



RACHEL FISHMAN AND IVY LOVE

**2015 COLLEGE DECISIONS SURVEY: PART V**

# SEARCHING FOR THE RIGHT COLLEGE

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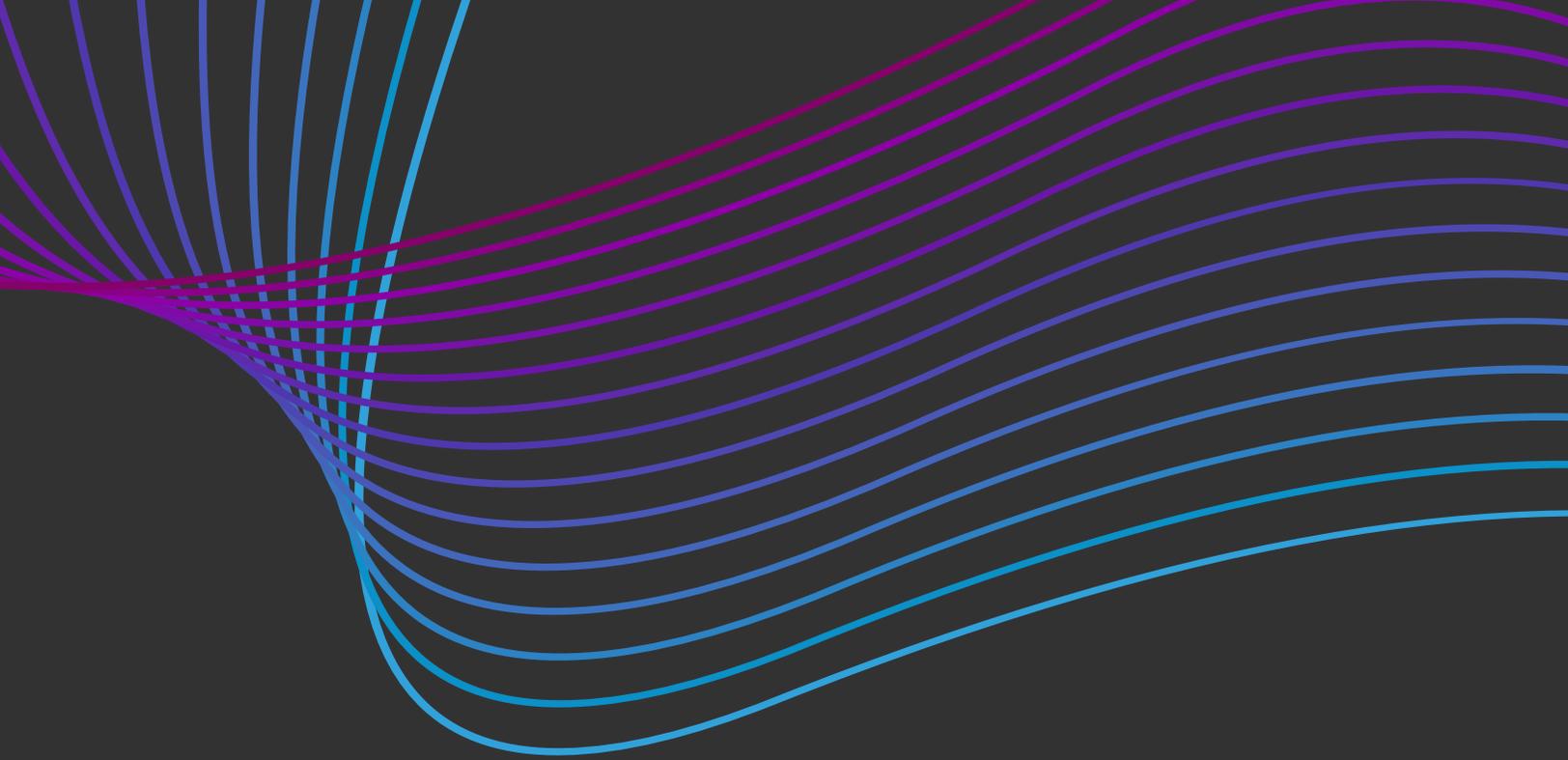
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# BACKGROUND

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How do prospective students gather information during their college search, and what resources do they find most useful? In this policy brief, we analyze students' college search behavior. Using recent survey data, we examine students' reported college information sources and whether students find these resources helpful and accurate.

This is the fifth and final brief in our **College Decisions Survey** series. In the fall of 2014, New America's Education Policy Program commissioned a survey that aims to refocus national attention on *all* students, regardless of whether they enroll in college right after high school or wait until their mid-thirties to attend for the first time. This is part of a series of briefs released during the spring, summer, and fall of 2015 that analyze the survey data, highlight specific findings, and address what students know about the college-going and financing process and how they decide where to go to college.

The series covers timely and important topics including:

- Financial concerns during the postsecondary decision-making process
- The application process for different types of students
- Students' familiarity with financial aid
- Students' ability to estimate their loan debt and monthly payments
- The college search process and helpfulness of various common resources

The survey data are designed to help researchers and policymakers better understand the concerns of today's students, and the factors they consider when choosing college. Additionally, this research will help policymakers and college-access advocates tailor their resources to have greater impact.

# METHODOLOGY

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New America commissioned Harris Poll to create and administer the survey. A national online survey was conducted between October 7th and November 3rd, 2014. The sample included 1,011 completed interviews and consisted of U.S. residents ages 16 to 40 who do not have college degrees and plan on enrolling in a two-year or four-year college within the next 12 months. The survey also included individuals who were in the first semester of their first year at a two-year or four-year college (n=264 for recently-enrolled students; n=747 for prospective students). We did this in part to ensure we had a large enough sample size to understand college-going behavior. Recently-enrolled students are not far removed from the college search process, and thus are able to reflect on the process. In our briefs, unless explicitly noted, both the prospective and recently-enrolled students are combined, and we refer to this group as “students.”

