

Administrative Services, President’s Cluster, and Student Success and Support Programs, College Centers  
Annual Program Planning Worksheet for 2025

**Program:** Financial Aid

**Current Year:** 2024-2025

**Last Year CPPR Completed:** 2023-2024

**Current Date:** 3/6/2025

**Cluster:** Student Success and Support Programs

The Annual Program Planning Worksheet (APPW) is the process for:

- Reviewing, analyzing and assessing programs on an annual basis
- Documenting relevant program changes, trends, and plans for the upcoming year
- Identifying program needs, if any, that will become part of the program’s Resource Plan
- Highlighting specific program accomplishments and updates since last year’s APPW

**Please complete the following information. Please note that responses are not required for all elements of this document.**

I. General Program Update

Describe changes and improvements to the program, such as changes to the mission, purpose or direction. Indicate any changes that have been made to address equity gaps.

The Financial Aid Office mission remains the same:

The Financial Aid Office serves individuals and their families with financial need by promoting funding programs, awarding financial aid, and advocating on their behalf within the Cuesta College community.

Veterans Resource Center (VRC)- works diligently to serve military connected students in accessing military education benefits and continuous support in achieving academic success. The goal is to provide the highest quality of service through local, regional and state-wide community partnerships to expand available resources and accessible tools that serve the unique needs of student veterans' well-being and success.

The financial aid and veterans’ offices are committed to DEI and giving all students the opportunity to obtain a college education. The mission of the financial aid office is to serve individuals and their families with financial need by promoting funding programs, awarding financial aid, and advocating on their behalf within the Cuesta College community.

The staff and director continue to review all information in the view of DEI and continuously work to update and policy or process that may cause an undue burden to our students. We will continue to close equity gaps to create stronger financial student outcomes and retention.

Further in this document we have information on updated processes and procedures that will help close equity gaps at Cuesta College.

- Based on guidance from NASFAA we are updating our processes around unaccompanied or at-risk homeless youth.
- The office is working to reach out to high school students regarding eligibility for typically chapter 35 GI Bill that allows a veteran's surviving spouse or dependent to use these college benefits.
- Staffing levels at the end of 2023-2024 were 2 of 7 positions. Current staffing levels of 5 of 7 positions have allowed the department to plan and attend a greater number of in-reach and out-reach events.

## II. Data Analysis and Program-Specific Measurements

Programs are often impacted by institutional or other organizational changes. Please review program-relevant institutional data sources, such as institutional enrollment trends, which along with some other relevant program data, is available on the [SLOCCCD Institutional Research website](#). Other organizational or departmental measurements may provide useful information for planning in your program; please describe those measurements and the data below.

### A. Data Summary:

- Describe data collection tool(s) used.  
Banner is a higher education enterprise resource planning system that allows users to retrieve reports with data that can break down the overall Cuesta College population. For the use of financial aid these reports show disaggregated data that allows us to analyze different groups of the student population. For instance, we can see how many students receive CCPG as compared to the number of students receiving both CCPG and Pell Grant. Tableau is used to produce the charts associated with this form.
- Include updates to program data results from the previous year, if any.

## Persistence Data Financial Aid:

This chart provides data on first-year persistence rates for students from 2019-2020 to 2023-2024, disaggregated by financial aid status. Persistence refers to the percentage of students who continue their education beyond their first year.



Figure 1. Information taken from Cuesta College Institutional Research from Tableau Public.

### Overall, First-Year Persistence (Top Chart)

- The **overall persistence rate** has fluctuated over the years:
  - **2019-2020:** 69.1%
  - **2020-2021:** 62.2% (a significant drop, likely due to the pandemic)
  - **2021-2022:** 66.3% (rebounded slightly)
  - **2022-2023:** 65.8%
  - **2023-2024:** 61.3% (another decline)
- The data shows that **persistence rates have declined in the most recent years**, which could be due to various factors such as financial challenges, academic struggles, or external influences (e.g., economic uncertainty, pandemic effects).

