March 29, 2017

Dear Secretary DeVos:

As organizations serving our nation’s students, workers, veterans, businesses, and institutions, we urge you to help these groups make more informed decisions by supporting greater transparency in higher education.

The U.S. Department of Education, under the leadership of both Republican and Democratic administrations, has worked for decades to increase the availability and utility of postsecondary education data. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), College Navigator, the Federal Student Aid (FSA) Data Center, and other resources provide students, families, and policymakers with important insights into thousands of colleges and universities. For its College Scorecard tool, viewed by more than 2 million people, the Department generates data on federal student loan debt, repayment rates, and post-college earnings. This information, which can only be reliably calculated using federal data sources, is provided through a public-facing tool and through an application program interface (API) and spreadsheet format so that private companies can develop their own resources for students.

This data is essential to aid in student choice and make the higher education market function effectively. The evidence is clear: College is worth the cost for most students, but some schools (and programs) are better than others. The right college can provide students with tremendous opportunities to reach their full potential, while a wrong choice can saddle students with crippling debt and limited job prospects. Students need good information to help them choose, and it’s especially important for first-generation and low-income students, who often lack knowledgeable family, friends, or counselors to guide them on college decisions.

Surveys show that students planning to attend college overwhelmingly identify better post-college earnings and employment as the most important reasons to seek postsecondary education. However, accurate information on average post-college earnings and debt repayment has not typically been available for specific colleges. This data fills the information gap. The Department has a unique ability to calculate comparable post-college earnings, by cooperating with the Treasury Department to utilize tax data. This collaboration allows prospective students, counselors, and educators to view average post-college earnings, while keeping sensitive individual data private and secure.

Here are just a few ways that this data is making a difference. (More information is available in the attached documents.)
• The Department of Veterans Affairs relies on the Department of Education’s data to help veterans make informed decisions when choosing a school at which to use their GI Bill educational benefits. Its GI Bill College Comparison Tool imports data on earnings, graduation, and repayment—key metrics to making an informed choice.

• High school counselors report that data about post-college earnings are sparking discussions with students and families about college occupational programs. Employers in fields like healthcare and manufacturing too often can’t find skilled workers, and these postsecondary programs can lead to good jobs.

• Students say that information like the Department of Education provides would have helped them make better choices about colleges and debt. In just one example, Bridget Little, a college graduate who is still struggling to get a stable full-time job, said, “Transparency and accountability provided through higher education data would arm students with information to help them make the informed decision that I could not.”

• This data has already been accessed by over 600 private developers, including some that have over a million users who now use the data to explore college options. Through a partnership with Google, data on college costs, graduation rates, and post-college earnings now appears in the search results for any Title IV-eligible college. By collaborating with the private sector, the Department of Education is increasing transparency and making the college choice process easier for families.

• Greater transparency and heightened attention to data is changing the way that states and higher education leaders are thinking about using data to improve student outcomes. At Miami Dade College, the nation’s largest community college, leaders regularly monitor key performance indicators similar to those in the Department of Education’s data, including graduation rates and median post-college earnings.

The fact that the Education Department discovered an error in its repayment rate metric was unfortunate. However, the error has since been corrected, did not affect repayment rate calculations used for other purposes, and does not negate the utility of the repayment rates nor the importance of publicizing the data. Students still have a right to know whether the colleges they are considering offer them an affordable education that will help launch their careers. Taxpayers also deserve information about whether the institutions they support through grants and loans deliver a quality education.

The Department should continue to provide and improve key information, and update the debt, repayment, and earnings data with the latest information available for 2015-16. The most significant improvement would be publishing more information by program of study, rather than only by
institution. Even at the same school, outcomes can vary considerably for different programs. Many students (including low-income students and working adults) are choosing from among programs at their local college rather than comparing schools around the country. Viewing employment outcomes by program can help institutions and area employers understand whether curricula are aligned with labor market demand, and many institutions and organizations support such improvements to the earnings data.

We hope you will lead the Department in working with institutions to enhance data quality, improve transparency, and reduce reporting burden, while ensuring that students, families, and other stakeholders have timely and actionable postsecondary data. Your dedication to providing better information would make a tremendous difference in the lives of millions of college students, as they make choices that help them pursue their dreams and careers.