Data were weighted to ensure that it is balanced and accurately represents the population of interest for the study. Harris Poll’s weighting algorithm included a propensity score which allows Harris Poll to ensure that the results obtained online are projectable to the entire population of interest. A more detailed description of the weighting, methodology, and instrument for this survey can be accessed at [www.edcentral.org/collegedecisions](http://www.edcentral.org/collegedecisions).

**Notes about figures/tables:** Percentages may not always add up to 100 percent because of computer rounding or the acceptance of multiple answers from respondents answering that question. Data were tested at the 95 percent confidence level. Superscript letters indicate statistically significant differences between the subgroups being analyzed.

New America also conducted one follow-up focus group to ask prospective students about how they decide where to go to college and how to finance their postsecondary education. This focus group was conducted by FDR Group in Baltimore, Maryland on February 12, 2015. The focus group included nine individuals, ages 18 to 36, of various ethnicities and household incomes. Since the focus group participants were not randomly selected, their experiences and comments are not generalizable to the population of interest featured in the study. Quotes from these focus groups are used for the sole purpose of introducing student voice into the briefs. The screener and transcript can be accessed at [www.edcentral.org/collegedecisions](http://www.edcentral.org/collegedecisions).

# FINDING AND USING INFORMATION ABOUT COLLEGES

There are over 7,000 two-year and four-year colleges and universities in the United States.<sup>1</sup> Prospective students seeking a college credential must find a way to sort through a list of institutions, degree and certificate programs, and majors to decide which college and which program is right for them. But choosing a school is only part of the college decision-making process. Students also need to figure out how much their education will cost, what steps they need to take toward admission and enrollment, how classes fit in their schedule, and what kind of student support resources they can access on campus.

Simply put, students seeking a college education have to locate and weigh an enormous amount of information in order to select an institution and program that fits their needs. It's unsurprising, therefore, that 63 percent of recently-enrolled and prospective students say they have often felt lost when researching college or financial aid options. What is curious, however, is that 75 percent said they are or were able to find all the information they needed when choosing the right college or university. How can policymakers reconcile this discrepancy?

In this brief, we analyze survey data to better understand how students seek information about colleges during their decision-making process. We also discuss which resources are most popular among students and how helpful and accurate students find them.

## How are students learning about college?

Currently, students use a wide variety of sources to learn about college, with some differences among various subgroups. Overall, college websites (63 percent) and online search engines (59 percent) were the most popular sources of information that prospective and recently-enrolled students used to learn about colleges. (See Figure 1 in Appendix. All figures and tables in this brief are located in the Appendix.) When pressed to list up to three resources they used the most often, websites and online search engines still topped the list at 47 percent and 37 percent respectively. Visits to a college campus ranked a distant third at 19 percent. (See Figure 2.)

In general, younger students (ages 16 to 19) were more likely to use a wider array of resources than students ages 20 and up. For example, nearly three quarters of high-school aged students say they use college websites as a source of information. In addition, approximately half of these students also consult friends, parents, teachers, and high school counselors. Older students are unlikely to seek advice from parents and teachers or visit a college campus. It's unsurprising that older students are less likely to consult parents and teachers as they've been out of high school at least a couple of years and may no longer be living at home. (See Table 1.)

However, these older students were significantly more likely than younger students to name search engines as one of their most frequently used sources of information (46 percent for students 24 and older versus 31 percent of students 16 - 19). In our follow-up focus group, some older students discussed how they turned to search engines to find out more about colleges and financial aid.

*Ann (moderator):* How else do you get information about financial aid?

*Mark:* Google. I wouldn't say my friends are the college-y type.

*Randall:* Like the Google searching, scholarship searches—scholarships.com. There are other ones that tell you what grants you would qualify for.

White students are significantly more likely to visit college websites (69 percent) than their African American (57 percent) and Hispanic (50 percent) peers. In addition, white students are significantly more likely to consult their parents (41 percent) than African Americans (25 percent) and Hispanics (19 percent). (See Table 2.)

When looking at differences in income, students coming from families making less than \$50,000 were less likely than their wealthier peers to use personal connections as sources of information. For example, only 20 percent of students from this income bracket consulted their parents about their college decisions, compared with approximately 40 percent of students with household incomes of \$50,000 to \$100,000. This may be because students who come from families with lower-incomes

are more likely to be first-generation college students, and therefore they are less likely to have parents who are knowledgeable about college. In addition, as household income increases, students are more likely to use a wider array of resources to learn about colleges. (See Table 3.)

The majority of students who looked for information say they found just the right amount of helpful information when researching colleges and universities (57 percent). Still some students were not as satisfied. Hispanic students and low-income students were more likely than their peers to say they did not get enough information about colleges through their research (See Tables 4 and 5.).

### **The Specific Resources Students Use and Their Reported Helpfulness**

Most of the resources students use can be grouped into four categories: institutional (e.g., college websites, brochures, campus visits), federal (e.g., U.S. Department of Education websites such as College Navigator or the College Scorecard), commercial (e.g., *U.S. News & World Report*, *Princeton Review*), and personal (e.g., friends, family members, and teachers). In the next section, we look more in-depth at how different subpopulations used resources from these categories, and whether or not they found this information to be helpful.

### **Institutional Resources**

Many of the most popular, most frequently used, and most helpful sources of information came directly from colleges, according to students. College websites (63 percent), college brochures (39 percent), and campus visits (38 percent) were the first, fourth, and fifth most commonly used sources of information (See Figure 1). Approximately 47 percent of students named college websites as one of their top three sources of college information, along with 19 percent who named campus visits and 12 percent who named college brochures (See Figure 2).

