I. Context for Planning

Institutional:
The mission of the office is to provide students with financial assistance options to attend the University. We support the goal of access to higher education through need-based federal, state, and institutional financial aid programs, and the goal of choice through academic merit, scholarship, and part-time employment programs. We promote and support the goals of the University in the recruitment and retention of students to achieve their personal and career objectives.

Mission-specific;

Current national and state trends:

- Increases in traditional college-age, full-time enrollment.
- Increases in enrollment from Southern Nevada and students of color.
- Continuing increases in college costs, the burden of which falls disproportionately on low-income families.
- Increases in state aid were provided this fall with 50% of increase per credit in registration fees targeted for need-based aid.
- Reconsideration and modification by states of 529 saving, pre-paid tuition plan, and other financing options.
- Continued use of credit cards, private educational loans and other consumer financing options to pay for college.
- Continuing emphasis and availability of federal aid through borrowing; half of all aid is loans, and the annual loan limit that does not provide enough funds to meet the total cost of education. Average indebtedness for undergraduate students nationally is $17,000.
- Delivery of aid information, applicant data and reporting to and from the U.S. Dept of Education solely through electronic communication.
- States reducing eligibility and using other means to modify entitlement programs like the Millennium Scholarship to contain cost.
- Status quo in the amount of dollars from the federal government in campus-based allocations regardless of increases in enrollment and financial need.
- Encouragement in technology by the federal government and competition among lenders has improved web services to student and parent borrowers (i.e. entrance and exit counseling, online Stafford and PLUS promissory notes).

Trends in service demands and quality:

- On-demand service expectation- congruent with the student’s schedule and need to know.
- Attitude of "entitlement" and unwillingness to accept individual responsibility and accountability.
- Lack of regard for policies, regulations and deadlines.
- Reluctance by students to read materials and follow instructions for self-service assistance.
- Lack of planning for college on the part of students and parents and unfamiliarity with the college experience and processes.
- Increasing demand and use of electronic communication and web services.
Single point of contact desired by students and parents for processing financial aid. The entire process of applying for and receiving aid is still confusing.

With the creation of more non-need programs, such as the Millennium Scholarship and prepaid tuition, more affluent parents contact the office, demanding immediate attention to their needs.

Additional, new aid programs with no commensurate increases in office resources to meet the operational and reporting requirements.

“Helicopter” parents- doing the “work” the student should be doing to learn about the processes and requirements.

For each institutional priority that involves a particular group of students, our office is expected to find funding. These commitments reduce funds available for all students who need money to access education.

**Performance Indicators for Overall Effectiveness:**

- Total dollars administered annually, with breakdown totals for undergraduate and to graduate students.
- Number of students served, the percentage they represent of the total undergraduate and graduate student populations.
- Number of students and dollars that were available to students at the opening of the school year.
- Student default rates on federal loan programs.
- Number of students accessing the office web page, the job board, and other e-services.
- Student satisfaction surveys and the results of other assessment tools.
- Annual compliance audits of federal and state aid funds are without financial liability to the University.
- Number of students of color who apply and receive aid in proportion to the total student population.
- Enhancements to processes and procedures that decrease barriers for students applying and receiving aid.
- Number of first-time freshmen attending the financial literacy workshop series.

**II. Evaluation of Current Services:**

**Present Demand and Requirements for Services**

- We are accountable for over 30 different federal and institutional aid programs and 13 state aid programs.
- Annually, the office receives approximately 12,000 applications for federal aid, 3000 scholarship applications, and processes initial and multiple transactions for hiring 3100 students employed on campus.
- Between Jan 1- April 1, 2003, 89% of our aid applicants filed their application electronically with the U.S. Department of Education.
- The office received 58% more applications than in 2002 for the same time period. The first four months of the year is when we receive about 60% of the total application volume.
- During 2002-03, the office managed and disbursed over $6 million in grants, $19 million in scholarships (including the Millennium scholarship), $25 million in loans, and $8 million in on-campus employment.
- 2001-02, 7337 undergraduate students (70% of total undergraduates) received one or more types financial assistance- a 14% increase over 2000-01.
- 2000-01, 1475 graduate students (46% of total graduates) received one or more types of financial assistance- an increase of 4% from 2000-01.
The Millennium Scholarship Program has grown from 1474 recipients in the fall 2000, to 2878 in fall 2001, 3892 for fall 2002 and 5000 so far for fall 2003. Dollars disbursed in fall 2000 were just over $3 million. This fall, we have disbursed nearly $5 million so far and expect to reach total disbursements of about $11 million by year-end.

