with these groups.
- **Publication with the [Journal of College Student Development](#):** The Journal of College Student Development is a premier scholarly journal that all ACPA members receive complimentary access to. Submitting an article for publication within the journal offers NASFAA an avenue to increase understanding of the financial aid profession for faculty, scholar-practitioners, and others interested in higher education related issues.
- **Creation of Faculty Materials:** The thought force recommends the creation and distribution of faculty resources through ACPA’s faculty network — particularly those who curate courses for higher education-related master’s programs. Options to consider include slide decks, short videos, or written material that faculty could incorporate into their course(s) to introduce careers in/pathways to the financial aid profession, more accurately relay the nature of the profession, and highlight transferable skills and competencies that would benefit someone interested in this work.
- **Strengthening NASFAA/ACPA Partnership:** ACPA collaborates with other associations through its [Education, Association, and Corporate Partnerships](#). The thought force recommends exploring how NASFAA could expand its partnership with ACPA. Some partnerships are more formal, with a documented mutually beneficial exchange between the two associations. An educational or programmatic-based partnership may be helpful to increase awareness of the financial aid profession, while also allowing ACPA to reach NASFAA’s members.

National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). The thought force identified NACE as a potential partner. When considering by what means a NACE partnership would support Group 2 objectives, the thought force suggests exploring participation in NACE’s various professional channels and raising awareness of the financial aid profession for current Career Center professionals. Opportunities could include:

- **Encouraging NASFAA member institutions to connect directly with their individual career centers** to raise awareness levels on the financial aid profession and current open positions at their own institution or within their geographic area.
- **Author an article for NACE’s journal** regarding best practices for career professionals to help make students aware of careers in financial aid offices.

- Attend NACE's annual conference to do a session on educating its membership of careers in financial aid offices.
- Submit relevant information to NACE's member newsletter. This could include research results, articles, or trending topics in the financial aid profession to share with the membership.
- Explore partnering with NACE's four regional associations to work more closely with the actual professionals in the career offices.

National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC). The thought force identified NACAC as a potential partner to review for Group 2, but recognizes admissions offices could have staff that may be interested in working in financial aid so they may be a potential partner for Group 1 as well. Opportunities could include:

- Explore ways to ensure NACAC's high school counseling members can help make students more aware of financial aid careers. This could include facilitating a session at NACAC's national conference to help high school counselors learn about careers in financial aid and that the financial aid office is a place where students can work while they attend college. NASFAA could develop a one-page document that helps students learn about the benefits of working for financial aid both while in college or as a lifetime career.
- Consider partnering to produce a webinar or presentation on careers in enrollment management overall that could be used as part of [National College Fairs](#), to spread awareness to multiple populations.
- Consider partnering with multiple higher education associations, including NACAC, to review the [Federal Reserve Bank Anchor Tool](#) and formally approach the Philadelphia Fed to look at doing a deeper dive into careers in higher education.
- Partner to develop a shared model for student employees across all of the offices that fall under enrollment management (admissions, financial aid, registrar, bursar) to give students exposure to the interconnectedness of all of these offices.
- Consider other joint marketing campaigns to advertise both financial aid and admissions careers together.

Broader Higher Education Association Suggestions. Across almost every association the thought force explored, there were two ideas that continually emerged:

Recommendation: Explore a way to have higher education association career centers collaborate and show job seekers positions from multiple office types. This could allow job seekers to explore positions across higher education by their geographic area, search for similar positions (e.g. counselor) across multiple office types to compare, and has the potential to expose individuals to offices they may not intuitively know to search for jobs within.

Recommendation: Bring together a working group of higher education associations that have identified competency areas for their profession, along with NACE which has existing [Career Readiness Competencies](#), to create an overall higher education competencies map that could highlight overlap among offices. Also consider examining these competencies by career level.

Specifically, the thought force reviewed:

- NACE [Career Readiness Competencies](#)
- ACPA/NASPA [Professional Competencies](#)
- AACRAO/NACAC [Core Competencies](#)
- NASFAA [Financial Aid Administrator Competencies](#)

In addition to the association-specific examples listed above, the thought force suggests creating awareness materials geared toward students or current job seekers that could be provided to these associations' membership as a resource when assisting students with career placement or job exploration. This could include:

- Creating a "Career Fair Toolkit" for financial aid professionals. This would allow state and regional financial aid associations to more easily attend any career awareness opportunities being hosted at NASPA, ACPA, or any other association at their regional and/or state level. It would also allow NASFAA the opportunity to participate in any career awareness opportunities hosted by ACPA or NASPA at the national level. The thought force feels this could include testimonials or "why" videos (why I work in financial aid, why I stay in financial aid, etc.).
- Updating NASFAA's [What Financial Aid Administrators Do](#) resource so it is more targeted at this audience, further explaining the profession.
- Updating the NASFAA Speaker and Mentor Professional Directory to include a designation for individuals who would be willing to speak on entering financial aid as a profession. NASFAA could also consider making this section of the directory public to allow partner organizations to recruit speakers to promote our profession.
- Exploring connections with student conduct professionals to further explore perceptions and stigmas surrounding the work within the profession. The work of student conduct and financial aid professionals can sometimes be misunderstood as being solely rules and regulations. The thought force suggests a collaborative campaign between these two groups of professionals to demystify the profession and relay the rewarding aspects of our work.
- Continue to consider opportunities to engage and partner with other relevant associations. Examples could include: guest speakers on other associations' podcasts, guest blogs, sessions at conferences, ways to get involved with their communities, as well as others. These avenues could include existing opportunities or new digital media campaigns identified by NASFAA and other associations.

