

Lack of Communication between Financial Aid Departments and Other Departments at

Columbus State University.

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Nat Turner once said, “Communication is the bridge between confusion and clarity”. As a college student, life is nothing short of a rollercoaster that never ends. With ups and downs that are unavoidable and the unexpected roadblocks that lead to major distress and consume the mind with endless doubt it can be uncomfortable trying to figure life out. At a school like Columbus State University with extensive resources to help students take care of their mental health by the encouragement to speak with the Counseling Center, it’s quite ironic that the stress put on most of the students comes from a neighboring department-Financial Aid.

As a rising senior at Columbus State University, I have encountered my own difficulties with the Financial Aid Department as well as heard horror stories from other students. The problem lies where the communication between departments has been severed. For example, at the end of my spring semester in 2021, my financial aid was not "in good standing" and I was told to pay a large amount of money all at once or I would be dropped from my classes. However, when I spoke to the dean of students she reassured me that I wouldn't have to do that and I quote, " I do not know why they keep telling people that."

This experience has led me to wonder how the lack of communication between school departments affects the relationship/trust that is built with students. In my research, I will be comparing the structure versus the actions of the department as described in the Structuration Theory. With this theory, I hope to reveal how the Financial Aid Department chooses to interact and serve the CSU students. As well as portraying the stresses that this particular department has placed on students as well as the barrier of trust that this department has created with in light of its efforts to help students. The advantages of conducting this research using The Structuration

Theory would consist of being able to see the approaches that the Financial Aid has when dealing with sensitive issues of the students at Columbus State University. As well as being able to see how these approaches have either harmed or benefited the students. Lastly, the advantages of Structuration Theory to conduct my research will allow for a new perspective of the interactions and relationships between CSU students and the Financial Aid Department. In this, my research will be able to help me answer how the lack of communication between school departments affects the relationship/trust that is built with students.

### **Research Design Overview**

In conducting this research, I will be collecting data by way of an interview. I will be conducting the interviews by way of video call, so I will be able to see the participants' reactions to the questions. As well as understand by body language the impact of talking about such a stressful department has on a participants atmosphere, confidence, etc. Continually, the strategies for analytic- data will be to take notes of the participants' answers as well as the environmental shifts when speaking on the subject. In conjunction with recording the interview- with consent of the participant- to re-watch for any subtle changes that I could have missed while jotting notes.

### **Researchers' Description**

As the researcher, my understanding of the untrustworthy relationship built between students and the Financial Aid comes from personal experience. From having anxiety from preparing myself to make a phone call to the department to walking into the department office and being told misinformation about my tuition. Not to forget, speaking with financial aid at times leaves you with more questions than you came with. In this, the research collected from by participants will expectantly provide the same results.

**Participant**

For my research, I will be including two participants in my research. One participant is a college student at Columbus State University who majors in Biology. The other is a Columbus State University Alumni. One participant is caucasian with a moderate grade point average. The Alumni is Black and received the Georgia HOPE Scholarship. Lastly, one of the participants is also not an American citizen.

**Researchers- participant relationship**

The relationship between the researchers and participants are close friends and siblings. One participant I have been in relationship with for almost two years from being neighbors in the dorms in 2020. Both participants are familiar with each other, but are not aware that each other is participating in the interviews.

**Participant Recruitment**

The participants were recruited by receiving phone calls by the researcher asking for their permission to participate to be interviewed for my research. I decided to use them as my research subject because they are reliable enough to be able to participate during the summer. They also will be able to give me genuine answers to my questions because they are comfortable enough to answer the questions without worrying about having to give an answer that is appropriate.

**Data Collection**

The data for this research will be collected by conducting interviews with two participants who are/were students at Columbus State University. The questions that I will be asking in the interview would be along the lines of

1. How has your experience with Financial Aid impacted your college career?

2. Do you consider your relationship with Financial Aid healthy?
3. How has your school helped to fix your problems with Financial Aid?

### **Analysis**

When analyzing my data, I first began by looking over the notes that I took during the interview in conjunction with playing back the video and audio of the interviews. In this, I was able to transcribe my interviews where I then able to conduct analytic memoing. Continually, I was able to find common themes in both interviews which further led me to find subthemes of my data.

### **Findings**

In my research, I found many overlapping ideas or answers from both participants. This was a great achievement for me because it helped me to further identify the themes and subthemes in my data.

- Theme 1: Impact of Financial Aid on Students.

In my interviews, I recognized that students did not negate the fact that financial aid is an important department and that it does have big shoes to fill. Although, the participants of my research did not fail to mention how financial aid impacted them mentally and emotionally. As stated in the Code of Conduct found on the Columbus State University Website regarding financial aid it states, “ Understand the need for financial education and commit to educate students and families on how to responsibly manage expenses and debt.”

In conducting my interviews, the discrepancies between the Ethical Principles and the interaction the students experience.

**Participant 1-** the person seeking financial aid would have a better education of what financial aid is and how they can actually help in simplistic terms. And not feel like the person that is trying to receive financial aid feel like they have to figure it all out. If that makes sense.

**Participant 2-** “I would say it would help because they would know what's going on between each other and between the person who has the problem so it won't be like “oh you need to go here, oh you need to go here, oh you need to go here” we could just figure it out in one place at one time.”

- Impact 1: Ruined Productivity

A correlation that I found when interviewing my participants was that both felt that the financial aid department ruined their productivity.

