1. Executive Summary

Leeward CC’s Student Services Area is comprised of 10 different units and programs that work in concert to support students’ entry, progression and completion of their academic journeys. They are responsible for supporting and assisting with students’ co-curricular needs—needs that are non-academic in nature, but that directly impact students’ ability to be successful in their classes and in earning their credentials.

Leeward CC’s Student Services Division embodies the following Units and Programs. Each play a unique role in students’ academic life; but all are focused on 1) helping students start, continue and complete their education; 2) providing support and resources to address challenges that jeopardize students’ progress; and 3) alleviating institutional, administrative and/or other barriers that prevent students’ forward movement.

Admissions and Records (A&R)
The Admissions & Records Office is often the first point of contact people have with the College. It oversees students’ admission; maintains their academic records as they progress through their academic programs (i.e., their grades and transcripts); and helps to confer all of their degrees and certificates once earned. It also serves as both an access and acceleration point for transfer students who wish to utilize previously earned credits to earn a degree; to students utilizing their veterans benefits to support their education; and any other student who needs their enrollment and/or course-taking verified in order to secure employment, scholarship funding, admission to the next level of education, etc. The Admissions & Records Office plays an important role in students’ entry into the College, their progression through their coursework, and their completion of this leg of their academic journey.

Counseling
Once a student’s journey begins, the Counseling Unit is the main provider of academic guidance and non-academic support. Counselors start students on the right path by providing initial advising for all first-year students. They then help to keep students on that path by providing continued academic advising (including transfer advising) and by intervening when students perform poorly. Counselors help students traverse the many facets of a student’s educational journey. This includes navigating the College’s processes and procedures; establishing educational and/or career goals; managing their financial supports; successfully negotiating work-school-life balance; practicing self-advocacy; and overcoming academic and personal challenges, to name a few. Counselors also are the arbiters of graduation, performing all degree audits to confirm eligibility for credential conferral. Each of the Unit’s 20 Counselors are asked to monitor and steward the educational journeys of a specific caseload of students—so every student has a counselor.

Early College
In order to increase the State’s college-going and college success rates, Leeward CC’s Early College Program provides high school students with the opportunity to take college courses while still in high school. The program targets those who do not traditionally aspire to college (e.g., low-income and first-generation students), and the credits students earn can be applied to both high school graduation and college degree requirements. The program strives to prepare students for
college success on all levels, and to meet the College’s student success goals. Leeward CC’s Early College Program depends heavily upon its partnerships with students’ high schools.

**Financial Aid**
The Financial Aid Office serves as the arbiter for federal, UH system and institutional aid that is given to students in support of their education. Although this office awards some merit-based funding, the majority of their resources support those who are both underrepresented in higher education and who stand to benefit most from it—i.e., low-income students. Because much of the funding given out by this office allows for continued financial support, the Financial Aid Office is key in helping students start, continue and then complete their education. The Financial Aid Office also plays an essential role in helping to provide equitable access to education for those who are underrepresented.

**Hawaii Nutrition Employment & Training (HINET) Program**
Through a partnership with the Department of Human Services (DHS), the HINET Program helps eligible students receive food stamps and other supports for their basic needs so that they can successfully engage in their education. Participating students must meet the DHS income standards and must be pursuing a short-term, workforce credential. The HINET Program is extremely important as it helps to fill the gaps for students who are ineligible for federal aid, who qualify for insufficient levels of aid, and/or who are pursuing non-credit credentials. The HINET Program also serves as a conduit that connects qualifying students to other State resources (e.g., childcare, TANF, housing, emergency assistance, etc.).

**Job Prep Services**
The Job Prep Services Office helps students prepare for employment. It provides them with career assessment and exploration tools; it helps them develop the skills to actually apply for jobs (e.g., resume building, interviewing, effective job searching, effective application submission); it helps to expose students to different job opportunities within intended fields; and it connects students with potential employers.

**Recruitment**
The Recruitment Office focuses on increasing Leeward CC’s enrollment. It helps to raise public awareness about the College, and it supports and promotes the (re)enrollment of a wide variety of constituents. The Recruitment Office coordinates and runs all campus tours; provides representation at Career & College Fairs and other events; performs various college-going workshops at the high schools; and provides application assistance to people who are interested in attending the College. The Recruitment Office also serves as the College’s primary liaison with its service area high schools, adult community schools, military educational centers and alternative educational sites.