Most students found institutional resources helpful, although some groups of students found them to be less so (See Figure 3). For example, 89 percent of those who used college websites during their search process found them to be very helpful or helpful, with approximately one in two (52 percent) visiting them every day to a few times a week (See Figure 4). As we discussed earlier, white students visit college websites at a higher rate

than African American and Hispanic students. However, African American students (95 percent) and Hispanic students (94 percent) were more likely than their white peers (83 percent) to report that college websites were helpful sources of information.

Students did encounter some problems with these sites, however. The most common difficulties revolved around finding how much a college costs (43 percent) and finding information about financial aid and scholarships (42 percent). Over a quarter of students (26 percent) said they did not have any problems when visiting colleges' websites.

Though only 19 percent of students said campus visits were among their top three sources of information, 93 percent of those who went on them found them to be either helpful or very helpful. Of recently-enrolled students, those ages 20+ were most likely to give college visits high marks (93 percent).

### **Department of Education Resources**

Although U.S. Department of Education resources like College Navigator are not as popular as other resources, one in six (16%) say they have used them or other federal websites as sources of information in their college search (See Figure 1). Eighty percent of students who visited these websites either said they were very helpful or helpful, slightly higher than the percentage of those who found high school guidance counselors (78 percent) or teachers (70 percent) to be very helpful or helpful (See Figure 3).

### **Commercial Rankings**

Though many colleges allocate a great deal of time, money, and energy to improving their ranking in magazines like *U.S. News & World Report*, only 23 percent of students say they used rankings in their college search. There were, however, some interesting differences by income, ethnicity, and age. Only 16 percent of students from families making less than \$50,000 say they used them, compared to 30 percent or more of students from all other income groups. (See Table 7). White students were twice as likely to use commercial rankings (26 percent) than their African American (16 percent) and Hispanic (13 percent) peers (See Table 8). In addition, students ages 16 to 19 were also more likely to have used college rankings than their older peers (See Table 9).

## Personal Resources

Though institutional and governmental sources comprise some of the most frequently used resources, students still find resources closer to home helpful and informative. For instance, many students ask friends (44 percent) and parents (32 percent) for college advice (See Figure 1). Our survey found that prospective students 20 or older considered their friends to be more helpful sources of information (71 percent) than students ages 16 to 19 (57 percent) did. Furthermore, students whose parents attended graduate or professional school were significantly more likely to consult their friends (59 percent) than were students whose parents had lower levels of education (39 percent for high school diploma and 42 percent for some college or a bachelor's degree). Students whose parents attended college or graduate school were also significantly more likely than others to use their parents as an information resource (40 percent and 51 percent, respectively compared with 21 percent of those who attended high school or less. See Table 10). Of

those who consulted their parents, male students who were 20 or older were most likely to say their parents were a helpful source of information (79 percent).

Students also consulted high school guidance counselors (35 percent) and teachers (31 percent) to explore information about college, though younger students (ages 16 to 19) were significantly more likely to use these resources than their older peers. For example, 54 percent of younger students used high school guidance counselors compared with 32 percent of those ages 20 to 23, 13 percent of those 24 to 29, and 9 percent of those ages 30 to 40. This makes sense given that younger students are more likely to be in high school and have access to guidance counselors and teachers. Regardless of age, the vast majority of students who used high school counselors and/or teachers found them to be helpful (78 percent and 70 percent respectively).

# DISCUSSION

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## The Federal Role: Better Data, Simplification, Accountability

There has been a push over the past several years to get better data about colleges and universities into students' hands.<sup>2</sup> Some policymakers and researchers believe that if students have access to better data, they will make more informed decisions about where to go to college and how to finance their education. As a result, there are a growing number of resources that provide students with the data they need to make good decisions, like the U.S. Department of Education's College Navigator or Scorecard and the College Board's Big Future. But throughout New America's survey, students gave contradictory answers about whether they had received enough information. As mentioned earlier, 63 percent of recently-enrolled and prospective students said they often feel or felt lost when researching college or financial aid options, but 75 percent said they are or were able to find all the information they needed when choosing the right college or university. What accounts for these inconsistencies?

We believe that students give such contradictory responses because the higher education market is overly complex and saturated with information, some of which is more salient to choosing a good college than others. You can throw loads of information at students to try to help them make better-informed decisions about which college will be the right fit financially, academically, and socially. But at the end of the day, if the system is too complex, no amount of information will clarify their decision-making process. For this reason, federal policymakers should improve available data, simplify the federal financial aid system, and provide a minimum floor of institutional accountability to deter students from going to institutions that are dropout and high-debt factories.

In our first brief, we called for ending the federal ban on the creation of a student unit record system.<sup>3</sup> A student unit record system would help provide students with precise data on student progression, college completion, and post-graduation outcomes. Many students think these data already exist, but they don't realize that the

way the government calculates graduation rates only measures first-time/full-time students or that there's no accurate labor market data about how alumni from specific colleges are faring. The U.S. Department of Education could use data from a student unit record system to revamp College Navigator and the Scorecard. Moreover, third-party organizations could also use the data to create consumer-friendly websites that help students choose a college that is a good fit for them.

Another way the federal government can help students make better decisions is to simplify the current structure of federal financial aid. The Education Department currently offers multiple grants and higher education tax credits to help students pay for college. Students also have a variety of student loan options such as subsidized, unsubsidized, and PLUS loans. On the back end, student borrowers can choose from over seven repayment plans, each with different terms and conditions. How can we expect students to make sound financial decisions when they are presented with so many options?

