

Education Datapalooza

Government encourages exploration of edu-related data resources



Guess what type of debt is greater than credit card debt? Student debt.

Last week, a battalion of educators, private-sector entrepreneurs and organizations convened for the Education Datapalooza, organized by the Department of Education. The challenge was to use released government data to try to tackle President Obama's plan to make college more affordable [www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/08/22/fact-sheet-president-s-plan-make-college-more-affordable-better-bargain-]. "Attending college is more important than ever, yet it's never been more expensive," stated US Secretary Arne Duncan.

College costs continue to increase. Textbook prices have risen three times the rate of inflation over the past decade. Cecilia Munoz, assistant to President Obama, shared that in the time that the family income has increased by 16%, the cost of college has increased by 250%. After college, students aren't doing much better. The average graduate has \$29K in student debt and not guaranteed a job. Higher education costs are clearly out of whack.

One solution, hopes the government, is to unlock troves of government data related to education (jump to the end of this story for a list). Nick Sinai, deputy chief technology officer, argued that opening government data both increases college participation by helping students make better choices about schooling and can even stir up \$3 trillion in economic growth (especially if you count all the time saved simplifying the application process).

Among the 600 educators, entrepreneurs and others who gathered at the Ronald Reagan Amphitheater in Washington, DC, for the edu-palooza were some who brought examples of what could be done with the government data. Among them:

- Abigail Seldin shared an open data feature recently added to College Abacus, a free site that serves as a financial aid calculator;

- Adam Phillabaum, formerly of PayScale.com, created How's My Offer to help students evaluate their offers from different colleges;
- Several professors at the Harvard Derek Bok Center for Teaching and Learning launched ABLConnect, a platform that aims to foster activity-based learning and community;
- Student Success Academy is tackling increased access to college and career counseling by taking advantage of government data, crowdsourcing and virtual conferencing;
- With the help of \$2.5 million, mostly from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, College Summit launched a series of 19 apps (one more to come) to help navigate the college process, including College Abacus, and created a one-stop portal: CollegeAppMap.org;
- Four college students spent four weeks building a demonstration site, This is Grit, that they hope will become an inspirational font of stories and social media about what it takes to succeed.
- Basno CEO Nicholas Thorne, and Dean of NYU School of Continuing and Professional Development, Dennis Di Lorenzo, partnered to create a new digital badging program to explain more clearly to employers what specific skills their certificates indicated.

Some of the attending entrepreneurs described their ongoing work: Ariel Diaz, CEO of Boundless, which is striving to cut textbook prices, pointed out that 7 out of 10 college students choose not to buy their textbooks because of finances. Deputy Secretary of Education, James Shelton, drove that point home when he shared that he himself was one of those students his senior year.

Looking for a challenge? Here's one: Shelton announced that the DOE wants to make it easier for students and families to complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Coming soon: a Request for Information (RFI) from the department to gather ideas and feedback on what Application Program Interfaces (APIs) for key education data, programs, and frequently used forms—including the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)--would benefit students and consumers the most. Seems like the data jamboree will continue.

(Government) Data, Data Everywhere

Relevance of data	Name	Description	A question it could answer
Higher Ed Data	IPEDS: Integrated Postsecondary Education System	System of interrelated surveys done annually by the National Center for Education Statistics. Collects from every post secondary school that takes part in federal student financial aid programs. Check out the IPEDS Data Center here.	How many and what type of students are enrolled at a postsecondary institution each semester?
	Federal Student Aid Data Center	Includes info on the Federal Pell Grant and other student loan programs.	What's the student default rate at a given postsecondary institution?

	National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS)	Compiles research based on student-level records, financial aid, demographics, enrollment data and so on. Check out the DataLab collection.	What are the most common degrees for undergrad and graduate students? What's their demographic makeup?
	Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS)	Follows a cohort of freshman students surveyed at three points in time: after their first year, then three and six years later.	What percentage of students starting postsecondary school finish within six years?
	Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B)	Follows students' education and work post bachelor's degree from 1992-93, 1999-2000, and 2007-8. Includes a special emphasis on following teachers.	What percent of these students were employed a year after receiving their degree? How much did they make?
	MyStudentData (National Student Loan Data System)	This one has information on loans for students. That said, it might take a grad degree to parse it.	
Elementary and Secondary Ed Data	Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)	Lots of data disaggregated by race/ethnicity, sex, English proficiency and disability. The data is collected in biennial samples. Data from the 2011-12 survey will be available in early 2014.	How many students are taking AP tests? What are average teacher salaries in different districts?
	Common Core of Data (CCD)	The primary database on public elementary and secondary education in the US.	How does the student-teacher ratio differ by schools and districts?
	EDFacts	A centralized collection of performance data supplied by K-12 state education agencies.	What percentage of students at a school or district have reached grade-level proficiency in reading or math?
Educational Attainment and Population Data	American Community Survey (ACS)	A continuous nationwide survey on demographics as well as the social, education, economic and housing characteristics of the US population. Available data begins in 2004.	What is the unemployment rate for people who have achieved different levels of education?

Current Population Survey (CPS)

Jointly sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and the US Census Bureau, this collection includes high-profile numbers such as national unemployment.

How does educational attainment vary in the US by age, sex, race and ethnicity.

Non-Federal Education Data

Common Data Set (CDS)

A collaborative effort among data providers in the higher education community and publishers (eg: the College Board, Peterson's, and U.S. News & World Report) that covers students' transition into higher education. It's a collection of standards and definition of data sets, not a data set itself. Nothing to download here, folks.