# DEGREE COMPLETION & UNIT APPLICABILITY

## FEBRUARY 11, 2016

Revised February 29, 2016

# DEGREE COMPLETION & UNIT APPLICABILITY

2016

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## OBJECTIVES

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The financial aid offices in Los Rios receive an estimated 125,000 applications for federal financial aid each year.   Many of these applicants, however, may never become students in Los Rios, or may not have the financial need, or are otherwise not eligible, to receive financial aid.  Of the 125,000 applications received, approximately 24,000 will receive Title IV Federal Student Aid from a Los Rios college.  While almost all of these students are eligible for the Board of Governors Fee Waiver (BOGFW).

Below is a chart that identifies the number of Title IV Financial Aid recipients in the Los Rios colleges.

| COLLEGE | TITLE IV FA RECIPIENTS |
|---|---|
| American River College | 9,898 |
| Cosumnes River College | 4,559 |
| Folsom Lake College | 2,036 |
| Sacramento City College | 7,427 |
| **District Total** | **23,920** |

*Table 1: Unduplicated FA Students 2014-2015*

While there is an exhaustive body of regulations that govern financial aid eligibility, administration and operations, of particular importance at this time is a long-standing requirement that a college cannot award a student aid for classes that do not count toward his/her degree or certificate. Specifically, the Student Financial Handbook clarifies 34 CFR 668.2 and states "you cannot award the student aid for classes that do not count toward his degree, certificate, or other recognized credential."

The colleges have long requested that system functionality be reviewed to determine what is required to ensure that financial aid is only funding degree applicable units.  The financial risks associated with funding courses that are not degree applicable could mean sanctions for the colleges including repayment and possible loss of the college's ability to administer Title IV aid.

As such, members of the PeopleSoft Financial Aid Liaison Team discussed system functionality and possible solutions during their meetings in May 2015 through September 2015.  Some of their objectives include:

- Provide timely information to students about what courses were applicable to the student's program of study and therefore eligible for Title IV aid;

- Eliminate the requirement for a student to repay aid for classes that were not required but the student inadvertently received aid;

- Allow students the choice to take courses that were not applicable to their program of study which would give students the flexibility to take any course offered at any of the colleges whether or not they may be funded by financial aid.

- Provide timely information to students so they can make informed decisions about current and future aid eligibility such as Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP), loss of loan subsidies, Pell Grant Usage limits;

- Provide a system where students could receive the aid for eligible courses without manual intervention when a student was also enrolled in courses that were not eligible for aid. The current process requires significant manual processing that delays aid to students who are enrolled in both courses that are applicable and are not applicable to the students program of study.

- Provide greater automation for identifying courses that were not applicable to the students program of study and properly account for remedial, ESL and repeat coursework.

- Provide a system that would let college staff override ineligibility as appropriate.

- Automatically adjust the student's aid to the appropriate amount based on course applicability.

- Automatically stop funding a student's program once it was determined to be completed.

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## PROGRAM EVALUATION AND TIMELINE TO DATE

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| | |
|---|---|
| Prior to June 2014 | The decision to implement Peoplesoft FA was made in part to meet this requirement. Trying to build interfaces between Powerfaids and Peoplesoft was inefficient. The decision to implement Peoplesoft FA dates back to our earliest discussions to implement PS financial aid. |
| June of 2014 | The college VPSS, FA Administrators, FA Supervisors, IT and Deputy Chancellor Lorimer, AVC Rosario, and the Director of Financial Aid Systems met to discuss the need to make funding appropriate programs and courses a priority in the District. |
| May 26, 2015 | IT discusses and provides recommendations to the PeopleSoft Liaison Team on how to approach the objectives. Degree Audit functionality as a tool for identifying course applicability first considered. |
| Sept. 2015 | Colleges support a two phase approach to meeting the above objectives.<br><br>Phase I: Using Degree Audit, the colleges would be provided a report that identified applicable course units based on program requirements and course applicability rules for repeat, remedial and ESL. Colleges would take the data from the report and manually adjust the FA units at the course level that would in turn |

adjust the enrollment status to the correct value and correct the amount of aid to be disbursed to students. Colleges would send individual notices to each student informing them of the change in eligibility. The identification of units was provided by a district developed report, but all adjustments and communications would be done manually.