Congress should simplify the financial aid system so that students can more easily understand the aid for which they're eligible and how they can finance their college education. Senators Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.) and Michael Bennet (D-Colo.) have co-sponsored a bill that would simplify the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) and allow the government to determine students' financial aid eligibility using earlier tax data.<sup>4</sup> In addition, this measure would streamline federal grant and loan programs into one Pell Grant and three loan programs—one for undergraduates, one for graduates, and one for parent borrowers. It would also simplify repayment options into two plans, an income-based repayment plan and the ten-year standard plan. The bill as it currently stands is unlikely to pass. But because Senator Alexander is the chair of the Senate Health Education Labor and Pensions committee, simplification will likely be on the agenda when the panel drafts legislation reauthorizing the Higher Education Act.<sup>5</sup>

Lastly, the federal government should provide minimum accountability to ensure students don't enroll in institutions where they are likely to end up with significant amounts of debt and unlikely to graduate. There have been increasing calls over the past few years for strengthening higher education accountability as the federal government has increased its investment in higher education, pouring billions of dollars into institutions regardless of their student outcomes. The Education Trust, for example, published a report in 2014 that urged policymakers to establish minimum standards for

colleges related to low-income student access and degree attainment. Under the plan, poor institutional performers would risk being stripped of eligibility to receive federal student aid including grants, loans, and tax aid.<sup>6</sup>

The Obama Administration's Gainful Employment regulations promise to play an important role in ensuring that vocational programs at for-profit higher education institutions and non-degree programs at community colleges meet minimum student outcomes standards.<sup>7</sup> These rules use debt-to-income ratios as a threshold to determine program eligibility for federal student aid. If a program fails to meet these standards, the institution will face sanctions including eventual loss of eligibility for federal student aid for that program. Policymakers should explore whether widening the scope of these regulations to cover all higher education institutions would help ensure students don't leave school without any hope of repaying their debt.

Providing information and simplifying the student aid system will only go so far. The federal government must work to prevent students from attending institutions—especially expensive institutions—where students are unlikely to succeed.

## Institutional Recommendations

While college websites and search engines were the two most commonly used information sources (63 percent and 59 percent, respectively), many students went on campus visits to learn about colleges (38 percent). Those who visited campuses found the trips to be more helpful than any other source, with 93 percent saying their visits were either helpful or very helpful. Since campus visits provided useful information to students at such a high rate, both students and colleges may benefit from making visits more accessible and affordable and by encouraging more prospective students to take a look at the campus.

Additionally, since we know that some groups of prospective students favor using search engines over going directly to college websites, institutions should provide accurate information that can easily be located using a search engine. Lead generators have become incredibly successful at Search Engine Optimization (SEO) and can often fall to the top of results that students click on when they search for information about colleges. The problem with lead generators is that they often list only those colleges that they contract with, giving students the false impression that they're a neutral source of college information. But, oftentimes, the purpose of lead

generators is to help schools—many from the for-profit sector—recruit students. Students should be cautious when using search engines to conduct their search, and institutions must continue to explore ways to improve and refine their SEO, so students find the websites they need.

Moreover, due to observed differences in race, gender, and age on the reported usefulness of college websites, institutions should target their digital outreach to specific groups of students to make sure key information is clearly and accurately communicated.

On the whole, when students who used college websites were asked what information they had difficulty finding, the most popular answers were cost of attendance (43 percent) and financial aid (42 percent). College websites should provide prominently visible information about the price that prospective students would have to pay if

they choose to attend those institutions. Schools must also make sure that the information that they provide is accurate. One student in our focus group complained that a for-profit college she visited gave her conflicting information about its price:

*Linda:* Some of the school websites that I went on had a price, and then when I was looking into the certification program, I went to meet with a financial aid advisor from [a for-profit college], and when I looked on the website it said \$12K, and when she put it down on paper it was almost \$16K. It was a lot more, and that kind of gave me a sense of distrust.

Through their digital and on-campus tools, colleges have the opportunity to build trust with prospective students by accurately communicating details of what attending that college would be like.

## CONCLUSION

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When students search for a college, it is clear that they use multiple sources of information to make the decision about where to attend. While it's encouraging that the majority (57 percent) of students say they found just the right amount of helpful information to make their college decisions, there are still many students who either say they didn't find enough information or that they found a lot of information that wasn't very helpful.

Since students are likely to use institutional resources to get more information during their college search, institutions must do a better job at giving students clear information, including price of attendance. The federal government also has an important role to play to ensure that the data institutions and third-party sources provide to students are accurate, and that there is robust accountability that will help prevent students from attending institutions likely to leave them worse off than before they arrived.

