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Scorecard for Colleges Needs Work, Experts Say

By RICHARD PÉREZ-PEÑA
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The steps that [President Obama](#) promised in his [State of the Union address](#) to control college costs and give consumers more information on the prices and values of individual colleges drew tepid responses on Wednesday from educational groups, who said the measures seemed generally positive but had many blanks to be filled in.

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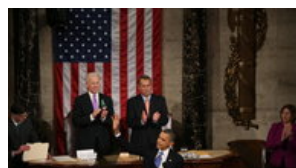
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As Mr. Obama promised on Tuesday night, the White House unveiled an interactive [College Scorecard](#) Web site on Wednesday morning that allows anyone to retrieve the net cost — not the full “sticker price” — of attending a particular college, along with data on [student loan](#) repayment and the loan default and graduation rates.

The new site follows other steps the administration has taken — including the introduction of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's online college [cost-comparison tool](#), and the creation of a uniform “shopping sheet” of financial information, since adopted by many colleges, to enable families to make apples-to-apples comparisons that had been elusive.

But some of the data in the new scorecard is a few years old, and most of it has been available from other sources, notably the federal government's own [College Navigator](#) site. Further, the information is presented as averages and medians that might have little relevance to individual families. The scorecard does connect to each institution's net price calculator, which allows individualized cost estimates, but it does not provide side-by-side comparisons of multiple schools, as other government sites do.

“This puts the key data together in a consumer-friendly way, which I think is important, because even motivated and informed consumers have a hard time finding and interpreting the data,” said Lauren Asher, president of the [Institute for College Access and Success](#), a nonprofit group that works to make it easier to get information about colleges.

But her group complained that the borrowing and default

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State of the Union Address

figures in the scorecard were misleading, and [said it was](#) "two steps forward, one step back."

The scorecard is "not a game-changer as much as the administration would like to believe," said Terry W. Hartle, senior vice president of the [American Council on Education](#), a major association of colleges and universities.

A spokeswoman for the federal [Department of Education](#) said the scorecard would "help families easily compare schools on value and affordability," but said the department could not yet elaborate on the plans.

One highly anticipated element of the scorecard would show how the recent graduates of each school fare in the job market and how much money they are making, fulfilling Mr. Obama's promise to show "where you can get the most bang for your educational buck."

But that tool does not exist yet — the scorecard simply says that the Department of Education is working on it — and experts say it would probably require a change in federal law to put it into effect. The [2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act](#) prohibits the government from keeping the kind of information that would be needed: tracking millions of people's educational backgrounds.

Similar information is already available, though it is not as complete as what the federal government could produce by tapping into tax return data. PayScale, a company that analyzes payroll data for millions of workers, publishes annual [rankings of colleges](#) based on graduates' long-term earnings. And another group, College Measures, is working with several states to develop a system for [rating the economic success](#) of recent graduates by matching information from the colleges in those states to income data collected by the unemployment insurance programs.

"This is one of the most fundamental pieces of information that everybody's been looking for," said Mark Schneider, president of College Measures, and a former commissioner of the federal government's National Center for Education Statistics.

In his speech, the president also reiterated his call to tie some forms of federal student aid to the same kind of college performance criteria.

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