## Persistence by Financial Aid Status (Bottom Charts)

- **BOGW (Board of Governors Fee Waiver) Recipients:**
  - Students receiving BOGW (low-income students receiving tuition waivers) have **higher persistence rates**, consistently above **70%** except in 2020-2021.
  - Their highest persistence was **78.5% in 2019-2020**, and their most recent rate in 2023-2024 is **73.1%**.
  - This suggests that financial aid positively impacts student retention.
- **Non-BOGW Students:**
  - Students **without BOGW have significantly lower persistence rates**, ranging from **44.3% to 54.7%**.
  - The lowest persistence occurred in **2020-2021 (44.3%)**, likely due to pandemic-related disruptions.
  - While there was some recovery in **2022-2023 (54.7%)**, the 2023-2024 rate has slightly dropped to **52.1%**.

## Implications for Financial Aid Offices:

1. **Financial Aid Support is Critical for Retention:**
  - Students receiving BOGW consistently persist at **higher rates** than those without aid.
  - This underscores the importance of **promoting financial aid programs** to eligible students.
2. **Targeted Support for Non-BOGW Students:**
  - Non-BOGW students have lower persistence, suggesting they may face financial or academic challenges.
  - Outreach efforts should focus on increasing awareness of **grants, work-study, emergency aid, and other support services**.
3. **Monitor and Address Recent Declines in Persistence:**
  - The drop in **2023-2024 persistence** suggests new challenges (e.g., inflation, cost of living, post-pandemic struggles).

## Persistence Data Veteran Status:

This chart provides data on first-year persistence rates for students from 2019-2020 to 2023-2024, disaggregated by Veteran Status. Persistence refers to the percentage of students who continue their education beyond their first year.



Figure 2. Chart from Institutional Research, Tableau, showing first-year persistence of veteran status students

### Top Chart: Overall, First-Year Persistence

- The top bar chart shows the overall percentage of students who persisted (continued enrollment) from their first year to the next.
- **Persistence rates fluctuate** over the years:
  - **2019-2020:** 69.1%
  - **2020-2021:** 62.2% (drop from the previous year, likely due to COVID-19 disruptions)
  - **2021-2022:** 66.3% (recovery)
  - **2022-2023:** 65.8%
  - **2023-2024:** 61.3% (latest year, showing a decline)

### Bottom Chart: Persistence by Veteran Status

This section disaggregates persistence rates into three groups:

1. **Veterans**
2. **Unknown/Unreported**

### 3. Not Veterans

#### Veterans

- **Lowest in 2020-2021 (37.5%)**, likely due to pandemic-related factors.
- **Improved to 60% in 2022-2023** but then dropped to 47.6% in 2023-2024.

#### Unknown/Unreported

- **2019-2020: 70.8%** (highest recorded)
- **2023-2024: 61.4%** (decline but still relatively strong)

#### Not Veterans

- This group shows persistence rates similar to the overall trend.
- **2019-2020: 67.9%**
- **2023-2024: 61.4%** (matching the overall decline)