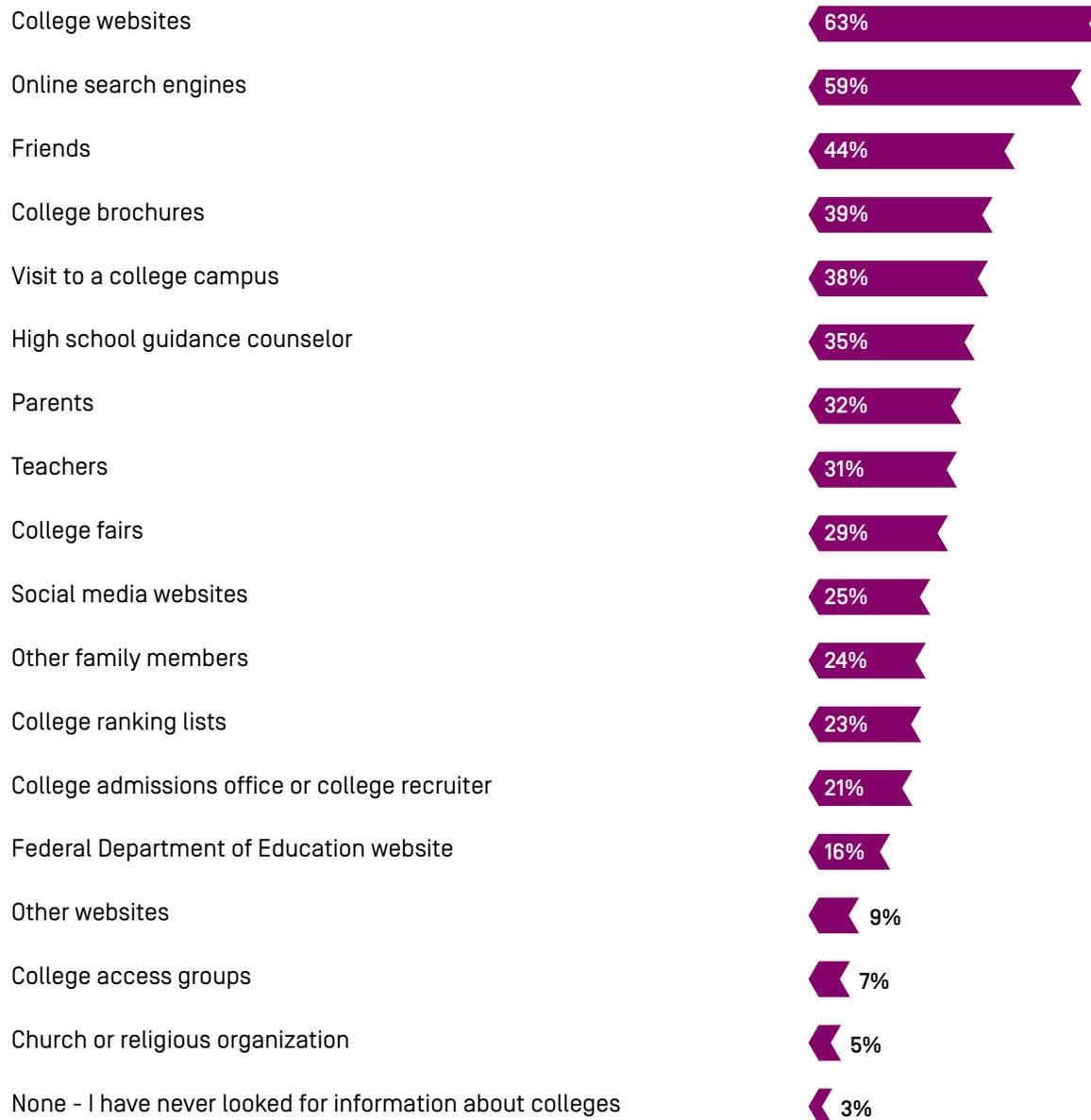


# APPENDIX

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Figure 1

## Sources of Information Used by Prospective and Recently-Enrolled Students

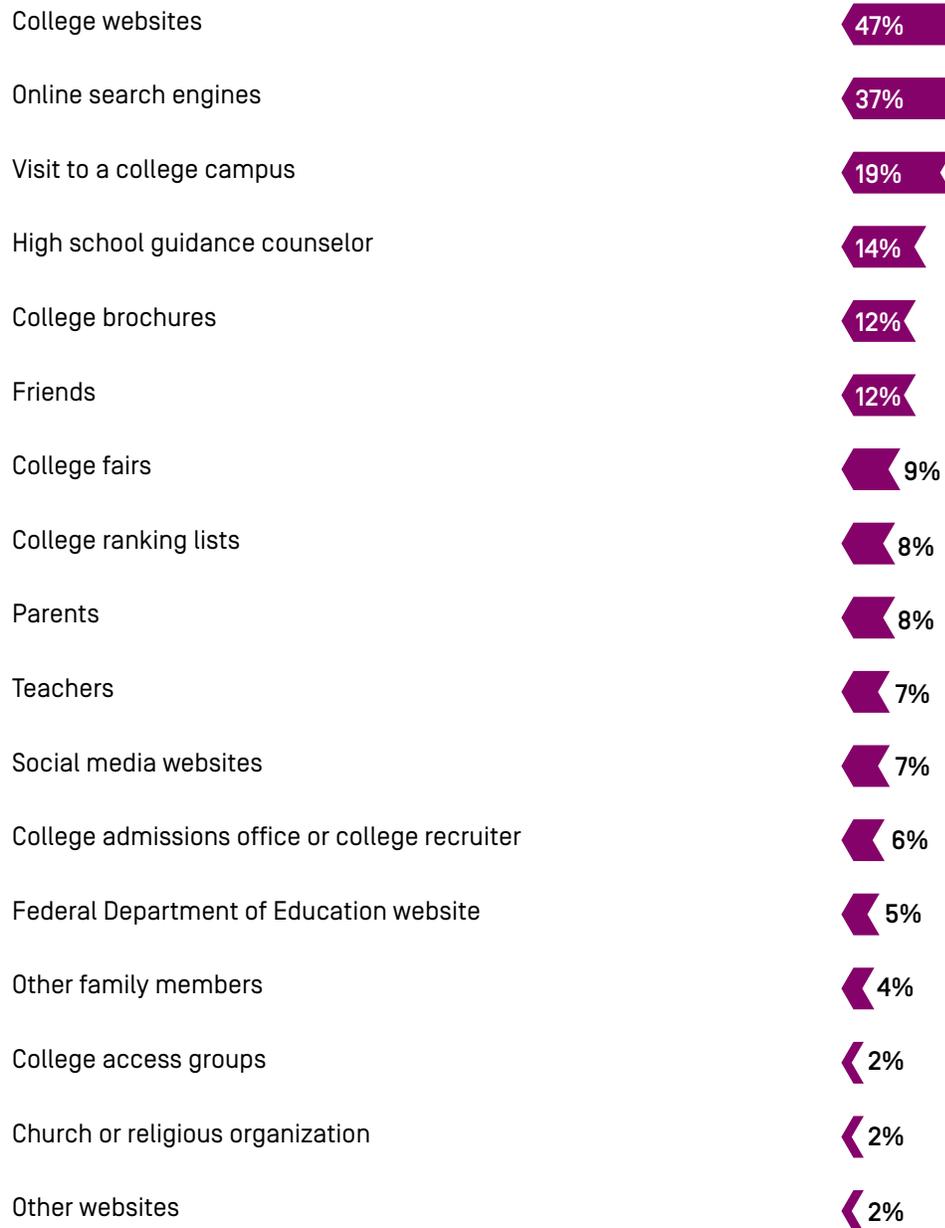


BASE: All Qualified Respondents (n=1011)

Q825: Which of the following have you ever used to find information about colleges? Please select all that apply.