Phase 2: Using the data from the report developed in Phase 1, the district would develop an automated process to adjust the FA units at the course level that would result in a change in enrollment status, and automatically send the student a communication.

Based on the go live date of April 1 proposed by the PeopleSoft Liaison Team, IT committed to having phase I done by the go-live date, but would make every attempt to have Phase 2 in production by the first disbursement date in August of 2016. The college voiced their need to have phase 2 in production.

October 2015   High Point Technologies found to be an affordable system that met project requirements. Functionality as a "bolt-on" was reviewed for compatibility with our current system and deemed acceptable. Product costs received by District on October 26. it came down to build it ourselves, or purchase High Point, and that there was no real "decision on the purchase" in terms of selecting from different vendors or products.

November 10   Authorization to purchase provided by Vice Chancellor of Finance and Administration.

## TOTAL FIRST-YEAR FEES

| If LRCCD selects the 1-year maintenance term option<br>• Product license<br>• Installation<br>• Implementation<br>• Maintenance/Support for 1 year | • Financial Aid Course Audit<br>• Message Center<br>• Financial Aid Automation<br>• Financial Aid Services | $ 434,000 |
|---|---|---|

November 17   Colleges provided notice that they would bear the cost-of the High Point modifications. Colleges shared concerns about the cost of the product and how it would be implemented. The colleges requested a demo of the product.

November 18/
December 4   Vice Chancellor Matista meets with college VPAs to discuss and agree to purchase the High Point product.

December 4   Colleges provide BFAP budget strings for the purchase of ongoing maintenance. Colleges express their concern about not having the opportunity to demo the product to their campus constituents.

February 8   HighPoint demo to 55 district and college stakeholders representing a broad range of operational units including Business Services, Counseling, Enrollment Services, Financial Aid, and Instruction.

Colleges were requested to pay 50% of the maintenance and support fees for 2016-2017 award year; District Office would pay the product license fee, installation, and implementation. The colleges will be requested to pay the annual maintenance and support fees for the product. Based on prior year Pell percentages, the cost share by college is:

Identified as an area of critical need to address federal compliance needs on behalf of the colleges/District, the cost of the initial implementation and installation ($339K) will be funded by the District Office. College BFAP programs funds will cover the ongoing costs for annual maintenance ($95K). It is noted that as the District transitions from PowerFaids, the BFAP programs will see savings in this line item as that maintenance cost ($135K) goes away. Due to BFAP budget requirements, the maintenance cost for Highpoint must be in place from day one to maintain that amount in BFAP expenditures in future years to avert supplanting.

The colleges have not been requested to pay the annual maintenance and support fees for future years. The colleges will fund ongoing annual maintenance fees.
The chart below describes the initial cost to the colleges for the development period of January –June 2016. The costs thereafter will be $95K.

| College Share | | |
|---|---|---|
| | Total | Share |
| ARC | 19,950 | 0.42 |
| CRC | 8,550 | 0.18 |
| FLC | 3,800 | 0.08 |
| SCC | 15,200 | 0.32 |
| Total | $47,500 | |

In a meeting with the VPAs and the VC Matista it was determined that funding the project using BFAP funds in the initial year would allow for continued funding in the future years without supplanting funds. VPAS were informed of this potential purchase and that the recommendation on how to pay for it was that the district fund the one-time (339K) as part of the Peoplesoft implementation and that the college BFAP programs would fund the annual cost