Sincerely,

Advance CTE
American Association of State Colleges and Universities
AMVETS
Association of Big 10 Students
Association for Career and Technical Education
Association of Community College Trustees
Association of Public Data Users
Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU)
Association of the United States Navy
Blue Star Families
Business Leaders United (BLU)
California EDGE Coalition
Campaign for College Opportunity
Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP)
Consumer Action
Colorado Center on Law and Policy
Data Quality Campaign
Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce
Indiana Institute for Working Families
Institute for Higher Education Policy
National Association for College Admission Counseling
National College Access Network
National Council for Workforce Education

National Skills Coalition
National Military Family Association
New America
Opportunity America
Partners for a Competitive Workforce
Policy Matters Ohio
Project Learn of Summit County
ReSOURCE: A Nonprofit Community Enterprise
Skills2Compete - Colorado
Southwest Ohio Region Workforce Investment Board
Student Veterans of America
The Bell Policy Center
The Education Trust
The Interfaith Alliance of Colorado
The Institute for College Access and Success (TICAS)
The Retired Enlisted Association
Third Way
Towards Employment
Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors
uAspire
Veterans Education Success
Veterans for Common Sense
Workforce Data Quality Campaign
Young Invincibles
INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

Increased calls for accountability and transparency at the state and federal levels, in addition to professional best practices, are informing the way Miami Dade College (MDC), the nation’s largest community college, is evolving its data culture. Specifically, the Florida legislature recently passed a law that funds the state’s community colleges based on their performance on four metrics: 1) completion rates, 2) retention rates, 3) job placement or continuing education rates, and 4) the wages of graduates in their first job post-graduation. Similarly, the U.S. Department of Education recently released more data on student success and institutional performance through its College Scorecard. Finally, the Association for Institutional Research recently published a Statement of Aspirational Practice for Institutional Research, which provides support for an intentional focus on increasing the ability to produce and use data.

Guided by a new strategic plan for 2015–2020, and in response to these growing demands for more sophisticated, timely, and actionable data, MDC launched a strategic set of activities designed to increase its ability to produce and use data to improve student success and institutional effectiveness:

- Focus on key performance indicators such as enrollment and completion;
- Track groups of students who start at the college at the same time over the course of their studies;
- Create data models based on past student performance to predict success for current and future students;
- Build internal capacity to evaluate the impacts of implemented interventions; and
- Increase the comfort and ability of faculty and staff to work with data.

USING DATA TO IMPROVE STUDENT OUTCOMES

MDC leadership closely monitors select key performance indicators (KPIs) that provide a snapshot of its institutional performance. Informed by accountability and transparency initiatives such as Florida’s performance funding model and the U.S. Department of Education’s College Scorecard, the KPIs include but are not limited to metrics such as the number of students enrolled and the number of credits in which they enroll; the rate at which students re-enroll from one semester to the next; the rate at which students complete their studies; the rate at which students continue their education at another institution whether or not they complete their studies; the rate at which students who complete their studies are employed; and the entry-level wages of students who complete their studies. KPIs allow MDC to gauge progress on high-risk and high-profile metrics, on a semester-by-semester and annual basis. Since data for some of these metrics are available for other colleges and universities through state and federal sources, they are also able to benchmark their performance against other institutions.

While KPIs provide an appropriately high-level view of institutional performance, MDC sees value in producing more granular data and analyses that can be used to improve specific policies, programs, and practices. One way to
do that is to track the progress of groups of students over time. First, MDC establishes cohorts of students who begin studies in the same semester. If necessary, they establish subgroups within each cohort, such as students who attend full time or enroll directly after finishing high school. At the end of every semester, they determine the status of each student in the cohort—if they enrolled, graduated, or did not enroll. MDC tracks the status of each student in the cohort, every semester, for eight years. This approach allows them to identify when a student discontinues enrollment. By using different variables within a cohort, like program of study, GPA, or high school, MDC can develop and apply more targeted interventions to help students succeed. For example, they can use the insights gained from the data to identify the highest-risk courses in a program of study and offer extra supports, like tutoring or group projects for students enrolled in those courses. This approach also aligns with cohort-tracking models used by federal, state, and voluntary accountability efforts.