Figure 2

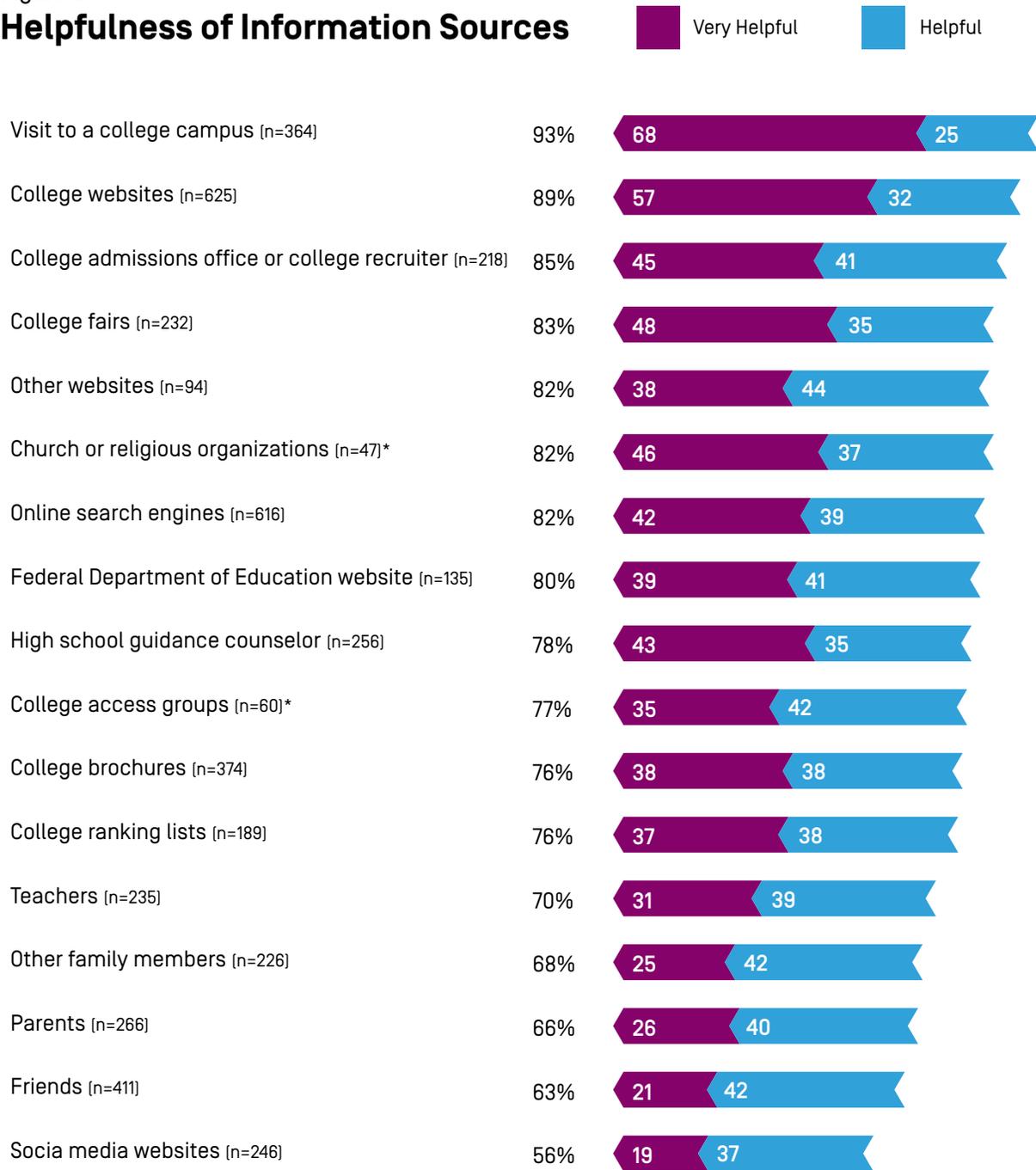
## Sources of Information Used *Most Often* by Prospective and Recently-Enrolled Students



BASE: Used source (n=975)

Q832: Which of the following did/do you use most often to find information about colleges? Please select up to three responses.

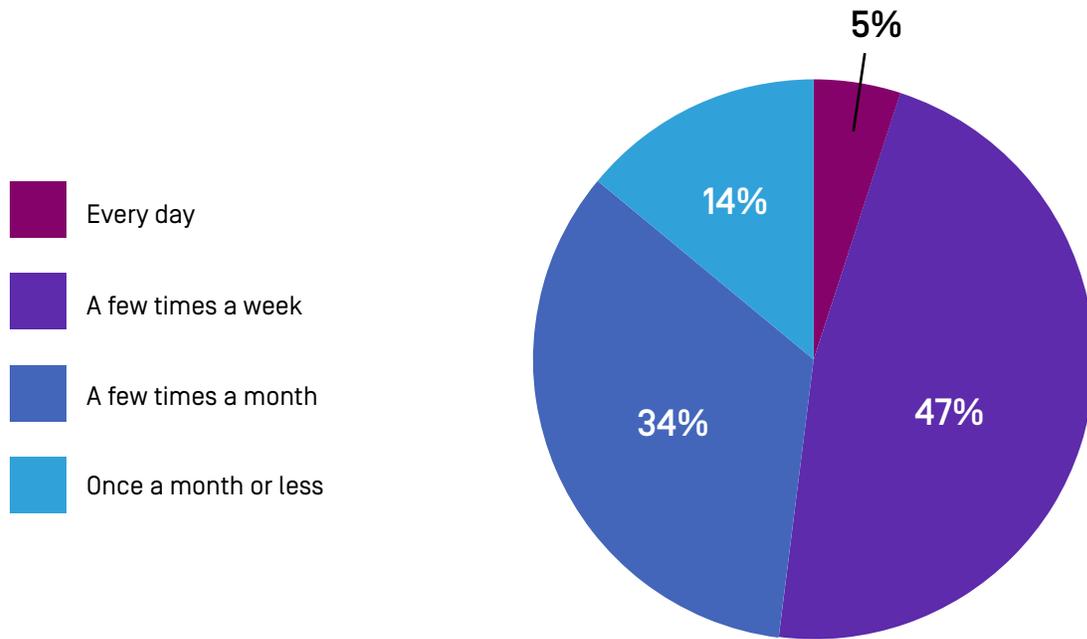
Figure 3  
**Helpfulness of Information Sources**