**Student Health Center (SHC)**
The Student Health Center is an extension of University Health Services at Manoa. It provides health care services that include but are not limited to health education, disease prevention, and treatment for acute episodic illness and family planning services to Leeward CC students, faculty, and staff. The SHC also works with Admissions & Records to ensure that the State of Hawaii
mandated health requirements for entrance to post-secondary school are met. The mission of the SHC is to achieve and maintain a healthy student body and college community.

**Student Life**
The Student Life Office helps to keep students engaged in their education by 1) offering them a conduit through which they can build connections; 2) offering them an opportunity to develop leadership skills; and 3) fostering a sense of community within the student body. Student Life does this through organizing and executing campus-wide events; facilitating the establishment and continuation of student organizations; overseeing the campus’s Student Government programs; and by coordinating and running its multi-campus intramural sports program. Nurturing involvement is important to students’ retention. Not only do students want to remain a part of our community because of these activities, but those involved in these Student Life programs must 1) perform at a certain level academically; and 2) stay enrolled at the campus in order to participate.

**Veterans Resource Center (VRC)**
The Veterans Resource Center (VRC) provides specialized services for military veterans, active duty servicemembers, reservists, guardsmen, and their dependents. It supports these students through all phases of their educational journey—particularly in their entry to the College and in their continuation from semester to semester. The VRC is key in helping students understand how to access and retain the military benefits that finance their education. It is also poised to support and provide resources to students who experience difficulty. The VRC houses a Leeward CC Counselor as well as a partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), who provides both an onsite Psychologist and a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

**Dean of Student Services Office**
The Dean of Student Services Office coordinates and oversees the efforts of all of the units within Student Services. It provides leadership and guidance; provides advocacy and resource development; oversees and manages various student success initiatives; acts as an ombudsman for students when they encounter difficulty with the College’s processes; and ensures the health and safety of the campus by administering and enforcing the Student Conduct Code as well as the University’s Title IX policy.

Collectively, the offices mentioned above contribute to the College’s efforts to enroll, retain and then transfer and/or graduate (i.e., completion) students—a process otherwise known as the Student Success continuum.

**EVALUATION SUMMARY**

Over the last year, many things changed. The COVID-19 pandemic completely shut the community down, and the University spent the entire academic year online. Our students experienced many repercussions from this in both their academic and their non-academic spheres. Many found their lives disrupted, their responsibilities expanded and their focus shifted to securing basic needs. Community-wide health and safety measures such as telework, social distancing and online/remote services made it difficult for the College and for Student Services to connect with students.
Therefore, in this last year, we saw a notable decline in student engagement, participation and service usage in almost every way.

There were a few exceptions where service utilization remained the same or increased. In general, areas that helped with students’ immediate needs continued to be tapped by students at either the same or increased levels as previous years (e.g., Counseling, Food Pantry, Urgent Student Relief Funding). Conversely, services that provided support and guidance for longer-term concerns (e.g., Job Prep Services, Early College, new admission) saw a considerable decline in usage. This shift in student patronage directly reflected the changes in their needs. Where they once focused on longer-term endeavors, their more basic and urgent needs now took centerstage.

Because the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic heavily influenced how Student Services was utilized this year, our annual review must keep this context in mind. In many ways, this year is an outlier for Student Services; it does not accurately represent the typical demand, effectiveness or efficiency of the area or its units. So, although we can reflect on what occurred, we cannot compare it to what may have been happening pre-pandemic.

When we do reflect on what occurred in AY 2020-2021, we can see the impacts of the pandemic:

**Program Demand**

In general, there was a smaller, but still significant demand for the services provided by Student Services. Our areas were successful in meeting these demands, even though it was more difficult given the fact that a University-wide hiring freeze created personnel shortages; that a University-wide spending freeze created resource shortages; and that we needed to transact most if not all of our business remotely (online, via phone, etc.).

**Enrollment**

- The College received 9,652 applications for admission, which represented a 12.5% decrease from the previous year.
- Of these, 2,109 were from Early College students, which represented an 18.8% shortfall from the previous year.
- 1,936 applications were from transfer students. These students have college credits and are likely in need of transcript evaluation services. Approximately 24.9% of our 2020-21 applicants fell into this category. Although this number remains high, it again represents about a 16.4% drop in applications from the previous year, even though the proportion of transfer applicants in the overall applicant pool remained pretty steady.
- Of the students who did enter and register in Fall, over 40% (40.5%) were supported by federal financial aid. In the Spring, financial aid supported over a third (33.7%). This represented approximately a 4.1% decline from the previous Fall term, but held steady from the previous Spring.

