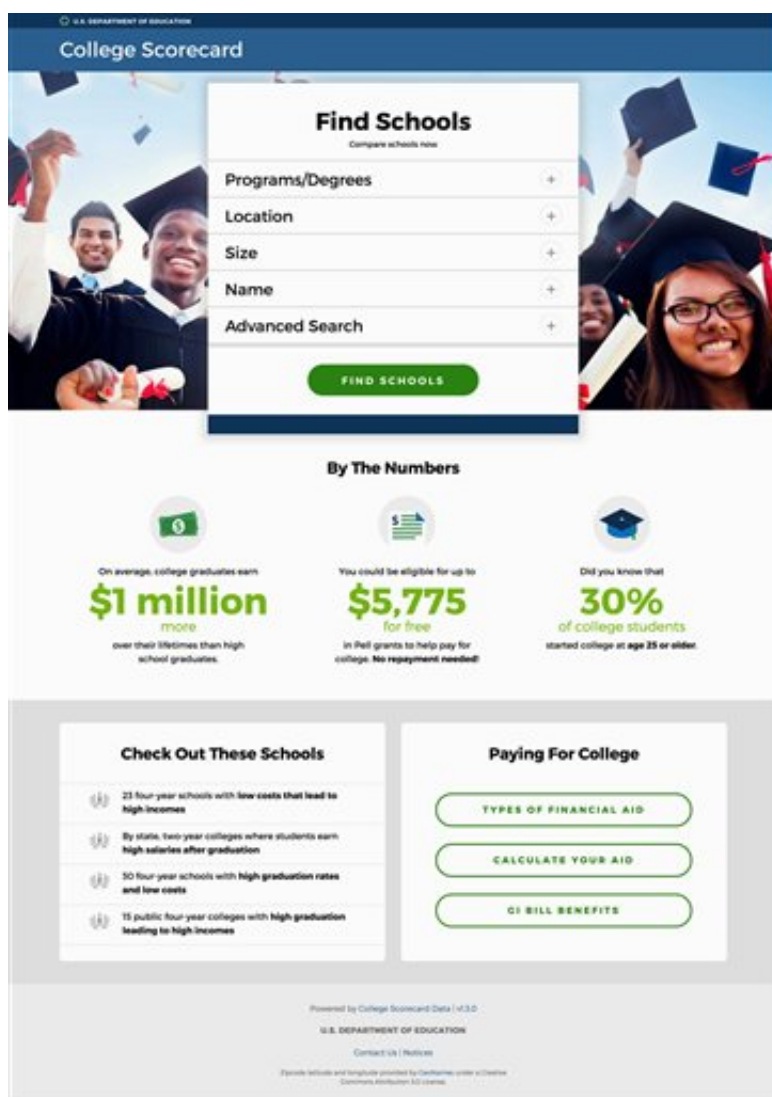


Obama promotes online search tool with college-specific data

September 12 2015, by Jennifer C. Kerr



This image provided by the Education Department shows part of a new web page that will help students choose the right college. Sharply scaling back plans for a government-run college rating system, President Barack Obama is now

trumpeting a redesigned online tool that will give students and their parents information about costs, student loans and other data to help them choose among the nation's colleges and universities. (Education Department via AP)

President Barack Obama on Saturday debuted a redesigned online tool with college-specific information about student costs, loans and potential earning power, scaling back a planned ratings system that critics derided as too subjective and unworkable.

The College Scorecard—at collegescorecard.ed.gov —provides a snapshot of what former [students](#) of each school might earn, how much debt they leave with, and what percentage can repay their loans.

"Everyone should be able to find clear, reliable, open data on college affordability and value," President Barack Obama said in his weekly radio address. "Many existing college rankings reward schools for spending more money and rejecting more students—at a time when America needs our colleges to focus on affordability and supporting all students who enroll."

The department's original scorecard had allowed users to search schools by majors offered, ZIP code, size and campus setting, among other things.

The updated site provides fresh data to help students choose the right college, with an emphasis on cost and post-graduate results, department officials said in promoting the changes.

For example, the scorecard offers the first comprehensive look at after-college earnings for students who attended all types of undergraduate institutions, based on tax records.

Someone heading to college could see the proportion of students at a school who earned more than they would have had they entered the job market right after high school. Also available: the median earnings of former students who received federal financial aid, at 10 years after entering the school, with a comparison to the national average.

Searches also show graduation rates and typical student debt and monthly payments a student would owe for each school.

"Students deserve to know their investment of resources and hard work in college is going to pay off," said Education Secretary Arne Duncan.

He kicks off a seven-state, back-to-school bus tour on Monday; Obama is set to appear at the first stop, in Des Moines, Iowa. The two will host a town hall meeting on college affordability and access.

The updated scorecard falls well short of the president's original plan, proposed two years ago before a crowd of 7,000 at the University of Buffalo.

Obama had said the government would design a college ratings system that would judge schools on affordability and return on investment. Many in higher education quickly criticized the idea and worried that the rankings would be arbitrary and unfair. GOP opponents in Congress called it government overreach.

The administration ultimately scrapped plans to use the ratings as a basis to parcel out billions of federal dollars in [financial aid](#), and decided against rating the more than 7,000 colleges and universities in the country.

Instead, the government said earlier this summer it would take a different approach, offering students and families more data to help

them make better choices—and draw their own conclusions.

Leaders in higher education who opposed the [ratings system](#) cautiously welcomed the new approach.

Molly Corbett Broad, president of the American Council on Education, acknowledged the interest in having accurate data about earnings for [college](#) graduates, but she said the revised scorecard still needs work.

"Developing a system of this size and scope is a complicated and nuanced endeavor and the department has done so without any external review," she said.

Significant data limitations exist, she said, such as one single earning number for an entire institution—regardless of whether the student studied chemical engineering or philosophy.

College search sites, such as ScholarMatch and StartClass, are using the new scorecard data to develop customized searches for students on their websites.

More information: College Scorecard: collegescorecard.ed.gov

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