BASE: Used Source [variable base]  
 Q830: How helpful are/were each of these sources of information about colleges?

Figure 4

## How Often Students Visited College Websites



BASE: Visited College Websites (n=625)

Q840: [IF ENROLLED] During your college search process, how often did you visit any college websites? [IF NOT ENROLLED]: During your college search process, how often do you visit any college websites?

Table 1

**Sources of Information, by Age**

Age	A. 16-19	B. 20-23	C. 24-29	D. 30-40
Base	256	250	252	253
Colleges' websites	 71% <sup>BCD</sup>	 55%	 53%	 59%
Online search engines	 57%	 57%	 59%	 65%
Friends	 51% <sup>CD</sup>	 42%	 35%	 37%
College brochures	 48% <sup>BCD</sup>	 33%	 33%	 29%
Visit to a college campus	 48% <sup>BCD</sup>	 33%	 31%	 26%
High school guidance counselor	 54% <sup>BCD</sup>	 32% <sup>CD</sup>	 13%	 9%
Parents	 48% <sup>BCD</sup>	 31% <sup>CD</sup>	 17%	 10%
Teachers	 48% <sup>BCD</sup>	 27% <sup>CD</sup>	 12%	 13%
College fairs	 43% <sup>BCD</sup>	 25% <sup>D</sup>	 16%	 10%
College ranking lists	 30% <sup>CD</sup>	 21% <sup>C</sup>	 11%	 17%

BASE: All Qualified Respondents (n=1011)

Q825 Which of the following have you ever used to find information about colleges? Please select all that apply.

Data were tested at the 95% confidence level. Capital superscript letters (A, B, C, etc.) indicate statistically significant differences between the subgroups analyzed.

Table 2  
**Sources of Information, by Race**

Race	A. White	B. African American	C. Hispanic
Base	594	168	164
Colleges' websites	69% <sup>AB</sup>	57%	50%
Online search engines	63%	55%	52%
Friends	48%	36%	39%
College brochures	40% <sup>C</sup>	45% <sup>C</sup>	27%
Visit to a college campus	40% <sup>C</sup>	37%	28%
High school guidance counselor	29%	35%	33%
Parents	41% <sup>BC</sup>	25%	19%
Teachers	29%	26%	30%
College fairs	29%	30%	21%
Other family members	30% <sup>B</sup>	15%	21%

BASE: All Qualified Respondents (n=1011)

Q825 Which of the following have you ever used to find information about colleges? Please select all that apply.

Data were tested at the 95% confidence level. Capital superscript letters (A, B, C, etc.) indicate statistically significant differences between the subgroups analyzed.

Table 3

**Sources of Information, by Income**

Income	A. <\$50K	B. \$50K<\$75K	C. \$75K<\$100K	D. \$100K<\$150K	E. \$150K+
Base	617	141	70*	42*	25*
Colleges' websites	 56%	 69% <sup>A</sup>	 65%	 86%	 64%
Online search engines	 58%	 69%	 58%	 63%	 51%
Friends	 37%	 54% <sup>A</sup>	 48%	 48%	 62%
College brochures	 36%	 34%	 44%	 57%	 39%
Visit to a college campus	 31%	 42%	 45%	 65%	 49%
High school guidance counselor	 26%	 37%	 35%	 49%	 45%
Parents	 20%	 37% <sup>A</sup>	 43% <sup>A</sup>	 52%	 70%
Teachers	 21%	 30%	 39% <sup>A</sup>	 38%	 52%
College fairs	 22%	 30%	 29%	 46%	 39%
Other family members	 19%	 33% <sup>A</sup>	 23%	 23%	 35%

BASE: All Qualified Respondents (n=1011)

Q825 Which of the following have you ever used to find information about colleges? Please select all that apply.

Data were tested at the 95% confidence level. Capital superscript letters (A, B, C, etc.) indicate statistically significant differences between the subgroups analyzed.

\*Denotes small base. Results should be interpreted as directional in nature.

Table 4  
**Helpfulness of Information, by Race**

	A. White	B. African American	C. Hispanic
Base	575	164	156
Not enough information	11%	7%	18% <sup>B</sup>
A lot of information, but very little was helpful	29%	22%	30%
Just the right amount of helpful information	57%	69% <sup>C</sup>	51%
None of these	3%	2%	2%

BASE: Have Looked for Information About Colleges (n=975)

Q850: When researching colleges or universities, which of the following best describes the information you found?

Data were tested at the 95% confidence level. Capital superscript letters (A, B, C, etc.) indicate statistically significant differences between the subgroups analyzed.