Stakeholder partnerships: As part of its work, the thought force met with staff and leadership from many of the associations listed above to share their ideas for possible collaboration and gather feedback. All associations were receptive to partnerships and collaborative efforts in bringing awareness to the financial aid profession as a career and felt there would be space for efforts listed above. The thought force encourages NASFAA to explore ways to make these new collaborations mutually beneficial, to strengthen the buy-in from other associations.

Conclusion

The thought force hopes this work will inspire future efforts to raise awareness of the financial aid profession. The three key takeaways are as follows:

- Further explore how to establish a classification for the financial aid profession and/or higher education professions into the O*NET Resource Center, which is sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration, and developed by the National Center for O*NET.
- Focus on the creation and implementation of a higher education academic course on financial aid.
- Focus on the development of resources listed throughout this report, prioritizing the ones that would best benefit individual institutions in their recruitment of new financial aid professionals.

If you have questions or suggestions, please reach out to Margot Manning at manningm@nasfaa.org.

Appendix A: Career Awareness Materials for Further Development

The following items were identified throughout the report as resources or concepts that could be further developed by future task forces and NASFAA. Additional content details and suggestions for each item can be found in the report above.

1. Create a “Career Fair Toolkit” for financial aid professionals.
2. Recreating the following resources to be geared more towards students.
 - a. [Transparency on What Financial Aid Staff Does](#)
 - b. [Competency Model Infographic](#)
 - c. [What Financial Aid Administrators Do Infographic](#)
3. Pull together testimonials from financial aid administrators highlighting their professional experience.
4. Provide information on where to find financial aid job postings: NASFAA Career Center, Higher Ed Jobs, LinkedIn, Career Center job boards, etc.
5. Share common career paths of financial aid administrators within an office, and externally. Highlight transferable skills.
6. Create additional [What Financial Aid Administrators Do](#) one-pagers for various audiences.
7. Develop a list of sample internship opportunities that focus on specific projects within the financial aid office.
8. Develop a template for a financial aid rotational career program so student workers can learn various aspects of financial aid administration in various areas of a financial aid office.
9. Create a “Tips for Reclassification” document and publish a series of white papers that outline successful reclassification efforts among various sectors.
10. Write a publication with the [Journal of College Student Development](#).
11. Create materials for faculty members. Options to consider include slide decks, short videos, or written material that faculty could incorporate into their course(s) to introduce careers in/pathways to the financial aid profession, more accurately relay the nature of the profession, and highlight transferable skills and competencies that would benefit someone interested in this work.
12. Add messaging to NASFAA’s association description to include language regarding the importance of the work of Financial Aid Administrators.
13. Broaden NASFAA’s student membership option from [“Graduate Research Students”](#) to the more general “Students” for interested students at non-member schools.
14. Update the NASFAA Speaker and Mentor Professional Directory to include a designation for individuals who would be willing to speak on entering financial aid as a profession.
15. Participation in [The Placement Exchange](#): Presented by NASPA and ACUHO-I, The Placement Exchange (TPE) serves as a career hub for student affairs, assisting both candidates and employers through various events and resources.
16. Collaboration with NASPA’s [Graduate Associate Program \(GAP\)](#).
17. Foster active participation in the following opportunities:
 - a. ACPA’s [Entity Groups](#).
 - b. NASPA’s SA: [Voices from the Field Podcast](#) and [Blog](#).
 - c. NASPA’s [Careers in Student Affairs Month](#).
 - d. [NASPA Communities](#).

18. Present a faculty-gearred session at NASPA's annual conference that includes programming geared towards faculty.
19. Exploring Connections with Student Conduct Professionals to further explore perceptions and stigmas surrounding the work within the profession.

Appendix B: Results from NASFAA Online Surveys

Methodology

Rapid Response Network Survey: In January 2024 NASFAA’s Research Department administered a three-question survey to our Rapid Response Network. This group is composed of approximately 200 Financial Aid Administrators from all sectors of postsecondary education. The survey opened on January 22, 2024, and closed on January 26, 2024. There were 92 completed responses submitted, resulting in a 46% response rate.

NASFAA Membership Survey: In January 2024 NASFAA’s Research Department administered a survey to a sample of NASFAA’s membership. This sample consisted of 15,552 Financial Aid Administrators. The survey opened on January 22, 2024, and closed on January 26, 2024, one reminder email was sent on January 25, 2024. There were 1,832 responses submitted, 1,716 completed responses and 116 partial responses, resulting in a 12% response rate.