MDC is also creating data models using the performance of past students to help mitigate risk—and predict success—for current and future students. By tracking the progress of students over time, they can identify those who did not persist from one semester to the next, construct a profile of those students, and determine whether there are common characteristics or behaviors among them. They can then determine the likelihood that other students who share the same characteristics or behaviors will not persist and complete. This student-level data helps faculty, academic advisors, and academic program managers work with students sooner by prioritizing interventions and focusing on the highest-risk students.

**RESULTS**

Steps MDC has taken to build institutional capacity to use data for student success have led to promising improvements in practice, including:

- Increased use of KPIs and student-level data by faculty, department chairs, and academic advisors in strategic enrollment management activities, including course scheduling;
- Increased use of external accountability metrics in academic program reviews; and
- Knowledge sharing to strengthen data literacy among faculty and staff through the MDC Data Academy, a 30-hour noncredit professional development course,

**LESSON LEARNED**

MDC captured three key lessons from their experience of using data to improve student success.

- **Build a stronger data culture.** The ability to respond to internal and external demands for more and better data is dependent on an institution’s data culture. While an institution must have the technical capacity to produce more and better data, it is more important that faculty and staff possess a willingness and ability to use such data to inform changes in policy, practice, and programs. Otherwise, tools will remain underutilized, and insights will remain unexploited.

- **Learn from existing activities.** Few institutions must start from scratch to increase their ability to produce and use more and better data to improve student success. There are benefits to building on initiatives that have been previously launched and advantages to aligning the change effort with external public policy developments that must be addressed anyway. For example, MDC has aligned its institutional KPIs with metrics used in state and federal accountability and transparency initiatives.

- **Dig deeper into student-level data.** Institutions should dig more deeply into the data than they may have done historically. Especially for open access institutions like community colleges, ensuring that all entering students in the cohort persist all the way to completion takes extraordinary effort. But without a deeper look at who these students are, developing appropriate supports and interventions will be that much more difficult.
Empower Students to Better Assess School Quality

To say my educational journey has been a rocky road is an understatement. That journey—which included four institutions and a subsequent trail of debt—could have been much easier if I had more information about my schools and their programs. I didn’t have the best guidance growing up—I lived on my own since I was 15 and didn’t graduate from high school. When I turned 18, I knew I didn’t want a career in customer service, so at the recommendation of a family member I started classes at (the now notoriously defunct) Lamson Jr. College towards a certificate in word processing. Had I known how many Lamson students in the word processing program found relevant work after graduation, I may have changed my very expensive decision to attend. While every student doesn’t receive advice from college-educated parents and mentors, all prospective college students deserve access to success rates of school programs.

There were several red flags that I only discovered once I was enrolled. Lamson, a for-profit school which was located in my local shopping mall, accepted me without a GED. Of course, I was promised I would earn my GED, but was never offered classes to help me achieve this goal. I was also assured that a word processing certificate would put me on the path to a well-paying administrative career, but the school never offered career preparedness services. Three quarters of the way through my program, I was involved in a car accident, which caused me to spend nearly a year recovering from my injuries. Although I had to drop out of school, I was determined to complete my education.
I took another risk 20 years later and attended a community college where, given the quality of my last school, none of my credits transferred. I brought my prior loans out of default, paid my first semester out of pocket, and finally earned my GED. I went to school part-time to make up for the damage from Lamson, and I worked full-time.

When I was ready to transfer to a university, I was offered two different scholarships. One was to a state university and one was to a small private university. With the limited knowledge I had on graduation rates and career success from each institution, I chose the private university’s scholarship for the school’s prestige. While it did not cover my full tuition, I felt more comfortable at a smaller campus with advisors and administrators who would help me through the transition. It had an impressive graduation rate overall, but I had no access to how my particular program performed or if graduates were able to obtain jobs in their field, but this information is not available for any college or university. Fortunately, that institution was not the same predatory school that Lamson was. Nevertheless, I was cautious about my chances of finding work after graduation. I was an English major—a significant step upwards from word processing—and received overwhelming support from my professors. I was told that I would find plenty of job opportunities, but never saw stats released on the program’s success.