Table 5  
**Helpfulness of Information, by Income**

Income	A. <\$50K	B. \$50K<\$75K	C. \$75K<\$100K	D. \$100K<\$150K	E. \$150K+
Base	596	136	68*	38*	24*
Not enough information	16%	13%	8%	13%	8%
A lot of information, but very little was helpful	29%	21%	14%	37%	19%
Just the right amount of helpful information	52%	62%	78% <sup>A</sup>	50%	73%
None of these	3%	5%	-	-	-

BASE: Have Looked for Information About Colleges (n=975)

Q850: When researching colleges or universities, which of the following best describes the information you found?

Data were tested at the 95% confidence level. Capital superscript letters (A, B, C, etc.) indicate statistically significant differences between the subgroups analyzed.

\*Denotes small base. Results should be interpreted as directional in nature.

Table 6  
**College Website Helpfulness, by Race**

	A. White	B. African American	C. Hispanic
Base	594	168	164
Visited college websites	69% <sup>BC</sup>	57%	50%
Base	385	94	91
College websites were helpful	83%	95% <sup>A</sup>	94%

BASE: All Qualified Respondents (n=1011)

Q825: Which of the following have you ever used to find information about colleges? Please select all that apply.

BASE: Visited College Websites (n=625)

Q831: How helpful are/were each of these sources of information about colleges?

Data were tested at the 95% confidence level. Capital superscript letters (A, B, C, etc.) indicate statistically significant differences between the subgroups analyzed.

Table 7  
**Use of Commercial Rankings as Source of Information, by Income**

Income	A. <\$50K	B. \$50K-\$75K	C. \$75K-\$100K	D. \$100K-\$150K	E. \$150K+
Base	617	141	70*	42*	25*
College rankings lists [e.g., U.S. News and World Report, Money magazine, Princeton Review, Washington Monthly, etc.]	16%	32% <sup>A</sup>	30%	35%	30%

BASE: All Qualified Respondents (n=1011)

Q825 Which of the following have you ever used to find information about colleges? Please select all that apply.

Data were tested at the 95% confidence level. Capital superscript letters (A, B, C, etc.) indicate statistically significant differences between the subgroups analyzed.

\*Denotes small base. Results should be interpreted as directional in nature.

Table 8

## Use of Commercial Rankings as Source of Information, by Race

<b>Race</b>	<b>A. White</b>	<b>B. African American</b>	<b>C. Hispanic</b>
Base	594	168	164
College rankings lists	26% <sup>c</sup>	16%	13%

BASE: All Qualified Respondents (n=1011)

Q825 Which of the following have you ever used to find information about colleges? Please select all that apply.

Data were tested at the 95% confidence level. Capital superscript letters (A, B, C, etc.) indicate statistically significant differences between the subgroups analyzed.

Table 9

## Use of Commercial Rankings as Source of Information, by Age

<b>Age</b>	<b>A. 16-19</b>	<b>B. 20-23</b>	<b>C. 24-29</b>	<b>D. 30-40</b>
Base	256	250	252	253
College rankings lists	30% <sup>cd</sup>	21% <sup>c</sup>	11%	17%

BASE: All Qualified Respondents (n=1011)

Q825 Which of the following have you ever used to find information about colleges? Please select all that apply.

Data were tested at the 95% confidence level. Capital superscript letters (A, B, C, etc.) indicate statistically significant differences between the subgroups analyzed.

Table 10

## Sources of Information, by Parents' Education

	A. High school or less	B. Attended college or college degree	C. Attended graduate school or graduate degree	D. Job training after high school
Base	325	461	112	113
Friends	39%	42%	59% <sup>AB</sup>	46%
Visit to a college campus	31%	41%	53% <sup>AD</sup>	29%
Parents	21%	40% <sup>AD</sup>	51% <sup>AD</sup>	20%
College ranking lists	18%	26% <sup>D</sup>	35% <sup>AD</sup>	10%

BASE: All Qualified Respondents (n=1011)

Q825 Which of the following have you ever used to find information about colleges? Please select all that apply.

Data were tested at the 95% confidence level. Capital superscript letters (A, B, C, etc.) indicate statistically significant differences between the subgroups analyzed.



# NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> For Academic Year 2011-12 found in “Fast Facts: Educational Institutions,” Institute for Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, accessed August 24, 2015, <https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84>.

<sup>2</sup> New America has been part of this effort as part of their work on the Gates Foundation’s Reimagining Aid Design and Delivery (RADD) project. New America is a member of the Postsecondary Data Collaborative, better known as PostsecData, an initiative created by the Institute for Higher Education Policy (IHEP) that advocates for high-quality postsecondary data. Read more about the initiative here: <http://www.ihep.org/postsecdata/about>.

<sup>3</sup> Rachel Fishman, 2015 College Decisions Survey Part I: Deciding to Go to College (Washington, DC: New America, 2015), <http://www.edcentral.org/collegedecisions>.

<sup>4</sup> Financial Aid Simplification and Transparency Act of 2015, S 108, 114th Cong., 1st sess., <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/bdquery/D?d114:1:/temp/~bdze9S:/bss/>.

<sup>5</sup> New America has written about why policymakers should be hesitant to adopt a two-question FAFSA in Rachel Fishman, “FAFSA Simplification: Be Careful What You Wish For,” EdCentral, November 24, 2014, accessed August 24, 2015, <http://www.edcentral.org/fafsa-simplification-careful-wish/>.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Dannenberg and Mary Nguyen Barry, Tough Love: Bottom-Line Quality Standards for Colleges (Washington, DC: The Education Trust, 2014), <http://edtrust.org/resource/tough-love-bottom-line-quality-standards-for-colleges/>.

<sup>7</sup> Betsy Mayotte, “What the New Gainful Employment Rule Means for College Students,” US News & World Report, July 8, 2015, <http://www.usnews.com/education/blogs/student-loan-ranger/2015/07/08/what-the-new-gainful-employment-rule-means-for-college-students>.





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