



**New Classified Hiring/Position Justification**

**Hiring Division/Department:** Enrollment Services/Financial Aid      **Position Title:** Financial Aid Assistant

**Classification**

Position type:    Permanent x      Full Time 100      # of months 12  
                         Part Time \_\_\_\_\_      % of Full Time \_\_\_\_\_      # of months \_\_\_\_\_

Position:      General Funds \_\_\_\_\_  
Allocation:    External Funds\* \_\_\_\_\_      Expiration Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Budget Information**

Grade      22A      Step      1      Annual Salary      \$ 56,064 + ben.

**Justification**

Please respond to the following questions in electronic format to the appropriate Dean, Manager or Vice President. Additional information may be provided as relevant for position justification.

1. Describe the specific needs for the position requested and the duties of this position in a brief statement.
2. Explain how this position aligns with and supports the mission and strategic goals of the college.
3. Explain how adding this position will strengthen the department or division.
4. Explain how this work will be accomplished if the position is not filled.

Please submit completed Classified Position Hiring/ Position Justification electronically to the responsible administrator in your division or department.

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**This position has been reviewed by the department or division and is recommended for hiring.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Dean / Director / Hiring Supervisor**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

1. Describe the specific needs for the position requested and the duties of this position in a brief statement.

The Financial Aid Department is seeking funding to hire a permanent fulltime financial aid assistant. This important position provides consistent professional staffing at our front counter, supports the administrative and clerical needs of the office, and maintains and supplements our capacity to engage in the numerous initiatives across the campus and in our community where financial aid expertise is needed. Special programs such as Promise have substantially increased and highlighted the need for knowledgeable financial aid staffing at the first point of contact.

This position would provide the main coverage at our front counter, answer incoming calls and manage our general voicemail, monitor our general email account, advise and assist students in completing their financial aid applications, review and provide intake for a variety of confidential documents and support the work of the technicians.

Staffing has been an issue for some time and with the change of administrators being so frequent, this position has been overlooked. Cañada is the only college in the district without a financial aid assistant position. For several years, we have relied on student assistants to maintain front counter coverage during the majority of our open hours. As helpful as they are, student employees are limited in the level and scope of work we can have them perform. Also, some students have shared they are reluctant to come to the front counter since they have our student assistants in their classes. In prior years, we have received funds to hire a short term hourly Financial Aid Assistant and the impact on the overall office environment and customer service has been extremely positive. Unfortunately, we have lost well-qualified staff due to the temporary nature of the funding and their ability to obtain permanent employment elsewhere.

Our ability to appropriately and effectively address the diverse needs of our students often relies upon the staff member to ask the right questions; a skill derived from extensive training and experience. This underscores the need for a permanent classified employee rather than a student assistant being the first point of contact by default. Given the current social climate affecting many of our immigrant students and their families and the economic stress and financial insecurity affecting the majority of the students, it is even more important that we provide a well-trained, socially aware, equity-centered staff member at our front counter.

2. Explain how this position aligns with and supports the mission and strategic goals of the college.

The College is committed to providing an educational space that is transformative for the communities we serve. Having access to this social imperative is becoming more and more challenging for our highest need students as the cost of living continues to rise and the socio-political climate is generating increased fear and uncertainty to those in our service area. Having a professional staff member as a first point of contact is key for building trust and removing barriers that impede student access and success. Often, financial barriers derail even the most motivated student; therefore, it is critical that students receive concise, correct and complete information at that first interaction with our department. We are unable to meet this need given our current staffing limitations. Students who are well prepared before classes begin are much more likely to succeed and re-enroll.

The addition of a fulltime financial aid assistant, much like other front-line staff in Student Services, will help ensure new and continuing students are guided and supported along their educational path in the most direct manner. The financial aid assistant, unlike most student assistants, will be familiar with eligibility requirements for a variety of other programs and services and can provide students with a warm hand-off to

Promise, EOPS, FFYSI, Personal Counseling, SparkPoint, the Dream Center, Puente, etc. which builds community.

**3. Explain how adding this position will strengthen the department or division.**

Exceptional customer service is needed in all front-line staff and the Financial Aid Department should not be an exception. The addition of a permanent financial aid assistant strengthens our department by placing a well-trained staff member as the initial point of contact, which is key in supporting institutional enrollment management and retention efforts.

There is a great deal of fear and stigma around financial aid. The addition of a permanent staff member who is able to build trust by providing consistent and complete information in an environment that is welcoming and supportive will help our department remove these barriers that inhibit students and families from disclosing personal information that may increase their access to financial aid or other services.