Rapid Response Network Survey Results

What is the highest degree you earned:

	High School Diploma or its equivalent	Some College	Associate’s degree	Bachelor’s degree	Master’s Degree	First Professional Degree (J.D., etc.)	Doctorate Degree (Ph.D., Ed.D., etc.)	None of the above	Other (please specify below.)	N
Upon entering the financial aid profession as a full-time employee.	1%	10%	5%	59%	25%	0%	0%	0%	0%	92
At the time of completing this survey.	0%	1%	0%	22%	67%	0%	9%	0%	1%	91

Other (please specify below.)

Graduate education beyond a BA but not degree

Have NASFAA credentials or certifications impacted your ability to advance in the profession?

Yes	44%
No	56%
N	81

Upon entering the financial aid profession as a full-time professional, what was your major and concentration (if applicable)?

Ninety individuals provided open-ended comments for this question. Their comments are synthesized below, responses may not sum to 100% as some individuals had multiple degrees or double majors prior to entering the profession full-time:

- 24 respondents had a business related major, either listing general business, business administration / management with a concentration in a specific area (most commonly accounting, finance, or economics), or listed a major that fell within business, such as finance, or economics. Three of these respondents indicated they had an MBA.
- Eleven respondents had a major related to education. Areas of education ranged from general education, secondary education, to higher education administration.
- Seven respondents had a major related to communications or journalism.
- Seven respondents had a major related to psychology.
- Seven respondents had a major related to political science.
- Remaining respondents had majors including broadcasting, classical studies, criminal justice, English, human resources, mathematics, Spanish, theater, health care administration, speech communications, anthropology, technology, family studies

NASFAA Membership Survey Results

RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

NASFAA Region

	Less than 3 years	4-6 years	7-10 years	11 or more years	N
MASFAA	42%	17%	11%	30%	459
WASFAA	32%	14%	15%	39%	402
SASFAA	37%	16%	13%	34%	342
EASFAA	36%	17%	12%	36%	269
RMASFAA	42%	18%	14%	27%	177
SWASFAA	39%	15%	14%	31%	181

NASFAA SECTOR

	Less than 3 years	4-6 years	7-10 years	11 or more years	N
Public 4-Yr	39%	17%	12%	32%	680
Community College	38%	16%	14%	31%	538
Nonprofit	39%	17%	12%	32%	471
For Profit	23%	8%	14%	55%	123
Graduate/Professional	32%	21%	21%	26%	19

SURVEY RESULTS

How long have you worked in a financial aid office as a full-time employee?

Less than 3 years	38%
4-6 years	16%
7-10 years	13%
11 or more years	33%
N	1,832

What were your pathways into the financial aid profession as a full-time employee? (Please check all that apply.)

	Overall Respondents	Less than 3 years	4-6 years	7-10 years	11 or more years
I was an undergraduate work-study/student worker in the financial aid office.	14%	10%	15%	15%	19%
I was a graduate student who worked in the financial aid office.	2%	1%	1%	1%	2%
I worked on a college campus and transferred into the financial aid office.	27%	29%	29%	21%	26%
I worked outside of higher education and changed jobs into the financial aid office.	28%	33%	28%	32%	21%
I worked in or with a job related to higher education, but I was not on a college campus, and then changed jobs to the financial aid office. (E.g. TRIO, College Access, High School Counselor, Lenders, etc.)	7%	9%	11%	7%	4%
I heard about working in the financial aid office from a friend or family member who worked in the field.	12%	11%	9%	11%	14%
I heard about working in the financial aid office from a career counseling center and/or news outlet.	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
I heard about working in the financial aid office during my masters or PhD program.	1%	2%	1%	2%	1%
A teacher or mentor recommended I explore financial aid as a career.	2%	2%	2%	3%	1%
I applied to work in the financial aid profession as my first job because I thought it sounded interesting.	6%	6%	6%	4%	6%
I began as a temporary worker who stayed in a permanent position when able.	7%	4%	5%	10%	11%
I wanted to work at my alma mater in any capacity.	6%	7%	7%	6%	4%
I was looking for a job of any type.	24%	25%	22%	27%	22%
Other (Please specify below)	4%	5%	3%	3%	3%
N	1,830	690	294	235	611

Other, open-ended text⁴: The most comment responses provided in the open-ended text were:

- The respondent applied to a different open position at the university, and the interviewer or HR representative recommended the apply for an open position in a financial aid office.
- The respondent worked in a different office, and financial aid responsibilities were added to their workload.
- The respondent wanted a job that provided tuition remission (for themselves or a dependent), in any capacity.
- The respondent was a K-12 teacher, who wanted to continue to work in education but no longer wanted to be in a classroom setting and/or wanted to move to postsecondary education.
- The respondent was a work-study student in a different office, found financial aid interesting based on their interactions, and applied for a full-time position upon graduation. Most common other offices were admissions, student affairs, and veteran's affairs.
- The respondent wanted a position that most closely aligned with their major/degree.
- Some respondents also indicated they were looking for a job of any type, but only in higher education.

