
**STOCKTON UNIVERSITY
ANNUAL REPORT FOR
FY24 COMPASS FUND PROJECT**

PROJECT LEADER(S):	Marielena Dottoli & Angelica Velez
PROJECT TITLE:	Free Assistance for Financial Success & Awareness
DATE:	02/03/2024, 03/21/2024, 05/01/2024

- *The boxes below expand as needed to accommodate your notes. You may also include/submit appendices or attachments, if needed.*
- *Email a copy of this completed form to the Compass Fund Review Board:
CompassFund@stockton.edu.*
- ***This form must be completed and submitted to be considered for a second year of funding, if applicable, or for any future Compass Fund support.***

Please provide a summary of the project and your experience.

To help support students in completing their 2024-2025 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), we hosted three FAFSA completion events during the spring 2024 semester. For our first event, held on Saturday, February 3, 2024, we chose to target Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) students. We promoted the event to all EOF students through emails from both the Office of Financial Aid as well as the EOF office. Students signed up for the event through a Qualtrics form and we sent event reminders to registrants leading up to the event. EOF covered the food for this event, a continental breakfast for all attendees. Each attendee received a financial aid folder that lists the steps to the financial aid process, helpful contact information and provides them a place to keep their important documentation, so that they don't lose it from year to year. We began the event with breakfast and a presentation on the changes to the 24-25 FAFSA and what attendees could expect when logging into the application. After the presentation, attendees were led into computer labs, where staff from the office of financial aid guided them in completing their FAFSA's. Students and parents each worked on completing their sections of the applications and financial aid staff walked around the room to assist, answering any questions and troubleshooting issues.

For the second event on Thursday, March 21, 2024, we sent invitations to a larger group of students. With the help of campus partners in Student Affairs, invites went out to all EOF students, all members of the First Ospreys, Sankofa and TogetHER clubs, all students who had reported at least one parent on the 23-24 FAFSA who did not have a social security number and all Tuition Aid Grant Recipients in the 23-24 academic year. Again, we promoted the event through emails to these students. Students signed up for the event through a Qualtrics form and we sent event reminders to registrants leading up to the event. As this event was in the evening, we ordered snacks and light refreshments for attendees to enjoy while we presented on the changes to the new FAFSA as well as what they could expect to see when logging into the new application. After the presentation, attendees were brought to computer labs, where financial aid staff assisted them in completing their FAFSA's. Students and parents each worked on completing their sections of the applications and financial aid staff walked around the room to assist, answering any questions and troubleshooting issues. During this session, almost every attendee required additional assistance, as many parents who attended the event did not have social security numbers. The U.S. Department of Education created a new process for the 24-25 academic year that would allow parents without SSNs to create FSA ID's and complete their own sections of the FAFSA. Unfortunately,

like many of the updates, students and families have faced several issues with this process. Our staff assisted these families as best as possible with the information provided by the Department of Education.

For the third event, we hosted virtual FAFSA completion events throughout the day on Wednesday, May 1, 2024, where students signed up for an appointment via our Microsoft Bookings page. Once the participants signed up for the event, we provided them with a unique Zoom link to meet with a staff member at their designated time.

Through these events, we were able to assist over 50 students with the financial aid application process. Putting together these events and not only seeing them come to fruition, but seeing them have an impact on our students was a very rewarding experience. With all of the changes to the 2024-2025 FAFSA and the obstacles that students and all of those in higher education have faced as a result, hosting these events this year was very much needed.

Please describe the results of your project and compare them to your original expectations. Elaborate on how well your objectives were met and how they might have changed. Note any particular obstacles that may have prevented your achieving full satisfaction on desired outcomes.

