Goal 1. Postsecondary Education, Career and Technical Education, and Adult Education:

Increase college access, affordability, quality, and completion by improving postsecondary education and lifelong learning opportunities for youths and adults.

Goal Leader: Ted Mitchell, Under Secretary

Public Benefit

Increasing college access, affordability, quality, and completion by improving postsecondary education and lifelong learning opportunities for youths and adults requires attention to three equally important factors to facilitate success: availability of good consumer information and financial aid, strong motivation by students and families, and access to affordable, high-quality learning opportunities.

Prior to entering postsecondary education, prospective students need easily accessible information on the cost of attendance and financial aid; rates for career placement, graduation, and college loan defaults; labor market outcomes and projections of labor market demand; loan repayment and management options; and other subjects crucial to understanding the affordability and value of the postsecondary institutions and programs of study available. Students deserve to know that, whether they enter a college, university, career training program, or adult education program, the credential they earn will be affordable and its value will be recognized as an indication that they possess the necessary knowledge and skills for success in the workplace and in life.

Providing federal student aid in a simple, reliable, and efficient manner is primarily how the Department supports college access, affordability, quality, and completion. In FY 2015, the Department delivered nearly $128 billion in grants, work-study, and loan assistance to almost 12 million postsecondary students at over 6,100 schools.[1] In addition, the Department administered $2 billion annually in grants to strengthen postsecondary institutions and promote college readiness, and nearly $1.7 billion more in grant funds for career and technical education (CTE), adult education (including literacy and civics education), and correctional education to help youths and adults secure the skills that equip them for work, civic participation, and lifelong learning.[2]

The Department has taken significant steps to increase college access, affordability, quality, and completion in recent years. Resources developed by the Department, such as the College Affordability and Transparency Center, the Financial Aid Shopping Sheet, the College Scorecard, a consolidated student aid website, and new loan counseling and financial literacy resources, now provide students and families with new and enhanced tools for informed decision-making. In particular, the release in FY 2015 of a vastly expanded College Scorecard—including many important metrics that have not been published before—has set a new standard for consumer information about postsecondary education. Redesigned with direct input from students, families, and their advisers, the College Scorecard provides the clearest, most accessible, and most reliable national data on cost, graduation, debt, and postcollege

[1] Federal Student Aid Annual Report FY 2015.
[2] Note that CTE formula funds go to both secondary and postsecondary programs; approximately 40% of the amount listed goes to postsecondary programs.

earnings. Gainful Employment regulations will also ensure that students are informed about key outcomes for occupational-oriented programs before they enroll and that programs not meeting established standards will lose eligibility for access to federal student aid funds. In addition, the Department continues to simplify the FAFSA so it is easier and faster for students to apply for aid, and has improved the process. Beginning with the 2017–18 award year, students can apply earlier and electronically retrieve tax information filed for an earlier year, rather than waiting until tax season to complete their applications. Learning about aid eligibility options much earlier in the college application and decision process will allow students and families to determine the true cost of attending college—taking available financial aid into account—and make more informed decisions. New and expanded repayment plans, including Pay As You Earn (PAYE) and Revised Pay As You Earn (REPAYE), make debt more affordable for students after they leave school. America's College Promise, the President's proposed new federal-state partnership to to make two years of community college free for responsible students, would significantly impact affordability by letting students earn the first half of a bachelor's degree and earn skills needed in the workforce at no cost. This proposal will require everyone to do their part: community colleges must strengthen their programs and increase the number of students who graduate, states must invest more in higher education and training, and students must take responsibility for their education, earn good grades, and stay on track to graduate. The Department will build on these efforts to ensure that all Americans, regardless of their financial circumstances, will have the opportunity to access and complete an affordable postsecondary degree or other postsecondary credential.

Analysis and Next Steps

Objective 1.2: Quality. Foster institutional value to ensure that postsecondary education credentials represent effective preparation for students to succeed in the workforce and participate in civic life.