Financially, I struggled. I borrowed additional money that wasn’t covered by scholarships and Pell Grants. Things went from bad to worse in my second semester, when I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer and and withdrew from all of my classes. When I finally returned to school, I was still sick, had to drop classes again, and lost my job. Despite my good grades previously, I was in danger of not graduating.

I finally transferred a third time to Park University, where I am currently enrolled. I’m paying less for many of the same services I received at previous schools. I’m happy here, and I don’t feel manipulated. In hindsight, I wish I could have gone here immediately after completing my GED. Instead, unfortunately, I have debt passing through four different schools. My loans are near the limit. I will have to take fewer classes, and if I am able to graduate it will take me longer.

The odds are against me, but I’ll overcome it. Not everybody has the same perseverance as I have, and this is the part where a lot of people just stop, and those are the people I want to be an advocate for. Taxpayers do not contribute to Pell grants for students like me to be mislead and buried in debt, all driven by a severe lack of information. It’s time for our government to help provide us access to information so that those of us who seek to gain skills and be educated do not fall prey to colleges that can operate and turn a profit with no accountability.

Ellen Griffin is a full time college student studying Social Psychology at Park University. She hopes to use her education to improve the way people communicate with one another in business. She has a 15-year-old daughter who she hopes will be inspired by her educational journey.
What You Don’t Know Will Hurt You: A Lack of College Program Data Can Land Students in Deep Debt

A certain image of the struggling Millennial shows up often in the media – underemployed, underpaid, and swimming in debt. I am that Millennial. I am buried in more than $113,000 of student loan debt, and can barely stay afloat financially. And there are thousands of people grappling with similar stories. These numbers – these people – can’t be linked to the common misrepresentation of Millennials – that we’re lazy, entitled, and misguided. There’s a much larger network of institutional barriers at work here. One of these barriers is accountability of our higher educational institutions. Prospective students should be able to access critical information that would influence their college of choice, as it is one of the most expensive investments many of us will ever make.

I graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 2007 with bachelor’s degrees in Anthropology and Sociology, and a certificate in Women’s Studies, just as the economy was beginning to stagnate. I loved my time at Pitt. I honed my analytical skills, expanded my understanding of worldviews, and learned the value of a liberal arts education. It was just the college experience I had been promised, and it was so personally enriching. But that experience doesn’t seem to translate that easily for hiring managers.

I thought having three degrees would have made me more well-rounded and appealing to potential employers, as it demonstrated my analytical skills and work ethic. At least that’s what I was led to believe when I was provided with a list of careers paths for sociologists and anthropologists and the variety of ways in which we could leverage our degrees. These lists made the job market out to be brimming with opportunities, all without releasing a single statistic from my school on how many students in my program actually found work in their field. I spent the summer after graduating looking for a job, and when I couldn’t find anything in my field, I eventually settled for a minimum wage job at my local Starbucks.
My mistake, I thought, was my lack of specialization, so I signed the papers, pursued the shiny program brochures and enrolled myself in a masters in interior design program at Chatham University, believing that it would lead to a good job.

Interior design has always been a hobby and secondary interest of mine, and those around me echoed the idea that pursuing a more focused degree would lead to a more stable job and a good living. Perhaps unsurprisingly, when I graduated in the fall of 2009, I was still without a job. We were in the throes of the worst recession since the Great Depression, the housing market had collapsed, and finding a job was that much harder as a young person. I've spent the years since initially working three part-time jobs, and moving into a full-time position stagnating at around $30,000 a year. Finally, after going a year and a half without a raise and working 40 hours a week, I got a second part-time job.