Financial aid assistants have the capacity to review complex student data and respond fully to inquiries from students who may have lost eligibility for the California College Promise Grant (formerly the BOGFW), need assistance enrolling in one of the disbursement options or have stale-dated or lost checks and other administrative issues a student employee cannot address. In our current structure, student assistants frequently need to ask the technicians for guidance or the technicians are covering the front counter. This pulls the technicians away from completing their work, which delays awarding of aid and reduces their ability to provide individual counseling to our neediest students. A consistent front counter staff person promises to bring significant value to the department: namely, allowing technicians to focus on work; decreasing financial aid processing time; and accelerating financial aid status updates to students, thus reducing how often students need to visit the office for updates. In addition, a financial aid assistant will specialize in exceptions to financial aid eligibility. This will deepen financial aid reviews for students and enhance our referrals, resulting in a holistic approach to student success.

The Financial Aid Department receives multiple requests throughout the year in partnership with Outreach to present information sessions and deliver application workshops in our feeder high schools. Financial Aid plays an integral role for promoting and supporting our Promise Scholars Program, the Dream Center and Dreamers Task Force, Study Abroad, COLTSCon, PEP, CBET, Proactive Registration, SparkPoint, Transfer Services, NSF/STEM Center Scholars, and more. Another permanent staff member will enable our department to be more responsive in fulfilling the numerous requests we receive for participation in on and off campus initiatives.

**4. Explain how this work will be accomplished if the position is not filled.**

Without permanent staffing for our front counter, we struggle weekly (sometimes daily) to address office coverage needs. Technicians and the Financial Aid Director will continue to share responsibility for covering the front counter when student coverage is not available which is disruptive to their individual workloads and diminishes their ability to meet one on one and actually provide proactive financial aid counseling. Based on our SARS Grid 2018-2019 data, 4,981 signed in for assistance at the front counter. Every visit required a technician to suspend their office workflow to help at the counter. The indirect cost in efficiency is significant. A new financial aid assistant will therefore boost office productivity and empower technicians to focus on their work.

The current staffing model is unsustainable given the increasing demand for financial aid presence in the different initiatives both on campus and in our service areas. It is a challenge on the department to provide adequate service when we have more than one person out of the office. Having a reliable and consistent financial aid assistant in the office who is assigned to some of these initiatives will balance workload and maintain quality service at our front counter. Without reliable front office coverage, we will not provide our students with the best service possible. It is difficult to quantify the impact this has on our students.

In this academic year we are expecting major changes to the Cal Grant program. Fortunately, our students might qualify for more aid. The implementation process will add an additional verification step for our independent Cal Grant B and C recipients. In addition, Cal Grant A – historically only disbursed at four-year institutions – will now gain disbursement at community colleges. Importantly, Dreamers are now eligible for the Competitive Cal Grant. Though beneficial for students, the changes cumulatively add to the office workload.

Each academic year, every technician responds to an average of 500 to 560 student-initiated emails. A financial aid assistant might specialize in emails, freeing technicians to focus on intricate – and time-sensitive – work processes.

In 2017, California community colleges missed out on nearly \$130 million in federal Pell Grant funds in a single semester (Wheelhouse Center of Community College Leadership and Research at UC Davis). Cañada College is no exception. The college alarmingly appeared on the latest Wheelhouse report.

Based on the 2017 report, almost 40% of Cañada Pell eligible students did not receive a Pell grant. Despite a recent push for increasing the number of financial aid applications, the industry has yet to address what happens after students apply for aid. In 2018-2019, 50% of Cañada Pell eligible students selected for verification did not submit required documentation. This prevented us from determining their eligibility. Yet it also prevented aid disbursement, potentially preventing some students from attending school. The problem is symptomatic of a silent crisis in higher education.

In response to the issue, our campus proactively enrolled in an experimental program conducted by a third party contracted by the Chancellor's Office to help students complete their verification documents. These efforts began in Summer 2019. Despite the extra push, only 30% of students completed their files.

There is no question: we need a consistent financial aid assistant who knows our population and departmental operations to bolster in-reach to our students.

As we get closer to the implementation of Guided Pathways, the entire college needs to be student ready including the financial aid office. Our new system, CRM, will play a key role in Guided Pathways and strategically connect students to services. However, in order for CRM to work, our department needs a financial aid assistant in order to free technicians to expand into case managing.

CRM will help financial aid technicians case manage students throughout the financial aid process, thus directly solving the aforementioned crisis of documentation. This will require time. Only a financial aid assistant can create time for technicians.

The Financial Aid office faces unique challenges. We are highly regulated, highly sought, and included in most federal and state initiatives (AB 19, SB 840). In order to continue following requirements and prepare

for restructuring through Guided Pathways, we absolutely need a financial aid assistant, especially since the position would have a positive ripple effect on office workflow, case managing, and productivity.