How long do you anticipate staying in the financial aid profession?

	Overall Respondents	Less than 3 years	4-6 years	7-10 years	11 or more years
I have no intention of leaving this profession until I retire.	46%	32%	35%	38%	69%
I plan to change careers within the next year.	7%	6%	9%	9%	5%
It's likely I will change careers within the next several years.	14%	17%	17%	17%	6%
It's likely I will change careers within the next decade.	3%	5%	5%	4%	1%
I haven't decided.	31%	39%	33%	31%	20%
N	1,829	690	293	235	611

What do you find most rewarding and most challenging about your work in the financial aid profession? Is there anything that could change your mind about staying in the profession? (Limit: 1,000 characters)

Respondents left a total of 1,390 open-ended comments to the above question. Among those 510 (36%) were from respondents who indicated they worked in a financial aid office as a full-time employee for less than 3 years. Among all respondents who indicated they worked in a financial aid office as a full-time employee for less than 3 years (n=690) this is a 74% response rate for this individual question.

Rewarding: Overall respondents most often indicated working with, and helping students and their families was the most rewarding part of their job. The second most cited reason was related to the enjoyment of general problem solving.

Respondents who had worked in FA for less than 3 years sometimes cited more specific reasons around helping students, such as helping students borrow as little as possible, and a few referenced feeling it is rewarding to work with the larger financial aid community or a general desire to learn as much as possible.

⁴ Initially 9% of respondents selected "other" and left open-ended comments. During analysis, NASFAA's Research Department recoded open-ended comments that either applied to one of the existing answer choices and/or were comments further explaining answer choices already selected (but did not provide a different reason from answers selected.) This brought the final selection rate for "other" down to 4%.

Challenging: Overall respondents most often indicated high workloads, constantly changing federal and state regulations, low salary, and having difficult conversations with parents/students as the most challenging part of their job. Several also cited the challenge of trying to assist a student who has “no eligibility” as difficult. Respondents who worked in a financial aid office as a full-time employee for 11 or more years often cited burnout.

Respondents who had worked in FA for less than 3 years specifically cited the lack of upward mobility in their office or the profession in general, stressed the “very low” salaries as compared to other offices or industries, trying to stay informed on regulatory changes while also managing their large workload. These respondents also talked heavily about having difficult conversations with students and parents, citing this often as a challenge. It is noteworthy this group described this differently than respondents overall. Overall respondents seemed to cite this as a challenge more related to having the conversation, whereas this group of respondents often seemed to cite this challenge as being unable to help a student achieve a goal and their disappointment surrounding the outcome.

Appendix C: Results from NASFAA Student Focus Groups and Graduate Student Interviews

Methodology

Undergraduate Student Focus Groups: In March 2024 NASFAA's Research Department recruited undergraduate students to participate in focus groups. The students in these two focus groups were all from the same private, non-profit, 4-year institution located in the southeastern region of the country. The recruiting institution was asked specifically not to recruit students who have ever worked in the financial aid office, to eliminate bias of students with knowledge of the financial aid office and positions within. Two one-hour focus groups were conducted with a total of twelve participants. A financial incentive was provided to increase participation. One researcher attended each session to facilitate the conversation and take notes. Participants were guaranteed anonymity — no individuals or institutions have been named to protect their identities. NASFAA developed the protocols to collect information about their anticipated career fields after graduation and their opinions on their financial aid office. All participants received some form of financial aid and were federal work-study students. The results of these two focus groups are synthesized below.

Graduate Student One-On-One Interviews: In March 2024 NASFAA's Research Department recruited graduate students to participate in one-on-one interviews. The students in these interviews were all from the same public, 4-year institution located in the southeastern region of the country. The recruiting institution was asked specifically not to recruit students who have ever worked in the financial aid office, to eliminate bias of students with knowledge of the financial aid office and positions within and only to recruit students who were currently enrolled in a master's degree that concentrated in higher education administration or college student personnel. The interviews were conducted with a total of 6 participants. A financial incentive was provided to increase participation. One researcher attended each interview to facilitate the conversation and take notes. Participants were guaranteed anonymity — no individuals or institutions have been named to protect their identities. NASFAA developed the protocols to collect information about their anticipated career fields after graduation and their opinions on their financial aid office. The results of these interviews are synthesized below.

Please note: This work is not intended to provide a representative sample of all student opinions on careers after graduation or their financial aid offices, but are instead intended to provide initial feedback and encourage further research with this population.

Undergraduate Student Focus Groups:

There were twelve students who attended the two virtual focus groups. These students ranged from freshman (first-year) to seniors (fourth year), with majors including pre-law, political science, women's studies, pre-nursing, computer science, sociology and more. All student participants received some type of financial aid, and all were current federal work-study students. None of the students had ever worked in a financial aid office, but their current employment included: reading tutor, academic department specific positions, housing and residential life, and student affairs.

