**1 Situation**

**1.1 Purpose**

I propose to develop a more effective financial aid website for Iowa State students because the current website lacks important information about how to afford college. This new website will allow students to sort through various scholarships with different requirements like need-based, types of demographic information, and various activity involvement. In addition to producing this new effective website, I plan to create a series of financial aid help videos to be uploaded to the website. These videos will provide the students with tips on how to write essays, where to find resources, and how to make appointments with financial aid advisors. These new resources will help more students get aid, have less donor money wasted, and improve the university’s appeal to incoming students.

**1.2 Background:**

Currently, 84% of Iowa State students receive some sort of financial aid through FAFSA and various other financial aid applications, as stated in the Status of Financial Aid packet released from Iowa State. However, according to a website called NerdWallet, “U.S. high school graduates left over $2.9 billion in free federal grant money on the table last academic year.”In an article named, “3 Surprising Reasons Students Don’t Apply for Scholarships,” published on academicworks.com, the three main reasons for students not applying are: many students believe they aren’t eligible, that applying is a waste of time, or that applying for scholarships is only for freshman.

Almost all of the reasons stated above stem from a lack of information provided to students about the available financial aid and how to increase their chances of receiving a scholarship. The Iowa State financial aid website is a prime example because it has many resources but they are buried or linked to a different department. For example, Iowa State University offers a financial counseling clinic through the College of Human Sciences but there is no mention of this on the financial aid website. Instead, if you look in the Frequently Asked Questions section of the financial aid website it will direct you to the Student Loan Education Office, which addresses loan management more than anything else. Some of the other resources that the Iowa State financial aid website lacks are: contact information for different financial aid departments, study abroad financial aid, and scholarship essay tips. This lack of resources and accessibility deters students from applying for financial aid and scholarships.

**2 Objectives**

**2.1 Scope**

This proposal will address the issues of students not completing scholarship applications and the lack of easily accessible information surrounding financial aid at Iowa State. The new website will make these resources more accessible to all students by compiling a list of financial aid resources. An example of what resources will be included are: financial counseling, departmental contact information, and tips on scholarship essay writing, and frequently asked questions by students. This proposal will not be addressing students concerns surrounding loans.

**3 Methods**

**3.1 Approach**

This new website will first be introduced at orientation for incoming freshman, where students will learn how to navigate this website and go through a brief overview of financial aid resources that emphasize the importance of continually applying for financial aid. In an effort for outreach, we will advise the learning communities to encourage both freshman and upperclassman to make use of this new resource. As part of this website, students will be able to create a financial aid profile that allows them to search for scholarships they are eligible for and notifies them when new scholarships become available. While logged into this system, students will also be able to add scholarships that they intend to apply for to their ‘cart’ and the system will periodically send them reminders about their scholarship deadlines. This element will prevent students from forgetting about applications that have previously started which will increase their chances of receiving more scholarships. The proposed website will be different than the current financial aid system, because it will be able to adjust for when a student changes majors or GPA. To accomplish this adaptability, the system will be connected to a student’s AccessPlus account. This feature is helpful because the system will send the student updated reminders about new scholarships now pertaining to them and remind them to disregard old ineligible applications.

I have modeled my system off of John Deere’s online job application system. On John Deere’s online system, they the applicant create a profile that lists basic information and area of interest among the company. The key difference from the John Deere online application system is the variety of search methods on this website. A range of filters is important because it will allow students to find more scholarships, they are eligible for and increase the chances of receiving a scholarship. A few examples of search methods to be provided on the new website are:

* Demographic information (Gender, Sexual Orientation, GPA, Major)
* Whether you want to study abroad or not
* Whether they are need based or not
* Number Essays
* References required

In addition to the new website, I plan to record a series of financial aid help videos provided by the financial aid department. These videos will help upperclassman learn the new system and enforce the idea that they too should be applying for scholarships. The content of these videos will include FAFSA tips, help on scholarship essay writing, where to look for grants, and how and who to get reference letters from.