**Retention and Persistence**

- 4,078 students who had applied to our campus during the evaluation period enrolled in classes. This represents a decrease of about 8.2% and is probably related to the lower application rates seen over the academic year. It also puts us on par with the 2018-19
academic year as well as those which preceded it; the application to enrollment rates in 2019-20 were exceptionally high and seem to represent an anomaly. The 8.2% loss in enrollment almost completely reverses the 8.5% gain seen in that one year.

- 1,368 of the 4,078, or 33.5%, of the applicants who subsequently enrolled were Early College students. This is 12.9% fewer students than in the last evaluation period, and a complete reversal of the upward trend that we had witnessed in the years prior to the pandemic.
- Student Services continued to support a student body of over 8,700 throughout the academic year, which translated into roughly 6,300 students a semester (Fall and Spring). This was consistent with the previous year and reversed the downward trend in overall enrollment that the College has experienced over the previous 4 years.
- Less than half (approximately 43%) of the continuing students at Leeward CC financed their education with federal student aid each semester. About 10.5% of Leeward CC’s students financed their education using VA benefits, and 80 students were supported by HINET.
- An average of 16.4% of enrolled students and an average of 23.2% of newly enrolled students were transfer students who have college credits that needed to be officially applied to our degree requirements.
- About 11% of our student body were veterans or military-connected, representing no change from the previous year.
- Between 9%-10% of our student body were Early College students who were dually enrolled in both high school and college.
- Hānai iā Leewar, the College’s Food Pantry, saw an 52.3% increase in student participants last year.
- The College continued to lose enrolled students over the course of time. The College’s Fall to Spring persistence rate continued its plateau of 68%, and its Fall to Fall rate remained steady at about 61%.

Completion
- During the review period, 2,114 credentials were awarded, which is 14.7% more than in the previous year.
- 717 Leeward CC students transferred to a UH 4-year institution, which represented a 6.1% increase over the previous year.

Program Effectiveness
Overall, the enrollment, persistence/retention and completion support provided by Student Services was effective in meeting students’ needs. Collectively, our units informed the public about Leeward CC; processed all application materials received; offered the requisite number of orientations and advising appointments; certified students for VA benefits and HINET and awarded financial aid; supported Early College students and provided resources, information and assistance to continuing students. Even though COVID-19 presented unique barriers and challenges to the way we normally do business, we:

- Admitted and supported the entry of 9,652 students.
- Awarded financial aid to 3,253 students, and supported 80 students through HINET.
• Handled 3,121 health requirements and helped 1,434 students overcome deficiencies in their health requirements so they could enroll. Although this represents a 9% reduction in health clearances management, we also saw a 12% increase in helping students overcome health clearance barriers.
• Took over 1,500 new, first-time students through an online new student orientation.
• Held new student advising sessions with 1,992 students.
• Supported the enrollment and continued needs of 8,700 students in AY 2020-21, which translated into approximately 6,300 students a semester.
• Facilitated greater success of the 471 Early College students in Fall 2020, 695 in Spring 2021 and 355 in Summer 2021 who were enrolled in our Early College courses at the high schools. They achieved about an 87% success rate (i.e., were awarded grades of “C” or higher).
• Supported individual students’ and their needs via 16,831 counseling appointments.
• Provided opportunities for students to engage and build their relationship with the college community via student-generated videos, virtual gaming, virtual student activities, podcasts, etc. via various Student Life programs.
• Conferred 2,114 degrees and certificates.

Over the past year, we made significant strides in a couple of specific areas:

Yield Rate. Even though the College received less applications, the number of students who were admitted and then subsequently enrolled (i.e., the yield rate) steadily improved. During this review period, 45.5% of those who were admitted for the Fall and 59.7% of those admitted for Spring registered for classes. This is a 3.5% and 7.6% improvement respectively from the previous Fall and Spring. This outcome is significant; the College’s yield rate has remained steady and/or has been declining over the past 5 years—despite efforts to improve it. So, even though we received less applications overall, more of the students we admitted registered for classes.

