



Obama's revamped college evaluation site ripped as 'misleading,' unnecessary

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President Obama has launched a scaled-back college evaluation [website](#) that does not include what some in the higher-ed world had feared -- a government rating system of America's roughly 7,000 colleges and universities.

But the site still has Washington asking questions about why the Department of Education is doing it in the first place.

Among the concerns is why spend taxpayer dollars when such for-profit operations as Barron's, The Princeton Review and U.S. News & World Report have for years been providing similar information and rankings.

"It's definitely a government overreach, though less than they had talked about," Neal McCluskey, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom, told FoxNews.com on Monday. "The federal government shouldn't be involved in assessing whether a college is good or bad."

He also said underlying problems included little context about such factors as student bodies and suggested the federal government felt compelled to make the assessments given the roughly \$150 billion it gives out annually in grants and loans.

Obama said in announcing a draft plan in 2013 that the administration would design a ratings system to judge colleges and universities on affordability and return on investment.

However, the ranking idea immediately encountered a backlash from congressional Republicans, who called it government overreach, and from many in higher education who feared it would be arbitrary and unfair.

Terry Hartle, the American Council on Education's senior vice president for government and public affairs, suggested the project is well intended, considering Americans want more information about the economic returns of going to a particular school.

However, he argued the scorecard has several “weaknesses,” including that it measures only students receiving financial aid, fails to break out the data according to school departments or majors and counts dropouts as well as graduates.

“I think it’s incomplete and misleading,” Hartle said. “I hope people who look at it don’t read too much into it.”

The Department of Education did not return a request Monday for information about the cost of the project or keeping it updated.

After scrapping the rating idea, the administration announced earlier this summer that the scorecard would instead offer more data to help students and their families make better choices -- and draw their own conclusions.

The scorecard indeed provides innovative information like how much debt students leave with and what percentage can repay their loans.

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

"Everyone should be able to find clear, reliable, open data on college affordability and value," Obama said Saturday in his weekly radio address. "