Objective Leader:
Jon O'Bergh, Senior Policy Advisor, Office of the Under Secretary (OUS)

Explanation and Analysis of Progress:

The Department pursued several rulemaking activities during FY 2015 on higher education topics, including the use of prepaid debit cards at IHEs; teacher preparation programs; and implementation of WIOA, which reforms adult education training and services, including in the areas of English language acquisition and vocational rehabilitation for individuals with disabilities. Most significantly, the Department implemented the Gainful Employment regulations, which took effect July 1, 2015, and began collecting data from institutions. The regulations foster program quality through transparency and accountability. Institutions will be required to notify students about completion rates as well as debt and earnings outcomes for certain types of occupational-oriented programs; programs that do not meet established standards risk losing eligibility for federal student aid funds. The Department also implemented its state authorization regulations on July 1 and reminded institutions and states of dual requirements that 1) IHEs must be authorized to operate in a given state by the appropriate state agency, and 2) that agency must have a process for handling student complaints.

The Department continues to encourage the higher education community to focus on innovative, transparent, and validated approaches to student learning. Through the Experimental Sites initiative, the Department announced experiments in the areas of competency-based learning, Federal Work Study, and prior learning assessments. The results of these experiments will guide future policy decisions. The Department and the White House

convened a group of 50 leading higher education experts for a discussion of innovation in higher education. Participants spent the day considering opportunities for innovation on which the federal government and others could take action expediently, and were led through a design-thinking workshop about how online learning tools can catalyze improvements in postsecondary education.

The Department awarded 18 First in the World grants totaling $60 million, with nine of the winning applications awarded to minority-serving institutions. The program focuses on high-need students and promotes evidence-based strategies and practices for college access and completion. Funded projects include a partnership of community colleges to implement proactive and individualized student support services, informed by an early alert and advising system based in predictive analytics; incorporating new teaching and learning strategies into the curriculum and student experience at an Historically Black College; and creating seamless transfer of lower-division general education requirements across participating institutions based on students' demonstration of learning outcomes regardless of courses or credits completed. The Department, through a contractor, will provide technical assistance to assist all grantees in conducting rigorous project evaluations. Those projects showing evidence of success will serve as models for possible dissemination or could be eligible for future validation and scale-up grants.

The Department awarded 40 grants totaling $17.5 million in the Strengthening Institutions Program (SIP).[3] This program helps postsecondary schools expand their capacity to serve low-income students by providing funds to improve and strengthen academic quality, institutional management, and fiscal stability, as well as build a framework to help students complete college. For the FY 2015 competition, the Department included a competitive preference priority supporting programs, practices, or strategies that are based on rigorous evidence.

The Department created an interagency task force on for-profit schools, including the Departments of Education, Defense, Justice, Labor, the Treasury, and Veterans Affairs, as well as the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the Federal Trade Commission, and the Securities and Exchange Commission. The task force established a working group to focus on enforcement-related issues.

The Department collaborated with the Department of Labor, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), the Corporation for National and Community Service, and the Institute of Museum and Library Services to develop Performance Partnership Pilots (P3) for Disconnected Youth. Nine pilots were announced in October 2015 that will test the hypothesis that additional flexibility for states, localities, and tribes, in the form of blending funds and obtaining waivers of certain programmatic requirements, can help overcome some of the significant hurdles that states, localities, and tribes may face in providing intensive, comprehensive, and sustained service pathways and improving outcomes for disconnected youth. Proposed priorities, requirements, definitions, and selection criteria for a second competition are under development (subsequently published in October as well).

In collaboration with the National Economic Council, the Department of Labor, and the Aspen Institute, the Department held an UpSkill Summit at the White House on April 24, 2015. One hundred employers made commitments to help millions of frontline workers develop their skills, training and credentials. The Department secured similar commitments from national and international labor unions and labor-management collaborations.

[3] FY 2015 awards listed at http://www2.ed.gov/programs/iduestitle3a/awards.html.

As part of the President's commitment to double the number of apprenticeships in the country, the Department collaborated with the Department of Labor and the Office of the Vice President to secure over 200 commitments from community colleges and their Registered Apprenticeship partners to grant college credits and degrees to individuals who hold apprenticeship program completion certificates.