We saw a similar improvement in the yield rate of Early College students. In academic year 2020-21, nearly 79.9% of Early College students who applied went on to register. This is a 5.5% improvement over the previous year.

Perhaps most significant, however, was the improvement in the yield rate among our direct from high school population. The yield rate among this population has always been troubling. The lowest of all applicant populations, its Fall yield rate has been dwindling by an average of 3% a year since 2016. In Fall 2019, it stood at 37.5%, which was 4.5% below the overall yield rate that year. However, it improved over the last year. Although the Fall 2020 yield rate still fell by 2%, the Spring 2021 yield rate jumped by 10%. Even though Spring yield rates traditionally trend upwards by 3% a year, the impact of the changes made in our Recruitment Office, which was fully implemented for the first time in Spring 2021, resulted in larger gains. We are expecting to see a similar impact in Fall 2021. This, again, is significant as we have been unsuccessful thus far to improve this outcome.
**Counseling Access.** Despite the fact that counseling services were offered completely online in AY 2020-21, students continued to access counselors and did so at a higher rate. Where other campuses saw a decline in counseling appointments, our Counseling Unit held steady and actually saw a 1% increase in student appointments.

**Engagement with HINET.** In the last year, HINET’s reach exponentially increased. Traditionally, this program received around 100-120 inquiries from students. This year, the number of inquiries received quadrupled. As HINET is an essential resource that can help students stay enrolled in and focused on their studies, it is important that students are aware of and are actively trying to connect with it.

**Food Distributions.** The community-wide shutdown caused by the COVID-19 pandemic left many of our students newly unemployed. The number of students on our campuses who now faced food insecurity issues therefore increased. Consequently, our Food Pantry saw a 52.3% increase in student usage over the last year. In order to meet the demands of our students, Hānai iā Leeward increased their food distributions on both the Pearl City and Waianae campuses from once every other month to twice a month; partnered with the College’s agriculture program to add fresh produce to its distribution; and partnered with the College’s Culinary Arts Program to add hot, prepared food to the items distributed. Hānai iā Leeward also added baby items, such as diapers, wipes, etc. to their inventory to support student parents.

**Course Success of Early College Students.** Although the participation of Early College students was slightly lower than in previous years, those who did participate succeeded at higher rates. Early College students achieved an overall success rate that was nearly 9% higher than in the previous evaluation year.

Although we made some gains in AY 2020-21, there is still work to do.

**Enrollment**

- For the first time in nearly a decade, we have improved our yield rates. Due to the changes made in our Recruitment and Counseling Offices last year, we have successfully reversed the historic downward trend and are converting more admitted students into enrolled ones. This, however, has been at the expense of the top of the enrollment funnel. In order to effectively shepherd students through our on-boarding process, we have had to redirect our resources from outreach (i.e., raising awareness of the College and soliciting applications) to recruitment (i.e., case managing accepted students through the on-boarding process). This has resulted in lower application submission rates, which, in turn, ultimately result in less enrollments even if we are converting more of the applied into enrolled.

- Despite our best efforts, we can still see that there are “leaks” at every step of our entry pipeline. This ultimately results in the loss of students. In Fall 2020, for example, we received 5,119 applications. Of those, we admitted 4,730 students—2,373 of which were new to college and needed to go through new student orientation (NSO). However, only 1,467 (61.8%) completed NSO and met with a counselor for new student advising. Of the students who completed their advising, only 1,142 (77.7%) actually registered. So, at each step, we continued to lose students; and this pattern of loss has held true over-time.
Most of the students in 2020-2021 who were awarded Financial Aid ultimately enrolled at the College (86.1%). This is an improvement of almost 5% over the last year, and reflects the intentional efforts our Recruitment Office made to follow up with awarded but unenrolled students. Even with this improvement, however, nearly 14% of those who have the financial means to enroll did not. Additionally, less than half of those who complete a FAFSA with us go on to enroll at the College. This pattern has been constant over the last 3 years, and is another “leak” in the pipeline.