#### Financial Aid and VRC Appointments

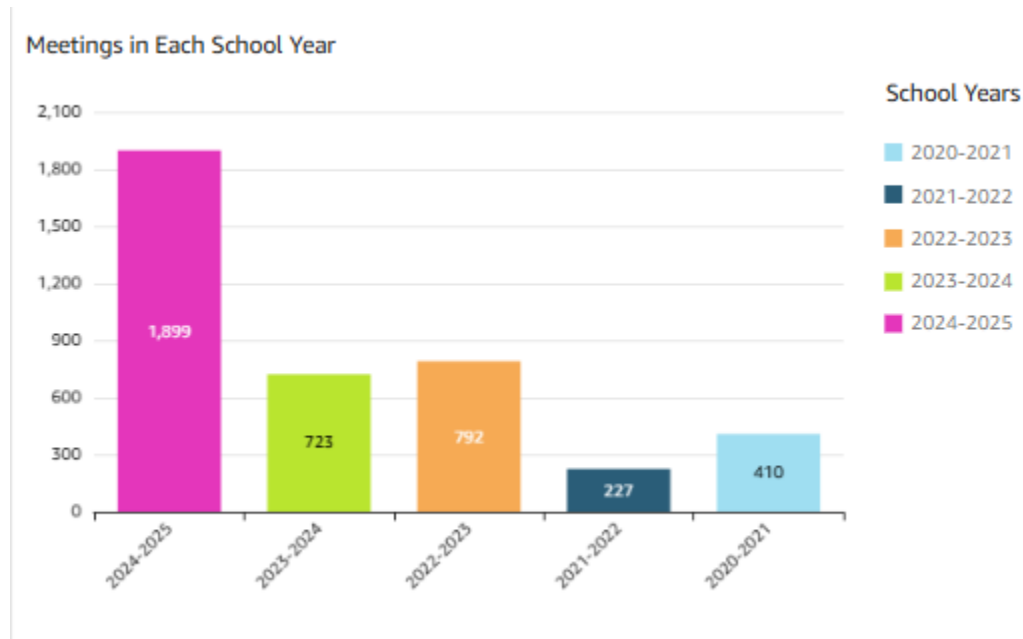


Figure 3. From ConexED showing number of appointments for all reason codes in the Financial Aid and Veterans Resource Center

The above chart shows the number of duplicated students that had phone, video, or walk in appointments at the financial aid office and veterans resource center on the San Luis Obispo and North County Campus. This is not an exhaustive list, and it does not include all

phone meetings. Issues with the new FAFSA increased the amount of contact with students that were reaching out to verify their financial aid status. The top 6 reasons for student contact in the 2024-2025 academic year, in both the financial aid office and veterans resource center from highest to lowest were:

- Checking Financial Aid Status
- FAFSA Application Help
- BankMobile Questions
- Award Disbursement Questions
- Food
- Tuition and Fee Waiver

B. Data Interpretation:

- Results from previous improvement efforts to the program based on institutional or departmental changes.

Data shows that the amount of contact made by financial aid office staff has increased significantly. However, the increase has not translated into a large increase in FAFSA submissions. Potential causes may be the late rollout of the new FAFSA and issues that arose with students and contributors completing the form. Some students may have contacted the financial aid office multiple times with the same or similar questions.

- Areas if any that may need improvement for program quality and growth.

Improvements in the way out-reach and in-reach is completed need to be looked at. As stated in other areas of this document, most financial aid outreach is completed during evening hours when students have already left school. I see the need for a more targeted approach to have students and their contributors complete FAFSA and the Cuestas Promise Application. Updating our out-reach practices to catch high school students at or immediately after school and changing how we contact student contributors may increase FAFSA completion rates.

### III. Annual Program Outcomes (ASOS and SSOS), Assessment and Improvements

Your program has established either Administrative Service Outcomes or Student Service Outcomes. Those outcomes are assessed and tracked in the Course or Program

Assessment Summary. Review CPAS documents for ASO or SSO assessment results for program outcomes.

A. Current Program Outcomes:

The Financial Aid Office and the VRC help achieve the District's Mission Statement through the following activities: 1. Inspire diverse student population to achieve their educational goals.

Outreach to all segments of our community, particularly underrepresented groups and military personnel, Veterans and their families. By visiting high schools and speaking to potential students and parents at different events such as Cash for College, Cougar Welcome Days and Promise Day.

Participation with VRC partners with the San Luis Obispo Veterans Service Collaborative (SVSC) and other county programs to provide resources and support.

Financial aid supports students as they work towards their educational goals.

Staff serve as liaisons to various campus departments and services, including the Veterans Resource Center, Monarch Center, Cal Works, Foster Youth, EOPS and Care and local high schools to serve as a contact and host financial aid presentations. This ensures information pertaining to financial resources is being disseminated to a diverse population and promotes cultural, intellectual, and professional growth.

Financial Aid staff participate in professional growth by attending staff meetings, on campus events, webinars and statewide conferences designed to provide relevant, current, and updated information regarding regulatory and legislative issues.