Career and salary aspirations upon graduation: Upon graduation many of the students either wanted to continue their education, specifically those in pre-law and pre-nursing programs, or obtain work in a field related to their major. Some specific career aspirations included real estate agent, neonatal nurse, lawyer, dermatologist, and data analyst. When asked to share what salary they hoped to receive upon graduating with their undergraduate degree, most

students indicated a salary range between \$60,000 - \$80,000. A few students indicated they would expect a minimum of a “six figure salary” and a few others indicated they did not have a specific number in mind, but would want to make enough money to feel college was worth the investment.

When asked if they had ever considered working full-time at a college or university the students overwhelmingly said no, that it had either not crossed their minds or they felt it was something they would not be interested in doing upon graduation. Some of the students expressed interest in continuing to be involved in their institution as an alumni or volunteer, but that a career was not something they would consider. A few students expressed they would be interested in exploring career options as an adjunct professor once they had established themselves in their own career.

Interactions of their financial aid office: When asked to share their thoughts on their interactions with the financial aid office on their campus, it was clear the students valued the feeling of a close relationship with their assigned advisor. Many students cited feeling financial aid was one of the most important parts of their college experience and having someone who will proactively communicate and follow-up with themselves and their families is important. Overall the students expressed a desire to have clear proactive communication, to work directly with an assigned advisor (instead of seeing someone different each time they interacted with the office), and to be told upfront who their assigned staff member was.

When asked what skills they felt someone who worked in a financial aid office would need most, students indicated:

- Professionalism
- Organization
- Clear communication
- Empathy
- Time management
- Patience

Graduate Student Focus Groups

There were six students who participated in the one-on-one interviews. They were all currently enrolled in a higher education administration or student affairs master’s program at public 4-year institutions and had never worked in the financial aid office in any capacity. All participants had received some type of financial aid during their time as an undergraduate and/or graduate and all had, at some point in their careers, worked on a college campus either as a student worker or full-time employee. While none had ever worked in a financial aid office, their employment areas included: housing and residential life, admissions, career services, and academic departments. A few participants had also interacted with the financial aid office in their professional capacities.

Career and salary aspirations upon graduation: Upon graduation most of the participants wanted to obtain a position at a college or university, in either a field that was closely related to the office they currently worked/interned with or at an office they felt had a similar mission (if they did not find a career in their first choice). Most participants expressed specifically wanting to work in a position that “directly interacted with students daily” and “helped” them in some way. When asked to share what salary they hoped to receive upon graduating with their master’s degree, most participants indicated a salary range between \$45,000 - \$70,000.

When asked if they went into their master's program feeling they knew what area or office of higher education they wanted to work in upon graduation or if they were unsure and refined their career aspirations during their studies, most participants felt it was a mix of both. Many expressed feeling they started their program knowing what type of work they wanted to do (event planning, working directly with students daily, etc.) but weren't quite sure what office that may be, and others expressed wanting to work in a specific office, but trying to broaden their options by completing internship/practicum requirements in different offices.

Master's program requirements: Five of the six participants confirmed their program does have an internship or practicum requirement. The participant who indicated their program does not note it is an accelerated master's degree and admitted students were required to have worked on a college campus prior to enrolling.

The structure for obtaining internship/practicum locations varied, with some programs having an existing list that students could choose from and some programs requiring students to obtain a site on their own. When asked if they felt completing their internship/practicum in the financial aid office was an available option most indicated they thought so, but did not really know any students who choose to do so. One student expressed at their institution that the financial aid office doesn't take internships/practicums due to confidentiality concerns.

Financial aid career awareness: When asked if the financial aid office comes up in conversation with classmates, program faculty, or advisors during career conversations all students expressed it did not. Most were unsure why they felt the office was left out of these conversations, but a few expressed that during introductory classes when students affairs offices were brought in as guest speakers the financial aid office did participate.

When asked if they had considered working in a financial aid office themselves all participants expressed they were not interested. Reasons varied, some felt they were "not good with money", others felt they did not want to work in a position where they had to have "hard conversations" daily, and some indicated they did not want the "responsibility" of making the decisions they felt were made by financial aid professionals.

When asked what types of positions they felt would be available in a financial aid office, most participants were able to describe a director or assistant director, front facing and administrative positions, counselors, and typically "someone who processes paperwork". A few students cited IT and/or scholarships as an additional position they felt would be in the office.

Interactions of their financial aid office: When asked to share their thoughts on their interactions with the financial aid office during their time as an undergraduate, current graduate student, or in their professional roles, responses were overall positive or neutral. Participants who had interactions with financial aid offices in a professional capacity had positive experiences and expressed appreciation for the work of their colleagues. A few students expressed frustration with the financial aid process, due to their own circumstances, but did not feel frustrated with the financial aid office itself. Some of the participants expressed they "did not receive financial aid as an undergraduate" as they only had scholarships, and at their master's program did not qualify for financial aid, so they had no interactions with the office.