Our Early College students fare better. During this evaluation period, we experienced an average 79.9% yield rate from Early College applicants—despite the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Retention and Persistence

We have not made any significant gains in our semester-to-semester persistence rates. They have stagnated—remaining at the exact same levels for the last 5 years. We continue to lose a little less than a third of our students from Fall to Spring, and then about 40% from Fall to Fall. A deeper dive into the data, however, shows that there may be some specific opportunities to help impact the loss:

- Our full-time students, across all student types, tend to fare the best. We have, and have held steady, high Fall to Spring retention rates of full-time students.
- HINET Program participants also seem to persist at higher levels. 75% of all HINET participants persisted from Fall to Spring. Financial Aid recipients also seem to persist at higher levels.
- We seem to lose part-time students the most. Across all student types (e.g., transfer students, returning students, continuing students, etc.), our part-time students are retained at rates about 10-20 percentage points below their full-time counterparts.
- We are most challenged with retaining our returning students. Among both part-time and full-time students, we only retain about half of those who start with us in the Fall semester into the following Spring.

Underperforming (UAP) students contribute to our attrition rates.

- On average, we lose about half of the students placed on UAP each semester; many do not or cannot re-enroll after receiving an academic sanction. Students placed on academic warning, which is the first academic sanction, represents the largest group of students lost. About 60% of all underperforming students were at the academic warning level last year; and 52% of these students did not persist into the next semester. The rate of loss for this student group remained consistent compared to the last evaluation period.
- The persistence rate of underperforming financial aid recipients stands to be even bleaker. Federal regulations tie academic performance with financial aid eligibility. Because of this, students who underperform often lose their funding, which hampers their ability to continue.
- Preliminary data suggests, however, that UAP students who 1) receive a counselor intervention; and 2) have registering for the next semester as part of that intervention, are much more likely to persist.

Although we continue to see unprecedented growth in Early College participation and typically maintain high student success rates, we are still challenged in delivering advising services to
them. Although more Early College students met with their Leeward CC Counselor last year than in the previous year, we still are only successful in connecting with 24% of the Early College population. As Early College classes have a unique impact on students’ academic record and future college journey, it is imperative that they are advised well and understand the implications of their Early College participation.

Additionally, the College’s overall enrollment rate continues to decline. Although our enrollment stabilized in this last evaluation cycle for the first time in the last 5 years, the gains that we make in enrollment are among Early College students—they are the ones who fill in our enrollment gaps. This is a concerning trend as Early College students 1) require more support and resources; 2) by-in-large will not continue from semester to semester and/or complete degrees with us; and 3) only enroll in 1-2 classes a semester. It is imperative that our campus continues to build our regular student enrollment.

Although Student Services is not solely responsible for these institutional outcomes, we do track and monitor them, as they are the ones that we try to help impact.

Student Services has already begun to position ourselves to improve our outcomes. We have:

- Initiated and contributed to campus-wide conversations focused on improving enrollment. We have partnered with other entities of the College (e.g., instruction, retention specialists, communications and marketing, etc.) to help reach out to various student groups and encourage them to enroll/re-enroll. We plan to expand our efforts by convening a division-wide Strategic Enrollment Management (SEM) taskforce that will formulate a comprehensive enrollment strategy.
- Deployed Signal Vine 2-way text messaging to encourage students to continue through the on-boarding process (new students) and to re-register each semester (continuing students).
- Convened a Student Services taskforce to develop and implement a Student Services-wide communication strategy and infrastructure. This strategy, once completed, will identify the critical messaging that should be deployed to students throughout their educational journey. It will also identify the best and most appropriate communication vehicle for the various types of messaging.
- Begun to develop a cohesive strategy to 1) ensure new student enrollment; and 2) intervene with more UAP students so that more can be retained.
- Continue the process of repositioning all offices so that they are best able to contribute to the College’s goals of improving enrollment, retention and completion. In this past evaluation cycle, the leaders of all Student Services units arrived at shared goals and target outcomes for the different phases of a student’s journey, and they identified the offices that should be involved in delivering each.

**Program Efficiency**

Although Student Services has been largely successful at meeting the needs presented, all struggle with achieving the efficiencies that could allow them to be more effective and impactful. A common theme throughout all of the Student Services offices—especially those who are highly regulated by compliance demands—continues to be an extremely high workload burden created by
the need to simultaneously execute and manage a multitude of processes that are 1) highly diverse in both their goals and in what is required; 2) highly complex; 3) constantly expanding and changing; and 4) lack the resources and tools, including technology and easy and timely access to data, that would make the work efficient. Much of the work executed by the offices within Student Services are highly manual in nature. As a result, their ability to be “efficient” as well as adaptive to new requests and situations rests entirely on the capacities (both in numbers and in abilities) of their human resources.