**Student Services Outcome 1: FAFSA/CADAA completion as compared to previous**



## Community College Districts in California

Show 10 entries

Search:

Districts	Enrollment	FAFSA/CA Dream Act Applications			
		Submitted		Completed	
		Count	Percent	Count	Percent
San José-Evergreen Community College District	21,216	22,926	108.06%	18,121	85.41%
San Luis Obispo County Community College District	13,808	7,235	52.40%	6,916	50.09%
San Mateo County Community College District	29,014	14,779	50.94%	10,265	35.38%
Santa Barbara Community College District	17,413	10,601	60.88%	10,076	57.86%
Santa Clarita Community College District	28,480	13,859	48.66%	13,193	46.32%
Santa Monica Community College District	29,960	27,422	91.53%	26,062	86.99%
Sequoias Community College District	16,841	14,639	86.92%	13,880	82.42%
Shasta-Tehama-Trinity Joint Community College District	11,360	9,847	86.68%	9,471	83.37%
Sierra Joint Community College District	23,577	18,099	76.77%	17,222	73.05%
Siskiyou Joint Community College District	2,368	1,957	82.64%	1,905	80.45%

Figure 4. CSAC data showing how many FAFSA/CADAA applications have been submitted to Cuesta College for the 2024-2025 aid year.

Chart shows the number of FAFSA and CADAA applications submitted to Cuesta College for the 2024-2025 aid year. Previous years:

- 2021-2022: FAFSA/CADAA 5,252
- 2024-2025: FAFSA/CADAA 6,916

**Student Services Outcome 2: Encourage early completion of continuing student applications.**

This cannot be measured for the 2024-2025 aid year. The New FAFSA was released in Summer 2024 which is months past the date used in previous years.

**Student Services Outcome 3: Reduce the number of student appeals, and students that are not meeting SAP.**

- A change was made to the SAP policy that impacted students exceeding the Maximum Time Frame section of our SAP policies. Data collection will continue from the 2024-2025 Academic Year.

**Student Services Outcome 4:** Partner with campus departments and join existing workshops/events to promote Financial Aid.

The Financial Aid Office has increased the number of in-reach and out-reach events during the 2024-2025 academic year. Since September 2024 the office has participated in over 30 events; Study Thon, Fast Track, Cougar Welcome Days; The Financial Aid Office has partnered with the Cuesta College Affinity Center and the Monarch Dream Program to offer presentations and workshops in English and Spanish and concurrently in person and on zoom. Staff has visited many High Schools in San Luis Obispo County including; Arroyo Grande High School, San Luis Obispo High School, Pacific Beach, Coast Union – Cambria CA, Atascadero and Paso Robles High School and Paso Robles Liberty and Independence High School. This is not an exhaustive list.

**Student Services Outcome 5:** Increase marketing and awareness for the Cuesta Promise.

#### Cuesta Promise Applications – Eligible

- 2021-2022: 1379
- 2022-2023: 1503
- 2023-2024: 1524
- 2024-2025: 1319

The number of eligible applicants has increased from the 2021-2022 academic year through 2023-2024 with a decline in 2024-2025. This is likely due to the late access for students to complete the New FAFSA. Eligibility for the Cuesta Promise requires the student to complete a FAFSA by August 1<sup>st</sup> for the upcoming academic year.

#### B. Program assessment:

There is a need to find new ways of connecting with high school students and their FAFSA contributors. Current outreach efforts take place during evening hours to accommodate working students/parents. Below is a list of activities they may better serve our communities prospective and continuing students:

In-reach/Out-reach

- Partner with high schools to have FAFSA out-reach workshops during normal school/business hours.
- Day time high school student workshop – with same day evening workshop for the student’s contributor.
- In-reach on campus: tabling and utilizing peer mentors to help spread the knowledge about financial aid to students who may not be aware.
- Use of a mobile FAFSA workshop vehicle, giving the ability to have computers anywhere on campus to promote FAFSA completion.
- Outreach in the community: Presenting at events or workshops regarding financial aid.
- Connect with and create more community partners to create workshops about Cuesta Promise and FAFSA.