Appendix D: Reclassification Tips

- Tips for reclassification:
 - Stay informed - pay attention to industry trends and how they compare to your institution
 - Advocate for your team - be able to articulate the work that goes into the job
 - Highlight the amount of discretion financial aid administrators have
 - Emphasize the importance of compliance and use Administrative Capability as justification for positions in financial aid
 - Be transparent with staff - understand and appreciate the work they are doing
 - Provide cost/benefit analysis - compare the costs of hiring and training new staff members with the cost of providing salary increases to existing staff
 - Take advantage of opportunities when they occur - for example, changes in leadership
 - Emphasize the importance of succession planning and structure
 - Be patient, but remain persistent - reclassification can take time
- Review the case studies highlighting institutions that successfully reclassified financial aid positions for increased salaries/benefits.
 - Case Study 1: During the coronavirus pandemic, many financial aid offices experienced a loss of staff. The executive director of financial aid at a large community college wanted to avoid this trend at her own institution. She reached out to senior leadership and human resources to warn them of the industry trend. They worked together to restructure the entire financial aid office to entice current staff members to stay. They also were able to create nine additional positions and filled all of the positions internally. This restructuring ignited the team, and created professional pathways that provided staff with a sense of accomplishment and purpose. The institution was able to retain all staff members.
 - Case Study 2: After starting a new leadership position at a new institution, the dean of financial aid and scholarships noticed that her staff members' job titles and description did not align with their actual roles and responsibilities. For example, a systems manager was performing director level tasks. She endeavored to have the positions reclassified to better align with the work being performed. Through writing, researching and advocating on behalf of her staff members at different levels of management at the institution, she was able to get through to the leadership team and have the position reclassified. She was diligent for six months as she worked through the process.
 - Case Study 3: The executive director of financial aid and scholarship services noticed a disparity between the more experienced, seasoned staff and newer, less experienced staff on his staff. The seasoned staff was satisfied with the status quo and less willing to adapt their processes to be more efficient. The newer staff members were more flexible and willing to find efficiencies. The director offered opportunities to all staff members to try to reinvigorate more senior staff members. He encouraged staff to join state, regional and national organizations. He offered promotions to staff members that were willing to invest in their own professional development and increase their work responsibilities. For example, a staff member earned his Master's Degree and was promoted to assistant director. He was able to rewrite job descriptions, create new titles, and give opportunities for different level staff to be promoted. This rewards structure ruffled some feathers, as it disrupted the status quo and changed the hierarchy of the office. Some senior staff members decided to retire or move on. However, the office overall is more productive and motivated.

- Cast Study 4: The executive director of financial aid at a large state university was having a hard time filling and retaining positions. After several failed searches, she began a conversation with senior leadership at her institution regarding salary. She encouraged human resources to conduct a salary assessment to compare her institution's rates with other similar institutions. They found that several staff members were underpaid and raises were provided. As a result, staff morale increased, and there was a reduction in failed searches going forward.

Appendix E: Three-Hour Class on Financial Aid

This class is intended to be incorporated into an existing course, potentially related to higher education finance.

Learning Goals

- Understand the history of student financial aid in the USA: Students will learn about the evolution of financial aid policies and programs from their inception to the present day.
- Comprehend the dual role of financial aid as a revenue source and an expense: Students will explore how institutions manage financial aid to balance the recruitment of students and financial sustainability.
- Grasp the differences between Institutional and Federal methodology in financial aid: Students will be able to distinguish between the two primary methods used to determine student aid eligibility and awarding.
- Apply the concept of Professional Judgment (PJ): Students will understand how financial aid officers use PJ to adjust a student's financial aid package based on special circumstances.
- Recognize the advising and counseling role of the financial aid officer: Students will learn about the responsibilities of financial aid officers in guiding students and families through the financial aid process.

Learning Outcomes

- Describe the key milestones in the history of student financial aid in the USA.
- Analyze the impact of financial aid on institutional finances, including the concepts of tuition discounting and the balance between aid as a revenue source and expense.
- Differentiate between Institutional and Federal methodology for calculating financial aid.
- Demonstrate understanding of Professional Judgment, including when and how it can be applied.
- Articulate the role of financial aid officers in advising students and families, including ethical considerations.

Lesson Plan

Part 1: Introduction to Student Financial Aid (30 minutes)

- Brief overview of the class objectives and key topics.
- Interactive discussion: What is student financial aid and why is it important?

Part 2: History of Student Financial Aid in the USA (30 minutes)

- Lecture: Key developments in financial aid from the post-World War II era to present.
- Group activity: Timeline creation where students place significant financial aid legislation and programs in chronological order.

Break (10 minutes)

Part 3: Financial Aid as Revenue and Expense (30 minutes)

- Presentation on the economics of financial aid, including tuition discounting.
- Case study analysis: Review a hypothetical institution's financial aid budget and discuss strategies to optimize its impact on recruitment and revenue.