**PROPOSED IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE**

Key to the success of the project is a timeline that ensures that: 1) data validation occurs; 2) impacted departments are provided the time and opportunity to define workflow and how to work with students; and 3) students receive timely and accurate communications prior to activation.
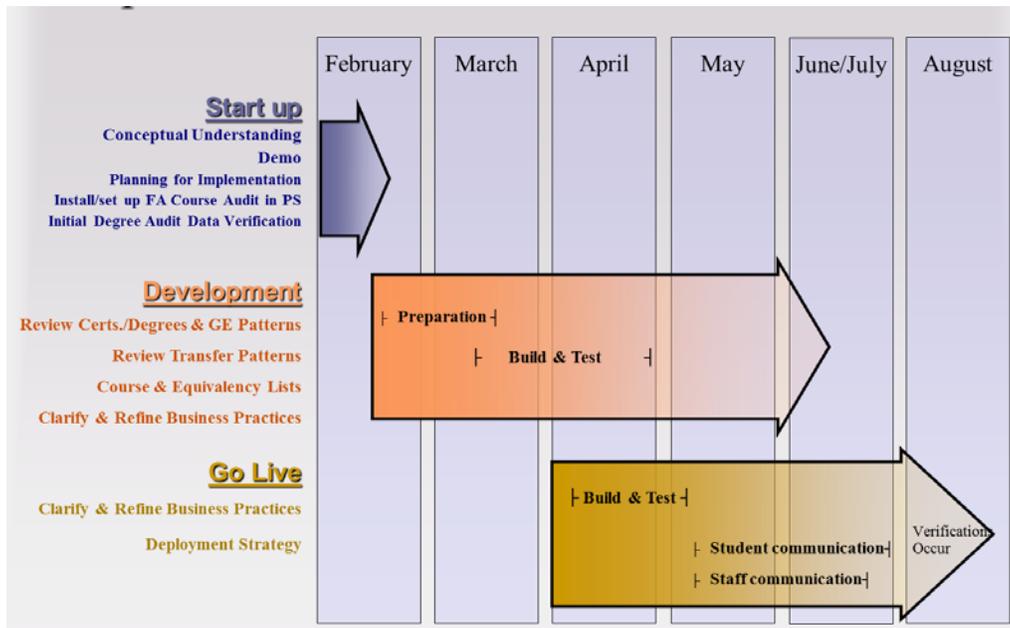
Validation Goals:

1. Degree Audit Course set-up is current and verified.

2. FA Remedial Rules and Repeat Rules verified.

3. Additional Exception Rules (courses) verified.

Validation Outcomes:

1. Degree Audit update process strengthened.

2. Confidence in FA Course Audit data.

3. Timely Notification to student of non-degree applicable/fundable courses.



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**ISSUES RAISED**

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1. Los Rios may be interpreting the regulations too stringently.

2. This process does not afford students flexibility to explore career options.

3. Prerequisite courses are only eligible for fee waivers and loans but not grants.

4. Degree Audit completeness.

5. Students should be able to be paid for courses they need at another institution that is not in any of our articulation agreements.

6. The counseling office may be inundated with students changing classes and students may not be able to get into the courses they need to receive federal aid.

7. Some courses are important for students to take but are not part of the program.

8. The purchase was not vetted.

9. Does not account for courses listed on outside transcripts.

10. Uncertainty on impact to enrollment when students are informed they will not receive aid for all their courses.

11. Transfer credit – we do not post equivalencies or GE to PeopleSoft, only units completed. This gives only a partial picture of the student's history. Students will not be treated equitably under this system.

12. Transfer credit for Math and English will be directed to Degree Audit if the transfer rule has the same course id from the external course as the one in Degree Audit.

13. GE (AA/AS and ADT) courses need to be evaluated by following the other school GE pattern.

14. Do not evaluate external transcripts on a course by course basis (we will start with English and math), rather only summary units.

15. Catalog Rights: transferring from another college; returning from another college; exit catalog right; split catalog rights.

16. D grade considered passing according to FA; implications for repeat rule processing.

17. Course substitution – DA has this function; currently not using it, we can use it and enter course subs, as they come in. Only good for courses inside the district.