**Participant 1-** Y: When speaking with financial aid, does the stress created by that department ruin your productivity?

T: Yes, because I think it sends the whole expectation of it. I feel like your mood affects that. Like if you have a negative mood towards it, then it goes not that smoothly.

**Participant 2-** Y: When speaking with financial aid, did the stress created by this department ruin your productivity?

T: Some sort of way. It made me worry about how to pay for school more than how to do my work most of the time.

These provide evidence for my research question because it helps to not only find a common stressor of students, but also pinpoints exactly how it is done. In conjunction with the communication of the departments, it would seem effective for the departments to be more aware of stressors of their students when trying to enforce a trusting relationship for other departments like Counseling.

- Impact 2: Relationship

Although, this can be seen as another discrepancy between how the department interacts with students and the overall structure of the department from the Ethical Principles that can be found on the Columbus State University website. For example, In the section entitled “*Manifest the highest level of integrity*”- the second bullet states, “ Deal with others honestly and fairly, abiding by our commitments and always acting in a manner that merits the trust and confidence others have placed in us.” In my own personal experience that is stated at the beginning of the paper, I was left with false information which caused me to lack trust and confidence in the financial aid department. As for my participants, they conveyed to me that they either fully did not trust financial aid or are neutral about the trusting relationship built with financial aid. Due to the stress caused by this department it can be assumed that this could be the leading factor for this.

**Theme 2:** Communication of the Financial Aid Department

At Columbus State University, there is the Financial Aid Department and the Bursar’s Office. Upon multiple first encounters, the process of being transferred back and forth between these two departments to answer a question can be seen as time consuming and unnecessary. This is where the communication of the financial aid department and departments surrounding could be useful.

When the participants of my interviews were asked if they believed that financial aid could be better off if the communication between departments were better they did not hesitate to agree. One participant blatantly stated, “YES”. Another participant stated, “No, I don't think there would be much stress if they communicated better.”

By the response given to me by my interview participants, I was able to think about how one department is able to produce unhealthy, unmerited, but unintentional stress to their students. From the evidence provided previously from the Ethical Principles found on the Columbus State University Website, it can be assumed that there are preventative measures in place for these types of situations. This led me to think if the interactions between students and financial aid could lead to further responses by the students when interacting with other departments/administrations of the school.

**Participant 1-** Y: When dealing with the financial aid department how can the stress from this one department ruin the trust of the administration- like Columbus State University-as a whole? Y: So your trust in the school.

T: because the person trying to receive financial aid will have a negative experience, so the expectation to receive help or benefit from the other department surrounding financial aid, there will be a perception of oh it will be bad.

**Participant 2-** Y:When dealing with financial aid, how can stress from the department ruin the trust you have in the CSU administration as a whole?

T: I wouldn't say it would- with the administration as a whole- it would just be with that department. I wouldn't have as much trust in that department rather than the administration.

## **Conclusion**

From my own personal experience with the financial aid department of Columbus State University, I was able to conduct interviews with a current student and an alumni regarding their experiences with the financial aid department using the Structuration Theory . During Interviews, I video recorded and audio recorded the answers of the participants to ensure I was not missing information, body language, voice reflections, etc while taking notes. Moreover, I was able to transcribe my interviews which allowed me to analytically memo. However, this led me to find themes that the participants helped to justify.



At the beginning of my research, I delved into the impact of the Financial Aid department and found many discrepancies between the Ethical Principles found on the Columbus State University Website and the actual interactions with students. For example, my participants felt that information/education about the finances of pursuing their degrees were hard to either access or understand. Another instance of a discrepancy would be the lack of integrity that is felt or experienced when speaking with Financial Aid which led to the untrustworthiness of that the participants conveyed feeling about the department. This can be seen when speaking about the relationship between students and the department. This is tangible for my research question because it shows the impact of ineffective communication from financial aid to students.

In conjunction, the idea of the communication from the Financial Aid department and other departments ties further into the purpose of my research. My participants made it clear that if the Financial Aid department communicated better with other departments that it would be better for the department, the students, and the relationship built between the two. Although, this does show another discrepancy between the interactions with the department and the Ethical Principles because it can be assumed that there are measures that are in place to prevent the issues that come from the Financial Aid department of Columbus State University.

In conducting my interviews, I was inclined to see the stance of my participants on what seems to be a domino effect of the lack of communication from this department and how it will affect the students when it comes to interacting with other departments/administration of Columbus State University.

## Appendix

- **Research Question**

- How does the lack of communication between school departments affect the relationship/trust that is built with students?

- **Why did I find it memorable?**

- This is memorable because of my own personal experience with financial aid and being told that I needed to pay a large amount of money when I was reassured by the Dean of Students that I did not have too.

- **Methods**

- I interviewed a current student and an alumna of Columbus State University about their experiences with Financial Aid.
- I recruited these participants by asking them to participate in my research and gained their consent to be interviewed and recorded.

## Analysis

- I transcribed my interviews and then analyzed them by analytic memoing which helped me to find the themes of my research.
- **Findings and Conclusions**
  - Students feel stressed when talking with the financial aid department.
  - Students do not have a trusting relationship with the financial aid department.
  - Students believe that if the financial aid had better communication with other departments like the Bursar's office would be beneficial.

- Students acknowledge that there may be a disconnect between themselves and other departments of the university.
- Students acknowledge the importance of financial aid.

References

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