We have seen significant improvement over the last year in a few areas. However, until we are able to secure more tools, achieving efficiency will remain difficult and will continue to compromise the effectiveness of Student Services as a whole.

Here are a few highlights from the Area’s program data that reflects this.

**Admissions**

One of the ways in which we determine efficiency in enrollment is by looking at application processing times. Admissions and Record’s goal is to process regular applications within an average of 14 days upon receipt. The ability to admit a student quickly has a direct impact on students’ subsequent decision to enroll with us.

As a College, we have historically struggled to meet our application processing goal. In past years, factors, such as unanticipated staff shortages, heavily impacted our ability to process applications on-time. However, in this past evaluation cycle, significant strides were made in this area. Starting in Spring 2021, the UHCC system adopted a new online application and admissions portal. These tools introduced a great deal of automation and allowed our Admissions Office to review and handle applications in-bulk, which was a huge improvement over the one-by-one processing that had to occur previously. Our campus’s effort to adopt this new system quickly showed in processing times for Spring 2021 (which was the inaugural semester). An even larger impact was seen in the subsequent Summer term.

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<th>Fall 2019</th>
<th>Spring 2020</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Average: 37 days</td>
<td>Average: 23 days</td>
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<td>Median: 22 days</td>
<td>Median: 24 days</td>
<td>Median: 5 days</td>
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The new application has made a huge impact in an area where we traditionally struggled to improve. Now that the process is more efficient and less labor-intensive for staff, our campus has the capacity to entertain different admissions strategies and practices that previously could not be considered due to workload implications.
This is a prime example of how tools, such as automation and technology, 1) help us make significant strides towards achieving our desired outcomes; and 2) introduce a greater ability for offices to be flexible, nimble and responsive.

**Recruitment and Outreach**

Over the past year, our Recruitment and Outreach office has been highly successful in transitioning from an outreach to a case management focused entity. However, they struggle under the weight of their activities as they are highly manual and inefficient. This office’s ability to identify where students are, in-process, at any given time so that they can intervene rests completely on their ability to obtain timely and accurate data on large groups of students. Having access to real-time data is ideal as students are constantly taking steps forward, so their place in the process is always changing. Static data becomes irrelevant quickly.

Our Recruitment and Outreach office, however, does not have ready access to the type of information they need. Instead, they are relegated to manually pulling, sorting through and matching raw data using existing (and not customized) reports in order to carry out their work. This is a time consuming and inaccurate process that requires a high level of training to execute, and results in a finished product that is already obsolete. This is a highly inefficient process that translates into wasted time and effort as phone calls and outreach activities inevitably include those who no longer need it.

Having a technological tool that is conducive to tracking and monitoring students and that is automatically fed by regular data loads, such as a CRM, would be game changing for this office and their outcomes.

**Transcript Evaluations**

Evaluating transcripts in an efficient and timely way is critical for students who enter our campus with some higher education experience. It is not only important for enrollment; it is also important for continuation and timely completion of a student’s degree. Students need to know, both at the juncture of deciding where to enroll and at the juncture of making registration decisions, if and how their previous credits apply. This, oftentimes, is a deciding factor in which college a student decides to attend.

However, we continue to fall short in our ability to evaluate transcripts in a timely way.

The College is inefficient at evaluating transcripts. Because we have minimal resources committed to this area, our processing times lag by about 12-14 weeks. This means that, on average, it takes almost an entire semester to finish evaluating a student’s transcript once it is requested. Our processing times have held steady at this rate over the past 3 years—ever since our transcript evaluation resources were reduced in 2016. This is problematic and can affect our enrollment.

Additionally, because of our resource limitations, we won’t evaluate a student’s transcript unless they are already enrolled with us. Although helpful from a workload management perspective, this practice is problematic for enrollment. Many students who have already accumulated credits are looking for an institution that will allow them to leverage their credits so they can attain their
credential efficiently. They do not want to enroll in an institution where their past credits can’t be 
utilized. So, the fact that we expect students to commit to our institution before we will tell them 
where they stand in terms of credit attainment can deter them from enrolling with us—especially if 
other institutions are able to provide them with the information they seek. Our College receives 
approximately 2,000 applications from transfer students each year. However, less than half of them 
actually enroll with us.