C. Results from improvement efforts arising from ASO or SSO assessment in the last year:

There has been a substantial increase in the number of in-reach and out-reach events the Financial Aid Office has planned and/or participated in during the 2024-2025 academic year. The number of FAFSA and Cuesta Promise Application completers has declined, however the deadline for this application is August 1st. The decline is likely due to:

- New FAFSA late release date and technical issues
- Economic climate
- Political climate
- Immigration policies
- Population decrease/number of students in high school

D. Recommended changes and updates to program based on assessment of program outcomes.

- 1) Financial Aid Counselor**
- 2) Outreach Supplies (SWAG)**
- 3) Ultra-Wide Computer Monitors for VRC Student Computers**
- 4) Mobile FAFSA Workshop Station – Golf Cart that has several computers that can be driven to different location son campus**
- 5) Extra Large Fridge/Freezer for VRC**
- 6) Working Hotspots for VRC Student Loan**
- 7) Tablets/Computers for VRC student Loan (not chrome book)**
- 8) Motorized Standing Desks for all Offices**

**9) Additional Professional Development Funds**

**10) Gaming system for VRC**

**11) Additional Cupboards for Financial Aid**

**12) Full time FA Employee for NCC**

#### IV. Anticipated Service Challenges/Changes

**Suggested Elements:**

A. Regulatory changes

McKinney-Vento Act

Updated guidance from NASFAA regarding the McKinney-Vento act for Unaccompanied at Risk of Homelessness and Unaccompanied Homeless Youth has been released for the 2025-2026 academic year. The Department of Education recorded 36,011 FAFSA applications that were submitted by students throughout the United States requesting one of the Unaccompanied Youth determinations. The total number approved was 4,313. Current legislation requires the financial aid office to make a determination within 60 days of the student submitting the request. The Cuesta College Financial Aid Office has created an updated document that follows all guidelines and procedures that will allow a determination to be made within the required timeframe.