18. Ed goal is transfer no degree – articulation agreements with four year schools are not in our degree audit programs. How will it work for these students?

19. Limiting students to one primary program rather than more than one degree and transfer to institutions with a double major.

20. Course directives – degree audit will apply the first class taken to the first area where it can be used. This is often not the intention of the student. Classes that can be used in multiple areas could be used in the wrong area. Students will get a message that a class is not FA eligible, which could be incorrect.

21. Surprised evaluators/A&R and counseling were just recently brought into the discussion.

22. Almost every financial aid student will need an override, which will impact counseling, A&R and financial aid dramatically.

23. Given that nearly 7,000 of FLC students (roughly 80%) receive some sort of financial aid (this includes BOGW), we have a major concern the back log of students that will need to see a counselor to get their ed plans "validated" so an override can be done with financial aid.

24. Seems like the program is designed for four year colleges, where you have terminal majors and a set curriculum for a limited number of programs (not a community college, where 70% of our students are trying to transfer from here)

25. The prep for the same major differs from one college to the next (including two and four year colleges), so EVERY student has a unique ed plan based on their major

26. requirements, transfer target schools, varying levels of remediation, electives, etc.

27. Degree audit does not capture transfer majors, and in fact, when a student selects a program in their Los Rios application (including supplemental applications), they can ONLY choose from programs that each college offers (AA,AS, ADT's, certificates), which often times, fails to accurately reflect the " true" program of study while taking required preparatory classes in Los Rios (engineering is a prime example of this).

28. The report references degree audit being used as "the" tool to inform the course applicability as early as May 2015, but I looked back in my PeopleSoft liaison team notes (back to May 2015) and could find nothing about it. The majority of the report-outs only said that PS financial aid was on schedule.

29. This will definitely make it even more important that Instruction ensures the catalog is accurate and updates are provided to the evaluator/degree auditor in a timely manner. Our evaluator will most likely be under pressure to complete the catalog analysis and degree audit data input into PeopleSoft in much faster timeline.

30. On page 3, Sept. 2015 – Phase I, it says that using degree audit, the colleges would be provided a report that identifies applicable course units based on program requirements and course applicability rules for repeat, remedial and ESL.  The fact is that <u>degree audit was built to exclude remedial coursework</u> because in determining a student's progress towards a degree/certificate (which is the original intent of degree audit), it is based on degree applicable coursework (units complete, GPA, residency).

31. On page 5, under validation goals, it says that one of the goals is that degree audit set-up is current and verified……..and that happens in February.  February – as in the month we're in.  The priority right now is evaluation of mandated ADT petitions – which will continue through March 15.  After March 15, the next focus would be working to address set-up issues in degree audit.

32. There are degree programs that are too complicated to set up in degree audit and they would need to be evaluated manually (at FLC – Dance Studies, for example).

33. Much of what is being proposed involves "overrides" and manual intervention, you're almost looking at a case management model for all financial aid students………similar to EOPS and even veterans who require the full VA ed plan.

34. Will students know if the courses they pick are FA eligible at the time of registration? For instance, upon clicking the class they would like to take, will/can something be noted there so that the student will know immediately?

35. Undecided Major—according to Feds this is ok, we should allow exploration for a few semesters, especially considering SSSP allows undecided for up to 3 semester. A "program of study" as defined by DOE is an eligible educational goal.

36. What is the District overall goal, isn't it to help students, not put up roadblocks for them as they try to finance their educational?

37. Can Research Office provide us with the # of students who will have an impact on this? This will negatively impact enrollment. Is District willing to take that on at this time, a significant decrease especially during a time where we are struggling to increase our enrollment numbers?