Applications for aid are not static documents processed once and stored. Upwards of 500,000 transactions may occur annually as students change data, enrollment, class standing, financial information or eligibility determinants.

The federal requirements mandate a complex set of steps and procedures that necessitate numerous communications with students. We are using email, postcards, and web services to reduce paper correspondence and save in postage costs.

Over 4900 loans were disbursed in 2002-03. The number of "players" involved in the student loan delivery system (the university, the lender, the guarantee agency, the servicer, the student and the parent) and the processing time is complex; therefore we receive daily "traffic" from students seeking reassurance on their status in that process.

In the weeks just prior to and just after the opening of the school year, we can have as many as 150 student visits and 600 phone calls per day.

Fall 2003, $20 million was disbursed to students’ accounts within the first 3 days of the semester.

The State continues to add new, non-need programs without resources to administer them. Programs like the Regents Award Program, the Millennium Scholarship, and the Nevada Prepaid Tuition Program, all require administrative support and create a demand on our office for services from the community, students, parents, the system office, and the university community.

As the financial aid office for Nevada State College students, our processing workload continues to grow and become more complex as the college enrollment increases. More staff time is committed to processing aid for their students.

**Effectiveness of Current Organizational Structure/Policies and Procedures:**

- Office policies and procedures are in large part dictated by federal and state regulations.
- As a part of our assessment plan, the office participates in the Quality Assurance Program sanctioned by the U.S. Dept of Education. We are one of 150 colleges and universities nationally. The program provides the authority to modify federal requirements involving verification of the application data by designing our own. As a result, we have been able to streamline the processes for students and parents, and no longer “bother” families whose eligibility for aid would not change. Annually, we analyze our effectiveness in targeting and modify procedures for the next processing cycle.
- The office's organizational structure has improved, but still not hierarchical enough to permit effective decision-making. However, we have made progress through salary placement to restructure the organization. The employment of an assistant director and range changes to create two other assistant directors this year will achieve more points of authority and oversight for effective management.
- Reception functions are handled by automated phone system that directs calls to an advisor or another appropriate person. With enhances to our on-line services, the phone traffic has been reduced significantly.

**Strengths of Existing Programs:**

- Our strengths are reflected in the annual report data to the UCCSN system office summarizing our activity for that year. In 2001-02, the office administered close to $55 million in financial aid sources for students.
- We successfully implement new state programs and regulatory requirements with no additional resources-budget or people.
Annual audits for the U.S. Department of Education never find inadequacies in funds management, program compliance, or regulatory enforcement. Findings can translate into limitations, suspension, financial repayments, or termination of the University from the federal student aid programs.

The default rate for our Stafford loan borrowers is 3.9% for FY2001, compared to the national average 5.4% for all universities and colleges, 5.4% for all public institutions, and 7.0% for all Nevada institutions. UNLV’s rate for the same period was 4.5% and the four UCCSN community colleges ranged from 7-12%.

The default rate for federal Perkins loan borrowers is 2.1%

For 2001-02, 70% of undergraduate students and 46% of graduate students received financial aid.

Current Challenges and Constraints:

Staffing and Training:

The University’s current range schedule provides little opportunity for advancement for administrative faculty. Entry-level professionals must leave the University for higher level and/or salaried positions at other colleges, so we are in a constant hiring and training mode. The training time for a new employee is at least one full cycle of the delivery system (minimum of one year depending on where in the cycle they begin employment).

Employment search and hiring processes are overly cumbersome, take too long, and require too many levels of review.

Redundancy is limited; positions are task and program specific because of the level of expertise required.

It is a challenge to accommodate the increasing need in the University's Southern Nevada office for a financial aid advisor to assist with recruitment.

Additional staff is needed to share the increasing workload, so that stress level and premature burnout are reduced.

The UCCSN master plan proposed a new need-based grant program of $7 million a year, up to a total of $21 million. Without staff and other financial resources to implement and manage this and any other new state programs, timeliness may suffer and checks delayed to students.

Lack of technical expertise within the classified staff to manage the ever-increasing demands of electronic systems.

Computer Systems:

Current SIS system is inflexible, out-of-date, and user-unfriendly. The new system will improve service and our capability to provide more information to students.

Training is non-existent for employees to learn how to use the SIS system and FOCUS reporting.

Retain techno-literate staff to manage all the electronic data systems for our applicant database, loan processing, and reporting to the U.S. Department of Education.