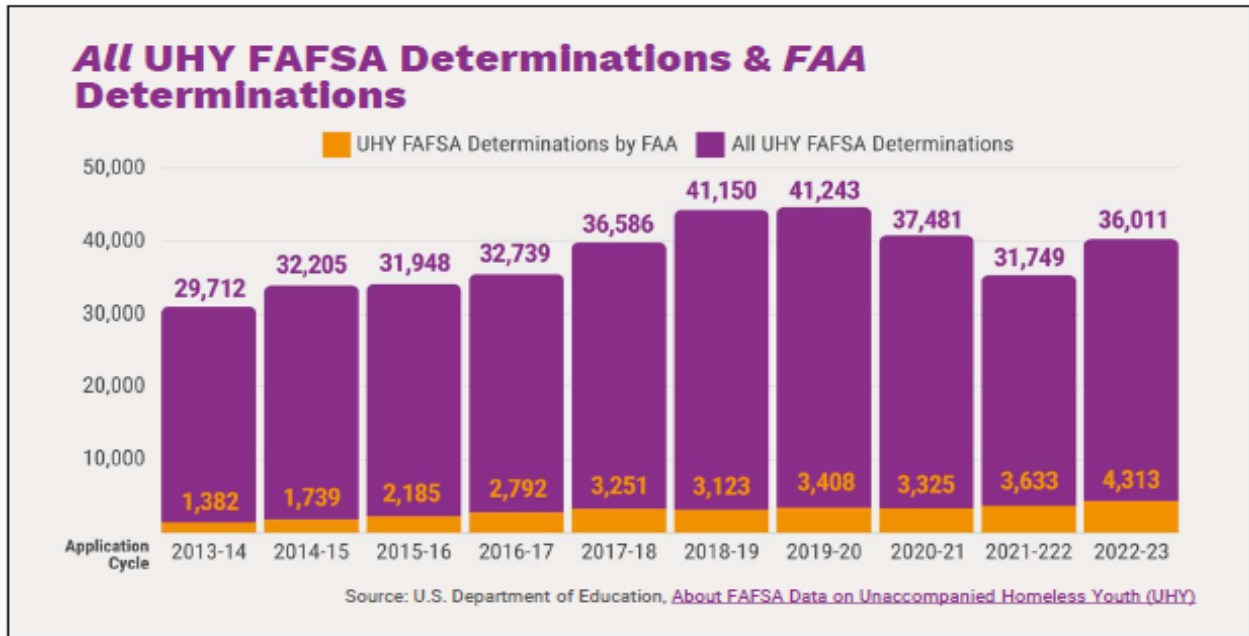


Figure 5. Graph from NASFAA showing all unaccompanied homeless youth FAFSA determinations and FAA determinations

This chart presents data on FAFSA determinations for Unaccompanied Homeless Youth (UHY) across multiple application cycles from 2013-14 to 2022-23. It distinguishes between **all UHY FAFSA determinations** (in purple) and **UHY FAFSA determinations made by a Financial Aid Administrator (FAA)** (in orange). FAFSA completion raises the likelihood that students will enroll in college by 84%.

Key Takeaways:

1. **Overall Trend:** The total number of UHY FAFSA determinations has generally increased over the years, peaking at 41,423 in the 2019-20 cycle before declining slightly.
2. **FAA Determinations Growth:** The number of UHY determinations made specifically by FAAs has steadily increased from **1,382 in 2013-14** to **4,313 in 2022-23**, indicating a growing role of financial aid administrators in verifying homelessness determinations.
3. **Recent Decline:** After reaching a peak in 2019-20, total UHY FAFSA determinations have declined, possibly due to external factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic affecting FAFSA completion rates.

Implications for Financial Aid Offices:

- **Increased FAA Responsibility:** More determinations are being handled by financial aid offices, highlighting the need for clear policies and staff training on verifying unaccompanied homeless youth status.
- **Support & Outreach:** The decrease in overall UHY FAFSA determinations after 2019-20 suggests a need for increased outreach efforts to ensure that eligible students complete the FAFSA.

New FAFSA

The implementation of the new FAFSA for the 2025-2025 academic year gave the ability for mixed status families to complete a FAFSA application. Moving into 2025-2026 FAFSA continued to allow mixed status families to complete FAFSA. Recently the California Community Colleges have seen that mixed families have been continuously receiving error messages when completing the online FAFSA and have been told when calling customer service to complete a paper FAFSA or CADAA. Some results from the new FAFSA are shown in the graph below.