Part 4: Institutional vs. Federal Methodology (30 minutes)

- Lecture: Differences between the Institutional Methodology (IM) and Federal Methodology (FM) in determining financial need and aid awards.
- Group discussion: Scenarios where IM and FM would result in significantly different aid packages.

Break (10 minutes)

Part 5: Professional Judgment and Advising Role (40 minutes)

- Presentation: Overview of Professional Judgment, including legal framework and ethical considerations.
- Role-play activity: Students act out scenarios between financial aid officers and families, focusing on advising and the application of Professional Judgment.

Part 6: Review and Wrap-up (20 minutes)

- Open Q&A session to clarify any doubts and reinforce key concepts.
- Brief review of the day's lessons and how they apply to higher education administration.
- Homework assignment: Prepare a short essay on how financial aid strategies can impact student diversity and access to higher education.

Appendix F: 15-Week Semester Course

AI Generated learning goals and outcomes, and course syllabus.

Working Title: Foundations of the Financial Aid Profession in the United States

The following learning goals and outcomes are designed to guide students through their journey in the “Foundations of the Financial Aid Profession in the United States” course, ensuring they gain a deep understanding of financial aid’s pivotal role within the higher education landscape. Upon completing this course, students will be familiar with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage and strategize financial aid operations within U.S. colleges and universities.

Learning Goals:

1. Comprehensive Understanding of Financial Aid: Students will learn the history, types, and administration of financial aid in the U.S. higher education system, understanding its critical role in promoting educational access and success. As part of this subject, students will be able to expand upon the connection between financial aid offices and other offices and units within the academic structure, including Admissions, Student Accounts, Fiscal Offices, Public Safety, Academic Offices, Housing, etc.
2. Financial Management and Strategy: Participants will gain insights into the financial dynamics of managing financial aid, including budgeting, forecasting, and the strategic use of financial aid as both a revenue source and an expense line.
3. Regulatory Compliance and Ethics: The course will cover the regulatory landscape governing financial aid, emphasizing the importance of compliance and ethical management practices. Students will be able to articulate ethical practices in financial aid administration including equity within packaging, ethical practices for professional judgment review, and professional ethics overall.
4. Analytical Skills in Financial Aid Administration: Students will develop analytical skills to project, manage, and evaluate financial aid funds and strategies effectively, using data-driven decision-making processes.
5. Communication and Counseling: The curriculum will enhance students’ abilities to communicate effectively with various stakeholders and provide insightful counseling to students and families about financial aid options and strategies. Students will be able to articulate the social justice basis of financial aid, and will understand the impacts of socioeconomic status and other forms of diversity on the student experience with financial aid.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Articulate the Role and Impact of Financial Aid: Describe the history, policies, and types of financial aid in U.S. higher education and explain its impact on student access, equity, and institutional success. Explain the relationship between the financial aid office and many other offices and parts of the academic ecosystem, and understand the impact of changes in any office (including financial aid) on the other offices or function.

2. **Manage Financial Aid with Fiscal Responsibility:** Demonstrate the ability to manage a financial aid office's budget, including accurately projecting financial aid expenses and revenue contributions, to support institutional financial health and sustainability.
3. **Navigate Compliance and Ethical Challenges:** Identify and apply relevant federal and state regulations in financial aid administration, addressing ethical considerations with integrity and professionalism.
4. **Utilize Analytics in Financial Aid Strategy:** Employ analytical tools and methodologies to analyze financial aid data, forecast trends, and develop strategic plans that align with institutional goals and student needs.
5. **Communicate and Counsel Effectively:** Display enhanced communication skills for engaging with students, families, and institutional stakeholders, providing clear, compassionate, and comprehensive financial aid counseling.
6. **Develop and Implement Financial Aid Strategies:** Formulate and execute strategic financial aid plans that balance the goals of enrollment management, student success, and financial sustainability, incorporating insights from financial aid analytics and trend analysis.

Through achieving these learning goals and outcomes, graduates of this course will be well-prepared to contribute to the advancement and equity of higher education through skilled and ethical financial aid administration.

Course Syllabus

Course Description:

This course provides an in-depth look at the dynamics of financial aid administration within higher education institutions. It covers the history, policies, and practices of financial aid programs, including federal, state, and institutional aid. Students will gain practical skills in financial aid management, counseling, and compliance with an emphasis on ethical practices and enhancing access to higher education.

Course Objectives:

- Understand the history and purpose of financial aid in higher education in the United States.
- Familiarize yourself with federal, state, and institutional financial aid programs.
- Develop skills in financial aid counseling, application processing, and problem-solving.
- Learn to navigate and apply United States financial aid laws, regulations, and ethical guidelines.
- Enhance communication and interpersonal skills to support students and families.
- Understand financial aid is revenue and expense related.