The Department surpassed its FY 2015 target for reducing the number of low-performing institutions—i.e., those with high student loan cohort default rates and below average completion rates. However, the Department proposes to replace this metric in FY 2016 with other metrics that take advantage of better data available through the expanded College Scorecard.

Challenges and Next Steps:

The Department will continue various rulemaking development and implementation activities during FY 2016. Working cooperatively with schools and the Social Security Administration, the Department must ensure that activities such as data matching and validation occur on schedule in processing Gainful Employment data. The Department will also publish final rules regarding WIOA, Teacher Prep, and cash management regulations.[4]

In the innovation space, the Department will continue to develop specifications for Experimental Sites projects on dual enrollment and alternative methods of quality assurance (the latter project, dubbed Educational Quality through Innovative Partnerships, or EQUIP, was subsequently announced in October 2015, as was the dual enrollment project). Processing amended Program Participation Agreements for institutions that wish to participate in the competency-based education and prior learning assessment experiments remains a complex activity and has taken longer than anticipated, but the Department expects to complete the process in FY 2016 so the experiments can commence. The Department will also consider steps that can be taken to help accreditors strengthen their oversight of institutions.

The possible reauthorization of the *Higher Education Act* could provide an opportunity to develop new ways to encourage innovation and quality in this sector. Continuing to embed evidence-based practices in grant competitions is another area in which the Department can foster quality in terms of better student outcomes. The interagency For-Profit Task Force will work toward sharing information to ensure that students are protected from unscrupulous institutional behavior.

The reauthorization of the *Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Improvement Act of 2006* creates opportunities to name quality features of CTE programs, strengthen the link between funding and results by incentivizing performance-based funding (such as completion-based state funding as an alternative to enrollment-based state funding mechanisms), and embed innovation funding in a reauthorized law that would include innovations, such as the American Technical Training Fund targeted at cohort-based, accelerated programming for high-demand sectors and occupations that embed remediation into program design.

Finally, the emphasis in WIOA Title II on integrated education and training programming opens the door for programs that by design allow adults to work on their basic skills while simultaneously pursuing credit-bearing courses at the postsecondary level that lead toward certificates or degrees in high-demand fields.

[4] Final Rules regarding Cash Management Regulations were published in October 2015.

U.S. Department of Education Indicators of Success	Baseline	2013 Actuals	2014 Actuals	2015 Actuals	2015 Current Year Targets	Current Year Results	2016 Out-Year Targets	2017 Out-Year Targets
1.2.A. Number of low-performing institutions with high loan default rates and low graduation rates[5]	AY: 2010–11 205	AY: 2010–11 205	AY: 2011–12 91	AY: 2012–13 55	AY: 2012–13 155	**MET**	NA	NA
New Metric: Pell enrollment at IHEs with high graduation rates[6]	AY: 2013–14 24.1%	NA	NA	AY: 2013–14 24.1%	NA	NA	AY 2014–15 25.0%	AY 2015–16 26.0%
New Metric: Number of states that develop or strengthen career pathways policies, guidance, or legislation	FY: 2015 8	NA	NA	8	NA	NA	10	37

NA = Not applicable.
TBD = To be determined.
Academic Year (AY) is a collegiate year spanning August–May; School Year (SY) spans August–July and is aligned with a P–12 school year; Fiscal Year (FY) corresponds to a federal fiscal year; Calendar Year (CY) spans January–December.

Data Sources and Frequency of Collection:
1.2.A. FSA Cohort Default Rate (CDR) Report, September 2014, and IPEDS Data Center; annually

[5] Metric being removed at the end of the FY 2015 reporting period and being replaced with the metric identified as "New Metric" directly below it. If there is no corresponding "New Metric" identified, new metric TBD. Please refer to appendix B for details pertaining to the removal and addition of metrics. The proposed FY 2016 and 2017 targets for the metric being removed were 135 and 117, respectively.
[6] "High graduation rate" is defined as 65% or higher, which is roughly the 75th percentile.