**Far fewer California high school graduates submitted FAFSA and CADAA forms in 2024**

FAFSA and CADAA applications

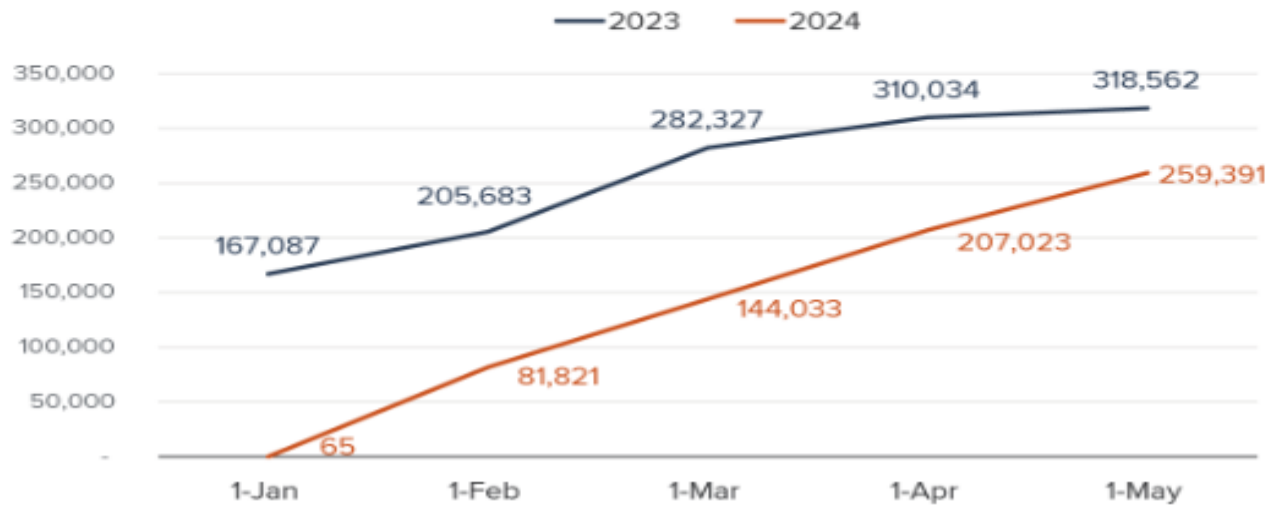


Figure 6. Graph showing FAFSA/CADAA submissions by high school students in California. From: PPIC Blog, June 2024

This graph illustrates a significant decline in the number of FAFSA and CADAA (California Dream Act Application) submissions by California high school graduates in 2024 compared to 2023.

## Key Observations:

### 1. Lower Overall Submission Numbers in 2024

- In 2023, by May 1st, **318,562** applications had been submitted.
- In 2024, only **259,391** applications were submitted by the same date.
- This represents a significant **decrease of nearly 60,000 applications.**

### 2. Slower Initial Submissions in 2024

- This dramatic difference suggests potential **delays and issues in FAFSA and CADAA processing, awareness issues, or changes in dates and requirements.**

## Veteran Services

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has required colleges employ a School Certifying Official and additional coordinator as two separate roles. Cuesta College has completed this requirement by updating department positions to allow for two staff positions, a Veterans Specialist and a Veterans and Financial Aid Coordinator.

## B. Internal and external organizational changes

Fraudulent applications are on the rise. Some call these “Bots” and some say “Ghost” students. Regardless of what you call it, the California Community Colleges Chancellor’s Office reports approximately 956,935 fraudulent applications were submitted in 2024.

## Suspected fraudulent applications

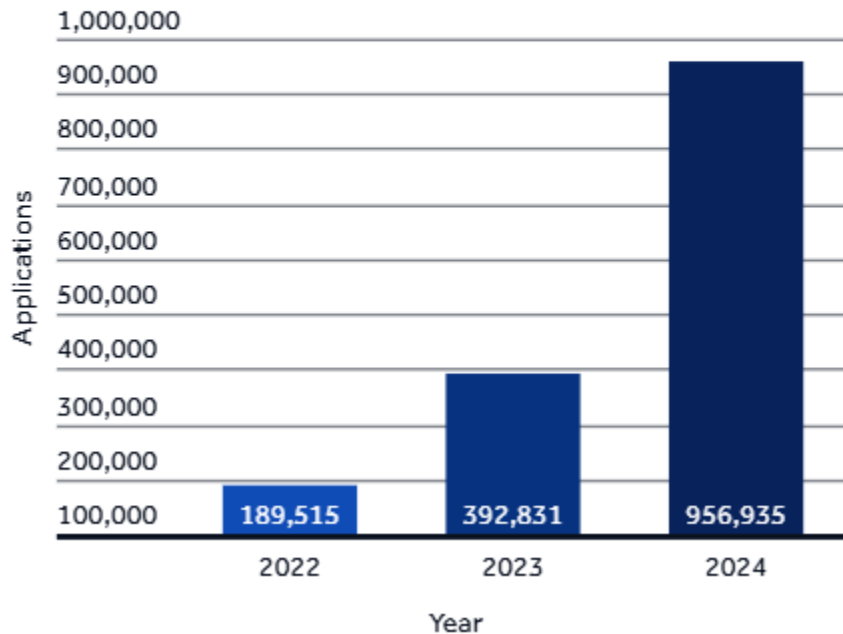


Figure 7. Chart of fraudulent admissions application submitted to California Community Colleges from 2022 to 2024. From: California Community Colleges Chancellor's Website.