Students with past college credits who are financing their education with some kind of benefit (e.g., 
financial aid, veterans/military benefits) maybe particularly impacted by our inefficiencies in this 
area. Some of these programs require/will require students to have their transcripts officially 
evaluated before they register for classes; if they do not, they are ineligible for their benefits. If we 
continue to be unable to evaluate a student’s transcript prior to their enrollment, we risk losing 
and/or seeing a significant reduction in the enrollment of these student populations as well.

As was the case in Admissions, the transcript evaluation process is highly manual; therefore, it is 
arduous and heavily dependent on human resources. If we are to affect any kind of change in this 
area, we will need to invest either in additional technologies that will improve efficiency, or we 
need to invest more heavily in human resources.

Veterans Benefits
The time it takes us to complete the processes that allow students to access their funding also affects 
enrollment. Therefore, we need to look at our efficiency in programs such as Veterans’ (VA) 
Benefits.

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<tr>
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In 2020-21, the amount of time it took for the College to complete students’ VA certifications 
increased; so, it appears as though our efficiency in this area decreased. This is problematic as the 
2019-20 data had already represented a decreased efficiency from the previous evaluation year. So, 
this means our efficiency in this area is on a steady decline.

However, the data can be deceiving. Many times, longer processing times can be attributed to 
student delays in providing the required documentation. The mandate to move to telework and 
remote communication and service beginning in Spring 2020 could’ve also exacerbated this. In 
general, VA benefits certifications are completed within 1-2 weeks of receiving the required 
documentation.

The increased inefficiency in 2020-21 does, in part, reflect a change in staffing and decreased 
resources in this area. In Fall 2020, the College lost its VA Certifying Official to retirement as well 
as its part-time VA clerk. Because the University’s hiring freeze prevented us from filling these
vacated positions, the work of these individuals had to be absorbed by staff members who 1) did not usually perform these duties; and 2) who had to shoulder them on top of their regular assignments. The transition to less experienced staff and the loss of focused and dedicated VA resources compromised our College’s overall efficiency.

**Needed Resources**

Overall, there are many areas of inefficiencies within the different Student Services Offices that prevent us from being able to make bigger impacts on intended outcomes.

It is our intention, over the next year, to 1) continue to evaluate, pinpoint and address areas where we can improve our efficiencies in order to have a greater impact on student enrollment, persistence/retention and completion; and 2) acquire the tools and resources to do it, including access to meaningful and timely data.

We do know that, at a minimum, all of our offices will highly benefit from the following tools in order to increase efficiency, and have a bigger impact on student success:

- A communication relationship management (CRM) software that will allow for the identification, tracking, monitoring, intervention and automated communication with various student subgroups. This type of tool is not only needed to facilitate the entry of students; it is also needed to help the College stay in compliance with various federal and state regulations (e.g., financial aid, NC-SARA) as it implements new initiatives (e.g., Online AA degree program, Course Program of Study, accelerated classes/programs, fully online programs, Early College, etc.).
- Effective, user-friendly, regularly updated and available data dashboards that will allow us to track and monitor our efforts, inform strategy design and inform resource allocation.
- A technological tool that will increase efficiency in our transcript evaluation process as well as additional staffing in this area.
- A Welcome Center Coordinator who can focus on managing the Welcome Center and its staff and who can lend additional support to Student Services-wide initiatives (e.g., Student Services communication initiative, maintaining the Ocelot Chatbot, maintaining Signal Vine, etc.).
- A centralized, IT staff person who can, at minimum:
  - Set up, configure and maintain the various software systems being or will be used by Student Services in support of multiple work functions (e.g., STAR, MySuccess, NSO Online, SECE, the Liaison application, the Ocelot ChatBot, SignalVine, any communication-relations management software adopted by the College, etc.).
  - Design, configure and maintain online systems that will allow for secure online submission of forms as well as the routing of those forms through various workflows.
  - Design and maintain the digital signage that will be present in the Welcome Center.
  - Create and design efficient and secure database systems that work with and between systems already being used by the campus.
- Alterations to BANNER pages that would allow for increased automation of our processes.
- Continued funding for the electronic platforms acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e., NSO Online platform, Ocelot ChatBot, Signalvine).