Week 1: Introduction to Financial Aid

- Topic: Overview of Financial Aid Systems and History in the United States
- Assignment: Write a reflection on the role of financial aid in higher education.
- Reading: Chapter 1 of "The Student Aid Game" by Michael S. McPherson and Morton Owen Schapiro. (Sandy Baum's updated Financial Aid Primer may be a good resource)

Week 2: Types and Purpose of Financial Aid (Financial Aid as it related to Enrollment Management)

- Topic: Federal, State, and Institutional Aid Programs (incorporate cost center/analytic aspects)
- Assignment: Compare and contrast different types of financial aid.
- Reading: NASFAA's "Student Aid Reference Desk" sections on federal, state, and institutional aid. (NASFAA's - Overview of Financial Aid Programs SSG, College Board's Trends in FA, and Sallie Mae may be a good resource here)

Week 3: The Application Process

- Topic: Navigating the FAFSA and CSS Profile
- Assignment: Complete a mock FAFSA application. (Assignments from the NASFAA-U SSG)
- Reading: Selected sections from the FAFSA Guide and College Board's CSS Profile instructions. College Board Need Analysis document - John Monroe.

Week 4: Needs Analysis

- Topic: Understanding the SAI, Cost of Attendance, and Financial Need
- Assignment: Calculate a mock student's financial need.
- Reading: NASFAA's "EFC Calculation Formula Guide." NASFAA COA Monograph. Snippets from folks filling out the FAFSA.

Week 5: Awarding Aid

- Topic: Packaging and Notification
- Assignment: Develop a financial aid award package based on a case study.
- Reading: Chapter from "Paying for the Party: How College Maintains Inequality" by Elizabeth Armstrong and Laura Hamilton focusing on financial aid's impact. (Budgeting for the institution and not just the FAO itself.)

Week 6: Loans

- Topic: Federal Student Loans Overview (and alternative loans, higher ed lending in general. Different payment vehicles. Payment plans. ISAs.)
- Assignment: Analyze loan repayment options for different scenarios.
- Reading: Sections from Federal Student Aid's "Direct Loan Handbook."

Week 7: Grants and Scholarships

- Topic: Overview and Best Practices
- Assignment: Design a scholarship program for your institution.
- Reading: "The Guide to Scholarships, Grants, and Fellowships for Students."

Week 8: Work-Study and Employment

- Topic: Federal Work-Study Program and Institutional Employment
- Assignment: Evaluate the benefits and challenges of work-study programs.
- Reading: Articles from NASFAA on work-study program effectiveness.

Week 9: Counseling and Advising

- Topic: Best Practices in Financial Aid Counseling
- Assignment: Conduct a mock counseling session.
- Reading: "The Financial Aid Handbook: Getting the Education You Want for the Price You Can Afford" by Carol Stack and Ruth Vedvik.

Week 10: Regulatory Compliance

- Topic: Understanding Federal and State Regulations (Working on how some bills have come about? Maybe in the history area? Talking about Reauth.)
- Assignment: Review a compliance case study and identify violations.
- Reading: Selected readings from "The Handbook of Federal Higher Education Law."

Week 11: Ethics and Professional Practice

- Topic: Ethical Issues in Financial Aid (PJ, SAP, Special Circumstances, Ind Student, Implicit bias, etc.)
- Assignment: Write an essay on ethical dilemmas in financial aid.
- Reading: NASFAA's "Statement of Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct."

Week 12: Technology in Financial Aid

- Topic: Utilizing Technology for Efficiency and Compliance
- Assignment: Explore a financial aid management system.
- Reading: Articles on the impact of technology in financial aid administration.

Week 13: Special Populations

- Topic: Serving Non-Traditional, Low-Income, and Minority Students (Formerly incarcerated students, prisoner education.)
- Assignment: Develop a plan to improve access for a special population.
- Reading: Research articles on financial aid's impact on access and diversity.

Week 14: Program Review and Evaluation

- Topic: Assessing Financial Aid Office Effectiveness (Audit, maybe board evaluation of FA programs, and how to assess them?)
- Assignment: Conduct a mock program review of a financial aid office.
- Reading: Best practices in financial aid program evaluation. (Opportunity to bring in compliance requirements and the penalties associated, case studies from previous schools who've had fines and findings.)

Week 15: Capstone Projects and Presentations

- Topic: Comprehensive
- Possible ideas: Financial literacy

Financial Aid Administration Project

- Assignment: Present a comprehensive plan for a financial aid office, incorporating elements from the entire course.
- Reading: Review all course materials and readings.

Texts and Resources:

- National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA) resources and publications.
- Federal Student Aid publications and guides.
- Selected academic and professional articles on financial aid administration.

Grading and Evaluation:

- Assignments: 40%
- Reflection Papers/Essays: 30%
- Capstone Project and Presentation: 20%
- Participation and Discussion: 10%

Prerequisites:

Enrollment in a Masters of Higher Education program or instructor's permission.

This syllabus is a guideline and may be updated as the course progresses based on emerging topics and student interests.