Higher Education Committee Update: Administration Releases Draft of Higher Education Rating System

On Friday, December 19, the Department of Education released a draft of its proposed higher education rating system, which will categorize colleges’ performances as either well-performing, poorly-performing, or in the middle. It also released a detailed description of the draft system. The 3-tier rating system is intended to avoid a situation where the federal government is ranking colleges against one another. It is currently being called a draft framework with the understanding that changes will likely need to be made. It is intended to be made public before the 2015-2016 school year.

The draft lists the metrics the Department of Education will use to determine these ratings. The rating framework identifies three main elements of institutional quality: affordability, access and outcomes. It would include degree-granting, undergraduate institutions, with separate groupings for four-year and two-year colleges. The metrics being considered by the department include:

Access:

- Percent of students receiving Pell Grants
- Family income
- Family contribution toward college
- Percent of first generation college students

Affordability:

- Average net price
- Net price by family income

Performance:

- Completion rates
- Transfer rates
- Earnings
Graduate school enrollment
Loan performance outcomes

The administration has requested comment on the draft system, with the comment period lasting until February 17, 2015. Under Secretary of Education Ted Mitchell underscored the administration's commitment to meeting its deadline to have the new college rating system in place for the next school year. He said the system could be refined to use fewer than the 11 metrics released Friday. Officials acknowledged the challenges they face working with data that only tracks first-time, full-time students and the framework suggest that the Department is considering using a measurement other than IPEDS (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System).

The New England Council will be submitting comment on the draft for consideration. If you have feedback or questions about the development of the rating system, please do not hesitate to be in touch.

Read analysis in:

Education Department Fact Sheet
Education Department Blog
The New York Times
Washington Post
Inside Higher Ed