**3.2 Result**

The new website will provide students with central location to find scholarships that they are eligible for and will send reminders about upcoming deadlines. This will help encourage students to make use of the scholarships already provided to them by the school and be less dependent on loans. These new resources will help more students get aid, have less donor money wasted, and improve the university’s appeal to incoming students.

**4 Qualifications**

**4.1 Personnel**

I will work with the Student Financial Aid Office Director, Roberta Johnson, in order to develop this website, since she has the ability to approve and provide permissions required to build the new design. Furthermore, I will also need the cooperation of the student financial aid office staff, to record the financial aid help videos soon to be uploaded to the website. Since this website will be on the Iowa State home page and will replace the current one, I plan to work with a professional web designer agency like Domain7.com. It is important that we use a professional agency because we need to keep the website secure and have a solid IT support base if anything goes wrong. This is especially important because I plan to have the student’s profiles linked with their AccessPlus accounts.

**4.2 Facilities and Equipment**

Creating this website would require access to the current financial aid website, computers with high-speed internet, and video recording equipment; most of which is already provided by the university. This equipment is needed to compile all the scholarships and grants currently available to students and to record financial aid help videos for students.

**5 Costs**

**5.1 Fiscal**

In order to get the funding needed, this project will first need to be approved by the Student Financial Aid Office and the Dean of Students. This project will require 80 hours of labor, to compile a list of all scholarships and grants currently offered by the University and to record financial aid help videos. An itemized list of the yearly cost this project will require is provided in Table 1 below. The data regarding the cost of developing and maintaining a website was estimated from the blog post *How Much Does a Website Cost in 2015*.

**Table 1:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Items | Price Estimate ($/yr.) | Yearly Cost ($) |
| Domain Name | $12/yr. | $12 |
| Web Hosting Cost | $120/yr. | $120 |
| Theme Cost | $80/yr. | $80 |
| Security Cost | $200/yr. | $200 |
| Plugin | $100/yr. | $100 |
| Maintenance Cost | $1000/yr. | $1000 |
| Labor | 80 hours/$15 | $1200 |
|  | Total | $2712 |

**5.2 Time**

The construction of this project will start at the beginning of the spring semester in hopes of having the site operational by May or late April. Hopefully, just in time for the start of orientation for incoming freshman. This way we will be able phase it in with the incoming freshman and can have videos on the new website teaching upperclassman how to use the new system as well as all the new benefits included with it. Table 2 provided below shows a full projected timeline for the proposed project.

**Table 2:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Action | Estimated Time | Projected Date |
| Submit proposal to the financial aid department | 1 Week | 9th January |
| Get approval for the project | 3 Weeks | 30th January |
| Apply for project funding | 1 Week | 6th February |
| Get funding approved | 3 Weeks | 27th February |
| Contact domain7.com | 2 Days | 1st March |
| Work with the Student Financial Aid office  to plan website design and compile all scholarships and grants | 2 Weeks | 15th March |
| Work with Student Financial Aid office to record financial aid help videos | 1 Week | 22nd March |
| Submit design to domian7.com | 1 Day | 22th March |
| Web development and design work by Domain7.com | 1 Month | 22th April |
| Beta test the website and upload financial aid help videos | 1 Week | 29nd April |
| Website launch | 2 Days | 31st April |
| Total Time Required | Roughly 17 Weeks |  |

**6 Benefits**

**6.1 Summary**

There are many financial aid resources currently available for students offered by the university but most of them aren’t on the Iowa State financial aid website. This lack of readily available resources deters students from applying for financial aid and scholarships. As stated above, this proposal presented the idea to compile financial aid resources and applications into one accessible location. In addition to creating a new website, a series of financial aid help videos was also suggested to develop students’ knowledge of resources on campus. These new resources will help more students get aid, have less donor money wasted, and improve the university’s appeal to incoming students. Moreover, this proposal will not only help current students but future ones as well.

**6.2 Contact**

For more information, please email me at [saral@iastate.edu](mailto:saral@iastate.edu) or call me at (563)-468-9165

**6.3 References**

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