Looking back at my education, I can't help but feel mislead and cheated. While I'll never regret my undergraduate liberal arts degrees, I pursued my graduate education without realizing how important your choice of school and program is when planning for and pursuing a career. It isn’t as if I never did my homework, there just isn’t enough information available for research. I may have been able to know how many students graduated from my school in my programs, and how many of them found work in their field, or found work at all a year after graduation. But right now, our government nor our schools make any of that information available. These details would have heavily influenced which school I attended, what programs I selected, and how much debt I’d be willing to accumulate for my education. But the blame instead has to fall on my shoulders, and schools continue to share none of the accountability.

Since graduation, I’ve been continuously solicited for donations with these requests following me through moves and relocation, but have not found equal efforts to give students resources on finding work in their field.

Transparency and accountability provided through higher education data would arm students with information to help them make the informed decision that I could not. Further, colleges should be, in part, accountable for the placement of their students post-graduation and accountable at holding their degrees to the esteem in which they cost. Simply put: if the students are paying a premium for the degree, the institutions should be accountable for delivering a return on investment.

For me, getting a return on investment will be a lifelong battle. I continue to hold onto the hope that those so quick to point fingers and call Millennials names will eventually recognize the need for action. Until then, I'll continue to work more than 40 hours a week.

Bridget is a more-than-full-time working girl who spends her nights easing her furiously fervent mind by daydreaming about writing op-eds and taking her activism to the next level. In her free time she enjoys volunteering in her community, spending time outdoors and pretending she has a green thumb. She is perilously passionate about Millennials and their fight to reclaim any semblance of the American Dream.
Students today have a vast amount of options for where to obtain an education, which allows us a lot of flexibility in finding schools of different sizes, cost, and locations. It's a great advantage for some, but can create quite a lot of stress if you aren't exactly sure how to assess which school will set you up best for post-graduation success. Students, especially those from underserved or underrepresented backgrounds, need data that clearly explains graduation and career success rates for people like them. In order to create a generation of leaders and innovators, today's students need to make more informed decisions on which paths will lead them there.

I aspired to become a lawyer since I was 14, so I was lucky to already have an idea of which programs would help me reach my goals. This didn’t necessarily make shopping for colleges easier, though. High school advisers and parents can be great resources to students struggling with higher education decisions, but I’m a first generation college student from a non-English speaking family, and there was not a lot of advice to go around. Most of my decisions were made through my own independent research. While my high school adviser was helpful in directing me to scholarship opportunities, I was essentially on my own to pick the right college.

As a 17-year-old, I did not have nearly enough knowledge of federal loan programs, extra college fees, trends in increasing tuition costs, or credit transferability to make the best possible decision when considering the investment I was making in paying for school. Institutions of higher education sometimes provide a cost calculator on their websites and some even provide financial aid estimators. These tools can be helpful in estimating front-end costs, but they do little to educate on what life after graduation, or dropping out, would bring. It only takes a few clicks for a student to receive thousands of dollars in loans, but some can end up repaying them for decades afterward. Once on campus, students have a lot to manage — jobs, internships, community involvement, all on top of classes — so often times learning about our interest rates, repayment options and potential loan forgiveness programs come as a harsh reality after graduation. Colleges need to be more transparent.
when advertising their costs by also informing prospective students on the costs that go along with repayment.

It can be an even higher stakes situation for students with backgrounds similar to my own, who may not have family or community resources, may need extra support, and may not be native English speakers. We need more information on which schools best serve first generation and minority students to feel comfortable and assured we’ll find a college committed to our success. A college campus can be a very unfamiliar environment when you don’t have family members to help navigate the strange new setting. Students from similar backgrounds already on campus can be a huge resource to prospective students, as they understand the struggles and can help provide guidance. But that alone isn’t enough. Sharing simply the number of minority students at a given school doesn’t tell us about the community we may be joining. Our institutions of higher education need to paint a more accurate picture of their minority communities, and the rate of success of those communities experience after graduation, including how prepared they are for the workforce. It’s a great resource for some of us, who are not used to asking for help and may let ourselves fail out of college before mentioning anything to anyone, but it’s frankly not enough.

I can’t speak for every low-income, first generation, minority college student in America, but I know these words resonate with a lot of my peers. While we know we need to take the reigns of our own success, we need to be empowered to do so, and it is clear that there is a lot of information that needs to be made available before students can make a decision that will impact the rest of their lives and those close to them. What we need right now is better data, more of it, and to have it in a transparent and easily digestible form.