38. After this goes into effect, what is the District's plan to bring enrollment back up?

39. If it is estimated that 25% of our population is on FA, can the District afford to lose up to 25% of the students?

40. How accurate is the Degree Audit?

41. Can we Go Live w/out the Course Applicability piece? Hold off on course applicability an additional year to test.

42. What happens if students changed their majors in the middle of the semester after we have funded them?  Will we see if the changes occurred?
43. What other colleges are using this product?
44. Have we spoken directly with DOE regarding these changes we want to implement?
45. While we could be out of compliance for paying for courses that a student may not need, at the same time, we may be out of compliance for not paying for a courses a student needs especially if we are reading regs to stringently.
46. Telling a student once they have registered that a class isn't eligible for funding is too late, at times it will be impossible for them to add another course
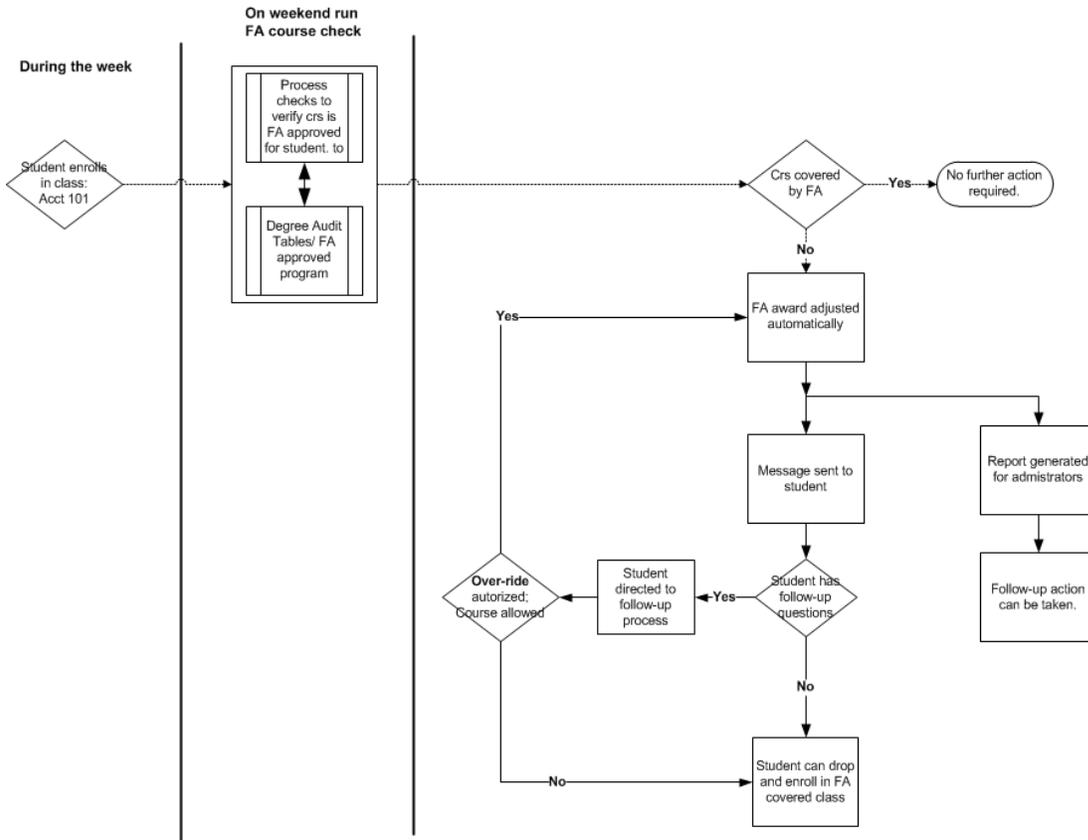
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### NEXT STEPS

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Areas to develop:

1. Expand PeopleSoft FA Liaison Team and Campus Implementation Team (CIT)

   membership to include faculty appointments and impacted operational units.

2. Expand meeting schedule to address adjustments to business processes.

3. Continue Set up/Validation.

4. Develop communications to students and college community.

5. Assess/adjust workflow and prepare for workload demands required for implementation.

6. Identify/track new and emerging issues from business units.

## Financial Aid Course Audit Verification Process (draft)

**On weekend run FA course check**

**During the week**

Student enrolls in class: Acct 101

Process checks to verify crs is FA approved for student. to

Degree Audit Tables/ FA approved program

Crs covered by FA

Yes — No further action required.

