

Leveraging the Funding Allocation Matrix for Student-Centered Investment at Empire State University

Aligning Budgetary Decision-Making with Institutional Goals to Prioritize Student Success

Empire State University, part of the State University of New York system, stands as New York state's premier public institution with a rich history spanning decades in online education. Catering to over 16,000 students globally, SUNY Empire is committed to offering high-quality, flexible, and affordable online education tailored to meet workforce needs.

A Key Component of the Strategic Plan

Facing the challenge of optimizing budget allocations to best serve its diverse student population, SUNY Empire recognized the need for a structured and transparent framework to guide its investment decisions. The Funding Allocation Matrix emerged as a strategic tool to align budgetary choices with the institution's core mission and strategic goals of enhancing student success. By employing the toolkit, SUNY Empire aimed to ensure that every dollar spent would benefit students and contribute to their academic and overall success. Moreover, the toolkit provided a systematic approach to assess the efficacy of past investments, identify improvement areas, and prioritize future initiatives based on student-centered metrics. This proactive approach not only streamlined the budgeting process but also fostered a culture of accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement within the institution.

Aligning Investments with Student-Centric Metrics

To ensure that their strategic investments resonated with the institution's commitment to student success, SUNY Empire employed the Funding Allocation Matrix in multiple capacities:

- **Assessment of Strategic Budget Requests:** SUNY Empire ran strategic annual budget requests from previous years through the tool. This exercise gauged the alignment of leadership decisions with a student-centric five-question rubric, evaluating how effectively the strategic investments supported student success.

Improvement Project

Develop a Budgeting Model to Prioritize Measurable Student Success

Toolkit Used

Funding Allocation Matrix

Results

- Identification of approximately \$500K in partially or non-student-centered software within the ITS department, highlighting areas for potential reallocation or replacement to better serve student needs.
- Streamlined budgeting process using the Funding Allocation Matrix, enabling SUNY Empire to align strategic investments more closely with student-centric priorities and metrics.
- Initiation of discussions and development of a companion tool or extension to the Funding Allocation Matrix, aiming to further align investments with other strategic priorities beyond student success.



“The Funding Allocation Matrix has enabled us as an institution to focus on the student first during the budget and strategic funding allocation process. Using the tool, we can set priorities to invest in the resources that our historically and currently marginalized students need for better outcomes, and we can scale up when we find a resource that works well for retention. This opportunity has given us the tools to start important conversations with leadership regarding equity and access and effective uses of our limited resources. And these conversations have the potential to bring transformational change to our institution in the student support area in a way that higher education has not experienced in the past.”

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Lexie Bonitatibus,
Budget Control Officer

- **Customizing the Funding Allocation Matrix for Leadership Discussions:** Feedback from the Cabinet highlighted the need for a simplified version of the toolkit for senior-level leadership discussions. Consequently, SUNY Empire adopted the Word companion version of the Funding Allocation Matrix, tailored to guide discussions and facilitate leadership dialogues while maintaining the operational Excel version for detailed analysis.
- **Prioritizing IT Investments:** SUNY Empire used the toolkit to assess 105 line items from its approved \$4.0 million Information Technology Services (ITS) budget. This exercise enabled the institution to prioritize student-centered software and hardware investments. Moreover, it identified non-innovative software candidates for potential replacement with newer, more innovative solutions.

Impact on ITS Budget Analysis

Through the ITS budget analysis using the toolkit, SUNY Empire identified approximately \$500K allocated to partially or non-student-centered software. Potential savings could have surpassed this amount if the institution had started with raw, unscrubbed data.

Over the past couple of years, SUNY Empire has already redirected or saved over \$1.5 million within ITS areas. This effort underscores the tool’s efficacy in directing investments toward technology that benefits student populations, particularly those requiring additional resources for improved outcomes.

Promoting a Student-Centered Budgeting Culture

The adoption of the Funding Allocation Matrix catalyzed discussions around defining “student-centeredness” across the institution. It emphasizes the importance of prioritizing budget allocations that directly benefit students, especially historically and currently marginalized student groups. The toolkit is now employed across various strategic budget areas, progressively integrated into annual budget cycles and strategic plan funding requests. By tying budget decisions more closely to student needs and outcomes, SUNY Empire is championing a culture that prioritizes student success at its core.