Thien is a graduate of the University of Nebraska – Lincoln with degrees in Political Science and Environmental Studies. He served as UNL student body president and pursued increased state funding for colleges with the student government. He has also worked with the National Campus Leadership Council to advocate for college affordability on a national level.
NEW COLLEGE RANKINGS CREATED USING COLLEGE SCORECARD DATA

by Jenna Leventoff

November 6, 2015

Traditionally, students, parents, and employers have looked to rankings from just a handful of entities, including *U.S. News & World Report*, to gauge the quality of higher education institutions. However, rankings are subjective, and not everyone agrees about what criteria indicate quality. The release of the Department of Education’s (ED’s) College Scorecard and College Scorecard Data websites have allowed other entities, such as the *Economist* and the Brookings Institution, to create their own rankings based upon their own criteria. These new rankings provide different measures to help students and parents consider how postsecondary education can impact their future careers.

Both rankings focus on monetary success. Generally speaking, each utilized the College Scorecard’s data to compare their own estimates of alumni’s expected income to actual outcomes to determine the financial gains attributable to each college. Nevertheless, the rankings reached largely different conclusions.

The *Economist* based its estimate about the expected earnings of alumni of 4-year colleges on a variety of factors, including SAT scores, race, prevailing wages in the school’s city, the number of Pell grant recipients at each school, and even whether students had an affinity for marijuana. The *Economist*’s top rankings went to schools whose graduates exceeded estimated income. According to this ranking method, the top three schools were Washington and Lee University, Babson College, and Villanova University, while the bottom three schools were Gallaudet University, St. John’s College, and Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>%ile</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Expected earnings</th>
<th>Median earnings</th>
<th>Over/Under</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>Washington and Lee University</td>
<td>VA</td>
<td>$55,223</td>
<td>$77,600</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>$65,170</td>
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<tr>
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<td>99</td>
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<td>PA</td>
<td>$60,455</td>
<td>$73,700</td>
<td>$13,245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>Harvard University</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>$74,466</td>
<td>$87,200</td>
<td>$12,734</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>Bentley University</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>$62,327</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>Otis College of Art and Design</td>
<td>CA</td>
<td>$29,562</td>
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<tr>
<td>7</td>
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<td>$37,025</td>
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</table>
The Brookings Institution ranked both two and four year colleges. Somewhat similar to the *Economist*, it based its estimate about expected earnings on factors including family incomes, the regional cost of living near the school, race, and test scores. The top ranking schools were those that had the highest score on a scale of 1 to 100, with higher scores signifying the greatest increase over expected earnings. Fifteen 4-year colleges, including a handful of maritime colleges, Babson College, and Harvard University, as well as thirteen 2-year colleges including North Central Institute, Foothill College, and Highland College of Montana Tech, received the Brookings Institute's top score. The 16 bottom scoring 4-year colleges include a number of prestigious conservatories such as The Julliard School and the Boston Conservany, while the 14 bottom scoring 2-year colleges include the Golf Academy of America - Myrtle Beach and Honolulu Community College.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Value-added to median student earnings 10 years after enrollment of 2001-02 cohort (100 = top score)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Albany College of Pharmacy and Health Sciences</td>
<td>Albany</td>
<td>N.Y.</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCPHS University</td>
<td>Boston</td>
<td>Mass.</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio</td>
<td>San Antonio</td>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maine Maritime Academy</td>
<td>Castine</td>
<td>Maine</td>
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<td>Buzzards Bay</td>
<td>Mass.</td>
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<td>Brooklyn</td>
<td>N.Y.</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>University of the Sciences</td>
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<td>Pa.</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>Bronx</td>
<td>N.Y.</td>
<td>100</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Colorado Denver</td>
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<td>Colo.</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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<td>Babson College</td>
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<td>Mass.</td>
<td>100</td>
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<td>Kings Point</td>
<td>N.Y.</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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<td>Palmer College of Chiropractic-Davenport</td>
<td>Davenport</td>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>100</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology</td>
<td>Terre Haute</td>
<td>Ind.</td>
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<td>Harvard University</td>
<td>Cambridge</td>
<td>Mass.</td>
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The *Economist* compared its results to Brookings' and found that, “the Brookings numbers regard a college's curriculum as a significant part of its “value add”, causing the top of its rankings to be dominated by engineering schools, and the bottom by art and religious institutions. In contrast, we treated fields of study as a reflection of student preferences, and tried to identify the colleges that offer the best odds of earning a decent living for people who do want to become artists or study in a Christian environment. Similarly, the Brookings rankings do not appear to weight SAT scores nearly as heavily as ours do, if they count them at all: colleges like Caltech and Yale, whose graduates earn far more money than those of an average university but significantly less than their elite test results would indicate, sit at the very bottom of the *Economist*’s list, whereas Brookings puts them close to the top.”