Through the three events, we were able to achieve our objective of assisting students in navigating the 2024-2025 FAFSA. Over 50 students and their families attended these events and received hands-on assistance with their 2024-2025 financial aid applications. Unfortunately, the U.S. Department of Education's rollout of the 2024-2025 FAFSA was anything but seamless. Since its launch, which was delayed almost three months from the typical Oct. 1 launch date, the application has been riddled with issues and a lack of communication from the U.S. Department of Education has caused uncertainty for students, families, financial aid administrators and higher education professionals across the country. Some of the issues plaguing the new FAFSA have taken months for the Department of Education to resolve and some have yet to be resolved. These issues have not only made it very difficult and in some cases impossible for some students and their parents to complete the application, but they have also made it difficult for financial aid administrators to assist students. As an example, parents without Social Security Numbers were unable to access their portion of the FAFSA, which was only recently resolved for some in May 2024. It is difficult to judge the success of our events with quantitative data. We anticipated being able to compare FAFSA completion rates for our returning students from the 23-24 to 24-25 FAFSA cycles; however, all of the challenges with the 2024-2025 FAFSA have skewed this data. If we compare 2024-2025 FAFSA completion data to 2023-2024 FAFSA completion data, the number of students who have yet to complete their 24-25 FAFSA has dramatically increased. This result, however, does not accurately depict the success of our events because of the plethora of external factors that have caused lower FAFSA submission rates for the 2024-2025 academic year. Through qualitative data collected in the form of post event survey responses, we learned that those who attended the events felt as though attending was beneficial for them and assisted them in understanding and completing the application. Attendees also expressed their appreciation for the assistance they received during the events in post event surveys.

Please explain and provide any University Relations & Marketing (URM) coverage of your project (social media posts, press releases, photos, videos, etc.) Include these items as attachments or paste them at the bottom of this document.

An article regarding the project was published on the Stockton University website:
<https://stockton.edu/news/2024/fin-aid-fafsa-compass-fund.html>

Please list any follow-up actions (publications, presentation venues, etc.)

Since the completion of our event, student corrections have become available. We are proactively conducting outreach to help students navigate corrections. According to the U.S. Department of Education, financial aid administrators will not have the ability to make corrections to student FAFSA data until at least the end of June 2024. In addition, we are continuing to promote FAFSA completion, specifically to Fall 2024 admits as well as continuing students who must meet the state’s June 1 filing deadline. As updates become available from the Department of Education, we are notifying students and providing them with support to navigate the next steps in the financial aid process.

Are you recommending the continuation of this project? If so:

- **What are the next action steps you foresee or recommend?**
- **What are the expected budget requirements going forward?**
- **Please identify the program, department, or division you should be working with to secure continuation of funding for your project.**

[Note: continuation proposals must be approved and incorporated into the appropriate budget process. This report will not constitute as a request for permanent funding.]

We are recommending the continuation of this project. The U.S. Department of Education has been very slow to resolve issues with the new FAFSA and provide guidance to schools and families regarding the application and processing. There are still many unanswered questions and obstacles students and schools are facing. We can foresee that these challenges will continue into the 2025-2026 financial aid cycle and students and families will need assistance navigating them. We would like to host these events again in the spring semester.

We would like to continue to provide financial aid folders to each participant as well as food for those in attendance. These items not only entice attendance, but they also provide a takeaway that students can reference to ensure future success. The food also ensures that attendees are comfortable at the event. Although we did have some leftover funding, we anticipate requesting the slightly more (\$3,000) if possible, for the next cycle considering possible inflationary adjustments for projected food and supply costs.

We plan to continuing working with Student Affairs to secure continuation of funding for this project. Specific offices include the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) and Student Transition Programs.

FINANCES: Based on your proposal, please outline below how the award has been spent.

	Amount	Notes/Comments
Beginning Budget Balance as of:	\$ 2,454	
Salary Expenditures		
• TES salaries (613340)	\$ 0	
• Student worker (613345)	\$ 0	
• Grad student worker (613350)	\$ 0	
Total Salary Expenditures	\$ 0	

Non-Salary Expenditures (<i>supplies, travel, etc.</i>)		
• Food	\$ 575.82	This covered one event. EOF covered the costs for the food for our other in person event.
• Supplies (financial aid folders)	\$ 1,454	Total cost was \$1,910- \$456 came from the financial aid office budget
•	\$	
•	\$	
•	\$	
•	\$	
•	\$	
•	\$	
Total Non-Salary Expenditures	\$ 2,029.82	
Total Salary + Non-Salary Expenditures	\$ 2,029.82	
Ending Budget Balance as of:	\$ 424.18	

If your project was approved for multiple fiscal years, please itemize future expenditures.
IMPORTANT: *Unused funds revert to the general Compass Fund at the end of the fiscal year (June 30th).
Compass funds DO NOT rollover to the next FY.*

Item Description	Expected Amount	Expected Timing for Payment
Food for events	\$1,000	Spring 2025
Supplies (Folders, pens)	\$2,000	Spring 2025
Total	\$3,000	