No

FA award adjusted automatically

Yes

Message sent to student

Report generated for admistrators

Over-ride autorized; Course allowed

Student directed to follow-up process

Yes

Student has follow-up questions

Follow-up action can be taken.

No

No

Student can drop and enroll in FA covered class

The structure of the PS FA Implementation project is that each college will establish its own College Implementation Team to review issues that are raised from college student, staff, faculty and administrators and to provide the colleges with the information that is being shared at the District Technology and Liaison Team meetings.

### PS FA TECHNOLOGY TEAM

This committee consists of members appointed by the college, from each college, that has a greater understanding of the use of technology in the Financial Aid Office, an IT supervisor, IT analyst, Accounting Staff, and the Director of Financial Aid Systems. The purpose of this committee is to assist in the technical aspects of implementing PeopleSoft Financial Aid. Important to note, this committee does not make changes in policy or campus process, but clarifies the need for certain changes as it impacts the technical implementation of PeopleSoft. Identified changes to policy or practice discovered by this committee will be forward to the PS Financial Aid Liaison committee for consideration. Chair: Cindy Velez, IT Supervisor.

### PS FINANCIAL AID LIAISON TEAM

This committee consists of members from various departments on campus and at the District Office. Members from the campus are appointed by the campus VPSS or designee.
The purpose of this committee is to form recommendations on policy or process changes and forward these recommendations to the VPSS Council for adoption. The committee will be forwarded issues that need to have action to allow for continued PS financial aid implementation and the alignment of policy and processes throughout the District. Co-chairs: Christine Hernandez (SCC) and Chris Thomas (CRC).

### PROJECT LEADERSHIP TEAM (PLT):

This team will receive recommendations from the PS FA Implementation Liaison Team and submit recommendations to the VPSS Council for adoption. This committee meets via conference call after the Liaison Committee meeting.

### DW FINANCIAL AID ADVISORY COMMITTEE:

The purpose of this committee is to discuss agenda items and recommend appropriate action, resources, policy changes, or direction. The agenda is developed by changes in Federal, state, or institutional policies that impact financial aid, college and or district personnel submission of agenda items, changes in technology that may impact process or a request for enhancement in the use of technology. Chair: Roy Beckhorn, Director of Financial Aid Systems.

### CAMPUS IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS (CIT)

These locally determined teams ensure that each college has a process for sharing information at the campus. The purpose of the CIT is to receive input from all constituents on campus and provide feedback on the progress and conversations that are taken place in the other implementation committees.

College Implementation Team (CIT) members:

| ARC:<br>Judy Mays<br>Jeff Stephenson<br>Robin Neal<br>Dawn Siracusa<br>Chad Funk<br>Kolleen Ostgaard | CRC:<br>Richard Andrews<br>Tiffany Clark<br>Ian Low<br>Selena Martinez<br>Shelly Massi<br>Yolanda Garcia<br>Phuong Le<br>Aksone Lusanaxay<br>Teresa Aldredge<br>Shannon Dickson |
|---|---|
| SCC:<br>Christine Hernandez<br>Kim Goff<br>Elaine Ader<br>Rukiya Bates<br>Robert Heidt<br>Daniel Kwong<br>Marilyn Keefe Perry | FLC:<br>Bernard Gibson<br>Ali Padash<br>Christine Wurzer<br>Dave Hill<br>Jim Cosentino<br>Joany Harman |
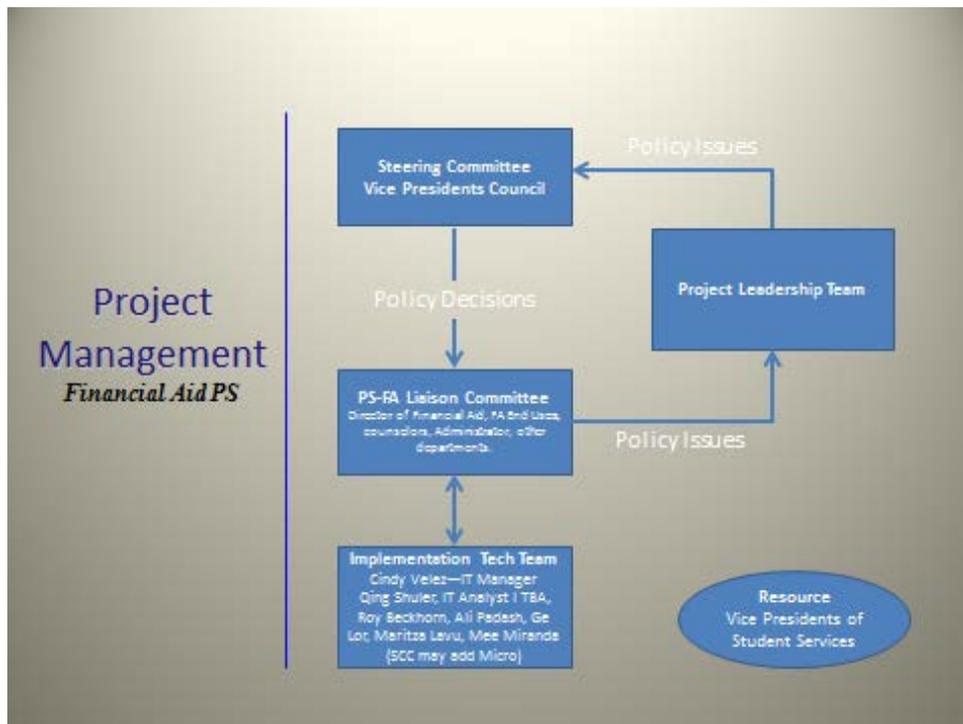
**PowerFAIDs mailing**

**Target Group:** All Financial Aid students currently enrolled to understand the importance of degree-applicability

**Frequency:** Two times a year approx. prior to registration

**Subject:** Are your courses degree-applicable?

**Content:**

# Los Rios

Community College District

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## Are your courses degree-applicable?

Dear Student,

The college would like to remind you that registration for the Summer and Fall semester will be starting in April. To prepare here are some helpful tips and reminders to keep you on track.

*Are your courses degree-applicable?*
Now is a good time to review what courses you need to complete your program of study at your college. Remember, federal financial aid can only be used to cover the cost of courses that are applicable to your current program of study. If you are enrolled in courses outside of your program of study-- they are not required-- you will receive a notice indicating which courses are not eligible to receive financial aid.

*Have you met with a counselor recently?*
The online course catalog is a great source of information and can help assist you in selecting the correct courses to enroll in that are applicable to your program of study. We also encourage you to make an appointment with a counselor to discuss your goals and the appropriate courses for you to take. Typically, student's wait times to see a counselor are less during non-peak times; making an appointment with a counselor now will eliminate the longer wait time as we get closer to the start of registration. To make an appointment, please contact your counseling department. Click here or go to this link: http://www.losrios.edu/cgi-bin/lrc_cmnt.cgi

*Have you printed your degree audit report?*
As you await your appointment, be sure to go to your eServices account and print a copy of your Degree Audit report. Your degree audit is a computer based assessment showing the progress you are making toward meeting degree requirements. This tool will help you understand the courses required for your degree and to help plan course selection for each term for your major and general education requirements. The report will also show you completed courses and courses in progress.

*And lastly, don't forget to renew your BOG Fee Waiver.*
To have your fees waived, you must reapply every year for the BOG Fee Waiver. Once approved, the fee waiver is good for Summer, Fall, and Spring semesters. The fee waiver expires at the end of the Spring semester each year.

Good luck as you prepare for the upcoming terms.

The Los Rios Community Colleges
American River    Cosumnes River    Folsom Lake    Sacramento City

Do not reply to this e-mail. It is for sending notices only