

Los Angeles Times

The White House wants to make comparing colleges easier with its new scorecard

A new online search tool is being unveiled by the Obama administration that aims to help potential college students learn more about campuses.

By **LARRY GORDON**

The Obama administration on Saturday will unveil a new online search tool that is aimed at helping potential college students and their families learn much more about campuses, including the financial aid they offer and how much their graduates earn later in life.

Although the new “College Scorecard” will allow consumers to compare various colleges on a variety of factors, it will not provide any ratings or rankings on the order of, for example, U.S. News & World Report.

President Obama said he proposed a ratings system two years ago but, after much study and controversy, his administration abandoned the idea and turned instead to improving existing federal databases for the public.

Department of Education officials said the administration backed away from a ratings system because it proved too complicated to develop and that they were afraid it might confuse consumers. Many colleges and higher education groups had opposed a ratings system, fearing that it would unfairly treat their schools or punish some for enrolling low-income students and less prepared students, who might be less likely to graduate or more likely to default on loans.

The new scorecard appears to be easier for families to search and navigate than the existing federal College Navigator and College Scorecard and improved graphics provide for better visual comparisons of schools.

The information is expanded as well, including data about net pricing for low-income and high-income students, graduation rates, ethnic diversity, loan default and median income 10 years after a student started college.

On Saturday the president said the tool will help families “navigate the complicated college process and make informed decisions.”

"The status quo serves some colleges and the companies that rank them just fine. But it doesn't serve our students well – and that doesn't always serve any of us well," Obama said. "There are colleges dedicated to helping students of all backgrounds learn without saddling them with debt. We should hold everybody to that standard. Our economic future depends on it."

The goal is "to help everybody who's willing to work for a higher education search for and select a college that fits their goals."

The scorecard still faced some criticism. The American Council on Education, which represents colleges and universities, said the statistics should have provided outcomes for students of various majors, such as engineering and philosophy, rather than lumping everyone together.

The organization also noted that the 10-years-later earnings figures are based on those who took out federal loans and might not reflect the true picture. White House officials say the earnings of borrowers are about the same as everyone else's.