Due to the increase in fraudulent activity the financial aid office has updated processes and procedures. Changes are:

- Students requiring verification for financial aid and/or federal direct loans must verify their identity in person at the Cuesta College Financial Aid Office.

This change should not have a negative effect on students. Cuesta College is part of the California Virtual College system (CVC). The CVC allows students that attend another community college to register for classes at Cuesta College through their website. This allows the students' home college to verify their identity in person if the student is seeking financial aid.

The number of fraudulent applications the college has received is causing an extra burden to staff and students. Work continues to be completed that is necessary to explicate the fraudulent applications. Process changes have been required and the direction to combat these issues will continuously be updated to identify and remove these applications. There is a need for the Federal and State government to make changes to their processes that will identify and

shut down the groups and individuals involved with fraudulent activity. The impact currently takes away time the department can otherwise use to process legitimate student applications, forms, and provide customer service.

C. Student and staff demographic changes

N/A

D. Community economic changes – workforce demands

N/A

E. Role of technology for information, service delivery and data retrieval

The Financial Aid Office relies almost solely on technology to receive and submit information for all financial aid programs. These programs include, but are not limited to Federal Pell, Federal Direct Loans, CCPG, AB19, AB540, and local programs; Cuesta College Promise, CASE Grant, and Basic Needs Grants. The funds that are either disbursed to a student or are grants that cover the students' cost of attendance require multiple computer databases; Banner, ISE, WinSCP, to submit this information to Bank Mobile, COD, NSLDS, and CSAC.

F. Providing service to multiple off-campus sites

The Financial Aid Office provides service at the San Luis Obispo Campus Monday, Thursday; from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Tuesday, Wednesday; from 8 a.m. – 6 p.m. and Friday; from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Financial Aid services are provided at the North County Campus each Monday and Tuesday from 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. and 9 a.m. – 6 p.m. respectfully.

The Veterans Resource Center provides service at the San Luis Obispo Campus Monday – Thursday; 8 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Friday; 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. Veterans Services at the North County Campus are each Wednesday from 9 a.m. – 6 p.m.

The financial aid office attends and plans outreach activities, such as; FAFSA/CADAA workshops or presentations throughout the county of San Luis Obispo. Some of these activities take place at high schools, continuing education schools and on the Cuesta College Campus.

G. Anticipated staffing changes/retirements

Staff

Beginning the 204-2025 academic year the financial aid office had several staffing changes.

- One full-time Financial Aid Support Analyst has been hired, which fills the second of two positions.
- One Financial Aid Specialist has been hired, filling the three positions.
- One Veterans Services Specialist has been hired as the Student Certifying Official, filling the one position available.
- One Financial Aid and Veterans Resource Center Coordinator has been hired, filling the one position available. This position change will open one position for Financial Aid Specialist after 90 days.
- The Veterans Resource Center has two student workers. These students are paid for their education benefits through the VA.
- The Financial Aid Office has an approved position for IT support. This position has yet to be filled.

## V. Overall Budget Implications

Immediate budget request(s) made in the Resource Plan

### **Elements:**

- A. Equipment/furniture (other than technology)  
Stand up desks are needed for several offices.
- B. Technology  
New laptops and docking stations are needed to continue staff ability to use multiple screens. This is necessary due to the multiple web accounts and pages that need to be reviewed and processed.
- C. Facilities  
Additional storage space is needed to keep files, folders, printed material, and other long term and long-lasting items.
- D. A mobile FAFSA application center, such as a golf cart fitted with computers may allow financial aid staff to reach students on areas of campus that would otherwise not venture to the financial aid office for information on FAFSA or CADAA.

## Signature Page

List the names and titles of managers, faculty, and classified staff who contributed to the annual planning and program review process.

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Name	Position
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Name	Position
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Name	Position
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**Student Success and Support Programs, College Centers and Administrative Services Programs: Managers completing this process must sign. All full-time director(s), managers, faculty and/or classified staff in the program must sign this form.**

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Name	Title	Signature	Date
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