

## Students frustrated navigating financial aid

By **Nia Daniels**  
Staff Writer

"Financial aid knows me by a first name basis because I come there almost every day with my financial issues, so our relationship is quaint," said Charles Gates, a junior biology major. "I've had multiple issues with financial aid where my financial aid package with Langston University didn't go through ... There were other issues where I was going over budget.

"I'm in a very good situation with my financial aid, and they were taking more money from my actual honors regent's scholarship I received. Logistically it makes sense why they did what they did but there was no communication that they were going to do this, and that was the main issue I had with them. If financial aid communicated with me this prior, I would've had a different outlook on my situation. I know financial aid has a hard job; they deal with money. I feel like the biggest thing they could do is have open communication with the students regarding their personal accounts."

Currently there are eight people working on the financial aid team. They used to have ten. One of the eight works as an associate director at the Tulsa Campus, but the main central processing area is at the Langston campus. Here they process all undergraduate students from all the Langston campuses including OKC, Ardmore and Tulsa. Financial aid plays a big role in the university because they must communicate with the registrar, academic affairs and student affairs. They're the middleman of it all.

For Nacasaw Coppage, the assistant director of financial aid, the job is about "being able to alleviate the stress of students for however long they're here. Having the capability to help with their finances for school and getting to see them walk across the stage."

She loves that she can be an important part of students' success. Coppage started in 2005 as a student loan clerk, left and then came back in 2014.

Madeline Thao is a junior nursing major and visited the financial aid office this semester. She had a balance on her account that wasn't supposed to be there because she's a McCabe scholar, meaning she has a full-ride scholarship.

She went through the process of signing in correctly and waiting for

a financial aid advisor to call her name to meet with her. Once they called her into their office they directed her to another financial aid advisor, and that person told her to email another financial aid advisor for further explanation. Thao grew frustrated, feeling that they kept re-directing her to different people to talk to instead of giving her a direct answer.

"There was another time when I went there and they sent me to the business widow, and the business widow sent me back to financial aid, then I had to go back to the business widow... I would like to see better communication between students and themselves," said Thao.

Another experienced person in the financial aid office is Royce Mack. Mack is the assistant director of financial aid, and a Langston business administration graduate from the class of 1988. Mack started working at upward bound and worked with high school students to prepare them for high school matriculation. As a Langston employee she worked for the family and consumer sciences program and the development foundation before transitioning to financial aid in 2009.

She's had a feel in all areas and had a chance to work with everybody. In financial aid she worked as a default management coordinator, records department, loan coordinator position, freshmen counselor and currently is the assistant director. She is retiring from this position in June.

The goal of financial aid, as they explain it, is to ensure students have the financial capabilities they need to reach their goals and get their degree. That includes scholarships, student loans, Pell grants and financial aid "but we want students to aim for scholarships, which is free money to avoid debt," said Coppage.

Financial aid recommends for students to reach out via email, walk-ins or by logging into virtual zoom. The virtual zoom session is available Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. All students need to do is jump on the Zoom, and it's a quick way to communicate with a financial aid advisor. At times the phones are busy so it's hard for calls to get through because the telephone volume is huge and difficult to manage.

According to Coppage it's important for students to have their student ID number ready when they

come speak to financial aid, but that information alone is rarely enough. "If you come in make sure your parent is available as well... It's always good to have the parent involved because the parent helps ensure students success by going through the process of financial aid, and the parent can help the process run smoother." Parents can provide information that some students don't know like how much income both their parents make and tax information.

"Honestly, I would prefer if the parent calls on the office phone if I can call them," Mack said. "I don't like to feel like I'm being blindsided... It is also helpful to know what parents/students are needing because we can do the research prior to and then we're ready and better prepared to answer the questions that they have."

Two important documents that students must fill out are the FAFSA and the FERPA. The FAFSA is available Oct. 1 of each year and closes

Jun. 30. Every student has to submit the application annually and if students are under 24, their parent needs to include their information and sign it. The earlier the FAFSA is completed, the better shape students are in to receive their financial aid package.

The FERPA needs to be filled out just once and is essential if students want their parents to access their financial aid information. If a parent calls the financial aid office and they don't have a FERPA the financial aid team can't discuss any information with them.

Students often express frustration with working with the office. Ezra McWilliams is a freshman agricultural business major and some of the issues he's had with financial aid have been receiving the proper help and knowledge about documents, scholarships and getting his bills cleared on time.

"Financial aid's system is really **continues page 8**

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