Handling Difficult Conversations
Members of the Association recognize that one of the purposes of the Association is to provide training and informational services to its members through training conferences and periodic written material. While the Association shall utilize its best efforts to provide its members with the most current information available, there can be no assurances or warranty that its interpretation of any rule, regulation or statute will be in conformance with any present or future interpretation of such rule, regulation or statute by any appropriate governmental authority.

Accordingly, each member shall hold the Association harmless from any claims, damages, or liability resulting from such member’s use of any information, data, or interpretations as provided to such members by the Association.
Presenters

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Agenda

What is a difficult conversation?

How do we start a difficult conversation?

Types of difficult conversations in financial aid

Difficult conversations with students

Difficult conversations with staff

Difficult conversations with other departments

Resources
Difficult Conversations

Every day in our personal and professional lives we face difficult conversations. Budgeting with our spouse or significant other. Family life with children, parents, in-laws, and the decisions that need to be made.

Then, we choose Financial Aid as our career, and much of our professional life is measured by how we handle the difficult conversations at work with our supervisor, a student, the staff we manage, and other departments on campus.

Difficult conversations are a day-to-day in operations as we respond to issues, concerns and communicate across the campus.

I am sure we can all think of a million different examples but today we will address three - students, staff and other departments.
A crucial conversation has three ingredients:

- High stakes
- Strong emotions
- Opposing opinions

“Each one of us enters a conversation with our own opinions, feelings, theories, and experiences about the topic at hand” – Patterson.
Difficult Conversations

- Satisfactory Academic Progress
- Professional Judgments
- Inability to pay
- Parent refusal to provide information
- Why am I not Pell Eligible?
- Why does FA keep students from staying in school?
Difficult Conversations with Students

• Maintain a dialogue with the student/parent
  • Allow them to express frustrations
  • Let them feel heard
  • Actively listen to what is being said
• State what you agree with
  • Allows the conversation to start on a positive note
• State the facts
  • Do not make it personal
Satisfactory Academic Progress

- Explain why they failed SAP
- Explain this is a Federal requirement
- Ask if they have any questions
- Use plain language
- Offer solutions
Unhappy Parent/Student

Aid has been adjusted or removed

Student or parent calls in upset stating no one told them this would happen!

How do we begin the conversation?
Why am I not Pell eligible?

EFC change from 22-23 to 23-24

I was Pell eligible last year!

How do you start the conversation?

Do you compare FAFSAs?

Has there been a change in the household since FAFSA was filed?

Verification changed EFC

• You changed my FAFSA, and I did not approve that!

• How do you start the conversation?

• Did the family use the IRS DRT? Or did they not transfer their data?

• Has there been a change in the household since their taxes were filed?
Difficult Conversations with Staff

- Timeliness/Work Performance
- Failing to be a member of a team
- New staff struggling to learn Financial Aid
- Teaching your staff to have difficult conversations
- Developing your future leaders
Difficult Conversations with Staff

- Practice what you preach
- Be prepared to stay on topic
- Create the right space for conversation
- LISTEN (Active Listening)
- Practice makes perfect
Difficult Conversations with Other Departments

FERPA

State the facts

Use plain language

Explain the process

Offer solutions
Difficult Conversations with Other Departments

Offer training sessions with other departments

Be part of the conversation on the table

• Committees
• Management
• Division meetings
More Difficult Conversations in 24-25

- **STUDENT AID INDEX (SAI)**
  - How will it change Pell eligibility?

- **Delaying Admissions Process Due to Late FAFSA Release**

- **Why Financial Aid Packages May Be Later Than Normal Due to Delayed FAFSA**

- **Asking Leadership for More Scholarship Money for Students Who Were Pell Eligible and Are Ineligible Now**
QUESTIONS
Thank You!