24/7 Service:

Lack of enhanced retrieval systems and SIS interface hinder the implementation of more self-service options for students in accessing their financial aid information.

Seek out additional service partners in the delivery of student loans to make it more efficient and timely.

Restructure the financial aid advisor assignments to provide more time for in-person advising for complex problems that necessitate intervention. An additional advisor would help.

Outreach:
➢ Educate parents on the college experience and essential steps to be successful in securing the aid they need.
➢ Streamline routine office tasks to provide time for staff to partner with other offices in outreach to middle school students.

**Funding:**

➢ The State now allocates 50% of the increase per credit in registration fee to provide additional need-based financial aid, approximately $600,000 this year. Additionally, we received the grant-in-aid funds released by the athletic fee waiver to award needy students, Southern Nevada as the first priority. However, the University still has inadequate resources for needy students, and more help from the State is needed to bridge the gap.
➢ UPC allocated $500,000 annually for additional merit scholarships. With the implementation beginning with 2004-05 of a restructured scholarship awarding system, based on recommendations from the Noel Levitz consulting firm, more funds will be needed to accommodate the ability-based, entitlement approach for scholarship awards to freshmen and sophomore students.
➢ The Millennium Scholarship Program, with no resources provided for administration to the office, is creating a workload demand of significant proportion. That workload should be recognized by system administration that can become an advocate for some financial relief for the college. Currently only the State Treasurer’s Office receives funding from the program.
➢ More scholarship and grant dollars are needed to provide for graduate students and to meet diversity goals.

**III. Analysis and Future Goals:**

*Major Challenges and Goals for the Next Five Years:*

➢ Implementation of new and modified federal program regulations as a result of the reauthorization of the higher education act, including retraining of staff and information dissemination to students.
➢ Implementation of a new student information system and financial aid module.
➢ The documentation of all financial aid electronic processes and security for all confidential information.
➢ Reorganization of the office into a hierarchy of responsibility, hire and maintain a trained, experienced staff adequate to meet the increasing demands for service caused by increased enrollment, new programs, changing regulations for existing programs, and enhanced technologies.
➢ Creation of an equitable and “predictable” scholarship award process that supports recruitment and retention of students.
➢ Support the efforts of development staff in the colleges and in the Foundation to secure more scholarship dollars, so colleges can support their students in their junior and senior undergraduate years and for graduate students.
➢ Increase support for the Southern Nevada office, diversity recruitment plan, and retention efforts of our division.
➢ Increase awareness campus-wide of the complexities of financial aid.
➢ Change Millennium Scholarship legislation from a per credit amount to a fixed annual amount.
➢ Move the human resources tasks associated with student employment to Personnel.
➢ Move Nevada State College’s financial aid operation to self-sufficiency.

**Strategies for the Future and Changes Needed:**
➢ Work collaboratively with Development and colleges’ development staff to enhance the scholarship program by securing funds for the two-tiered approach (general scholarships for the first two years and college based scholarships for the upper division students).
➢ Work with UCCSN to advocate for legislative changes to the operation of the Millennium Scholarship.
➢ Strategize with the Union staff to create a need-based grant program for needy students for whom the fee would pose a hardship.
➢ Support Nevada State College’s financial aid recognizing the increased the workload for 6 of my current staff.
➢ Eliminate the scholarship application for continuing students, and therefore the need for a student to initiate their desire for consideration. The colleges’ faculties know their academically superior upper class students and select them regardless of the application requirement.
➢ Continue transition to an electronic aid delivery system from application through deposit of aid funds to the student's bank account using web technology, interfaces with the U.S. Department of Education, lender services, and secure transmission of forms and information.
➢ Redirect the general scholarship program, including grant-in-aid funds, to create a “guarantee” of a scholarship to incoming freshmen based on their ability level for their first two years.
➢ Create training workshops for campus staff on the fundamentals of financial aid- Financial Aid 101- to improve the communication of basic information by recruiting staff and academic representatives of colleges and other interested faculty and staff.