The *Economist*'s comparison illustrates how different priorities can impact rankings. Nevertheless, WDJC is pleased that the College Scorecard has enabled institutions to conduct research and draw their own conclusions. WDJC applauds all efforts to provide students with the information they need to make informed decisions.
Deciding which college to attend is an exciting process for students across the country who are eager to get an education and get their independent lives started. We know that college graduates are more likely to be employed and earn higher incomes than those without a college degree, but we also know how difficult it can be to afford college. Tuition and fees have gone up by nearly 30 percent since the Great Recession, and now the average student walks off a college campus with roughly $30,000 dollars in loans. In addition to cost, there are numerous factors to weigh when picking a school, including available programs, financial aid, location, size, the list goes on and on. It can be difficult to choose which college to attend, and to know how to pay for it. With student debt at an all-time high in the U.S., it is essential that young people are empowered to make the best possible choice about their education.

Last year we were excited about a new tool designed to help make this process a lot easier: The College Scorecard. The online tool, developed by the U.S Department of Education, helps promote transparency of colleges across the country and also allows college-bound students to make more informed decisions about the schools they consider. There are other resources out there that rank schools, relying on metrics such as selective acceptance rates or even how much money schools have.
The College Scorecard is completely free and allows users to search for schools and sort them based on information the user cares about, such as net prices, what percent of students graduate on time, whether students can repay their loans, and the median income for students after leaving school. This is the first time that this data has been collected, visualized, and made easily accessible on this scale. Rather than deciding where to enroll based on selective statistics or college rankings published in magazines, students now have the opportunity to make informed choices using the College Scorecard. We see that this tool not only has the potential to revolutionize the way that students search for schools, but also the way they value their education.

We wanted to find out if students were using the scorecard, and if so, what their experiences were. In June, we introduced the Scorecard to about 90 high school students from across the U.S., including Texas, Kentucky, and Louisiana, who were visiting D.C. with the Close Up Foundation. These students expressed interest in going to college at some point, so introducing the College Scorecard could help them throughout their college search process. We wanted to see how useful the tool would be to them and to see if it would help influence how they are considering their future decisions. The students were presented with the Scorecard, shown its various features and
asked to try out the tool on their own devices. After performing additional demonstrations for the students, most of them said that the new tool would have some impact on their decision about where to go to school.

Of the 90 students present, 73 of them took our six-question survey following the presentation. They reported the following:

- 97 percent of students noted that they had never heard of the College Scorecard.
- 86 percent thought the tool was designed well and easy to use.
- 72 percent of students said that the scorecard provided information that they had never seen before.
- 70 percent of students stated that the tool would help them in their search for the right school.
While the tool is a major step in the right direction, we know it is not perfect. The students said that they would like to see some improvements, including the ability to compare several schools side by side, and more data on post-baccalaureate programs. Below are some keywords from the students’ comments about the Scorecard compiled into a word cloud (as you can see, the word compare is the largest, meaning it was used the most).
Throughout the presentation, students seemed eager to play around with and share the tool. Most of them were excited about how it would help them in the future and that this information is now readily accessible. We hope that the Department of Education will continue to support and expand this tool. Making the decision about which college to attend can be difficult and stressful for many young people, but we believe that continuing to expand the College Scorecard will empower young people to make more informed decisions about their futures.