Resource Allocation and Priorities:
➢ The office must retain the money budgeted as a reimbursement for the workload of operating a financial aid program for Nevada State College.
➢ Secure additional scholarship resources from UPC to supplement last year’s allocation.
➢ Funding to continue the Presidential Scholars program is needed- $500,000 annually.
➢ Fixed resources may require the elimination of discretionary programs.
➢ With 10% more resources, hire 2.0 new FTE financial aid professionals- one for the north to support growth in aid application volume and new programs and one for the Southern Nevada office to support recruitment.
➢ Allocate 1.0 new FTE for computer networking, advanced voice response system and data warehousing support.
➢ Allocate 1.0 new FTE for conversion to manage, direct and train staff in the new Student Information System.
➢ Secure endowment/investment resources that will yield an additional $10 million dollars available to award each year to implement the transition of the general scholarship program to first and second year students.
➢ Some staff resources could be redirected with the transfer of student employment hiring to the office with the human resources expertise, Personnel. Our office would continue to coordinate the financial aid based employment programs, namely college-work study, literacy and Regents Award employment programs. These programs number approximately 400 students as opposed to student employment as a whole that exceeds 3100 students per year.

IV. Summary:
1. Demand for financial aid and scholarships increases each year while resources, both human and financial, remain static or are decreasing.
2. Merit and non-need aid programs continue to increase and are still “fashionable”. More state need-based aid is still required to provide access for needy, low-income students.
3. Students expect instant service and prefer to use electronic information channels and communication options to printed media.
4. The University's current student information system restricts our capability to streamline and enhance our services to students.
5. Office staffing structure requires substantial changes to address changing needs and demands of students, increasing numbers of programs and applicants, the rate of staff turnover in the technical support areas.
6. Salary structure for student services professionals requires modification in order to attract and retain experienced staff.
7. Scholarship program requires additional funding. Using the general program to target the enrollment and retention of freshmen and sophomore students and promoting the colleges to support the upper division years of undergraduate study is an approach we have been advised will enhance our enrollment and retention. We plan to begin such a plan for 2004-05.
8. The resource demand for technology enhancements and value-added technologies will continue, along with the requirement for trained, technical staff.
9. A pyramid of different types of service would better utilize staff resources and support 24/7 services.
10. The current operation of the Millennium Scholarship continues to “gobble up” our office’s human and time resources.
11. The resources we commit to the financial aid operation for Nevada State College continues to grow.
12. The office will be challenged to advocate and support the Student Union’s request for an increase in the student fee with students who do not see the value and do not want to pay higher fees.
13. The current payment of the Millennium Scholarship based on number of credits is overly labor-intensive and confusing to parents and counselors. Changing the legislation to a flat amount per year based on institution type would be a welcome modification for all involved with the program.
IMAGINE THIS…. 4 YEARS OR LESS:

Jane is a high school freshman, from Las Vegas who wants to attend the University in Reno. Through on-line college planning tools, she is already familiar with the admission requirements and knows that she will meet them with the college courses she has planned to take. She and her family have started to investigate financing options, and know what she cannot attend without financial assistance. She expects to be a Millennium Scholar, but knows that it does not cover all the costs of living on campus in the residence hall. She decides to visit UNR's financial aid advisor in the Southern Nevada office. S/he pulls up the UNR homepage and shows her how to use all the various links to on-line financial planning. Amazed at how easy it is, Jane runs through different financing options at home with her family. They continue to monitor her academic progress using the college planner tool through high school.

Jane applies on-line for admission early in her senior year and receives an email acceptance through her customized web site. It also informs Jane that she qualified for a 4-year scholarship based on her admission credentials. Her major department has also awarded her a scholarship. Jane and her parents already applied for and received their SFA PINs to access the federal aid systems, so she and her parents complete and "sign" her federal financial aid application on-line. After receiving the FAFSA data electronically, UNR posts her financial aid offer on her private web site and emails her that it is time to review the aid offer and pick a lender for her loan. Jane visits the web sites of the "recommended" lenders, picks one, clicks on the promissory note, "signs" it electronically, and completes the first-time borrowers entrance interview session. She informs UNR that she will be attending in the fall and has arranged for the transfer of funds, after tuition and housing is paid, into her newly set up bank account when she arrives in the fall. She checks WEB-REG for disbursement information, tracks her borrowing through the National Student Loan Data System, and uses the on-line tools for debt management. She also can track on-line her Millennium Scholarship balance once she accesses the funds.

Jane has just finished first semester and her grades are high enough to maintain her current scholarships. Her department can access the information through SIS and automatically consider her for additional awards for her sophomore year. She has already completed the renewal FAFSA on-line, using the SFA PIN she received prior to enrollment. She visits the UNR home page and links to Student Financial Services to search for other scholarship opportunities. She clicks to check her aid status-making sure the file is complete and awarded. Then completes the loan process on-line for the next year. Jane is going to be the first in her family to attend and graduate from college.

10.13.2003