

College Decisions Resources List: 2015-16

Many great resources offer students the tools and information to help them decide where to apply for college. School counselors, mentors, college access professionals and other caring adults can help guide students through the process. Here are some websites, handouts and other resources that can help students make more informed college decisions:

FloridaShines – Florida's Student Hub of Innovative Educational Services

Link(s): <https://www.floridashines.org/>, <https://www.floridashines.org/go-to-college/get-ready-for-college-careers> (College Checklist and College & Career Planner worksheets), <https://www.floridashines.org/go-to-college/explore-colleges-universities> (explore Florida colleges and universities)

FloridaShines, a service of Florida Virtual Campus, provides online access to educational services for high school and postsecondary students across the state. Students have the ability to search and explore online courses and degree programs at state colleges and universities, check their transcripts and apply to take courses at other institutions. The College Checklist and College & Career Planner are great resources for students considering postsecondary options in Florida.

Florida Economic Security Report, Beyondeducation.org

Link(s): http://beyondeducation.org/temp/ER_Report.pdf (Economic Security report), <http://beyondeducation.org/> (report landing page), <http://esm.beyondeducation.org/esm/florida/> (accompanying workforce outcomes database)

School counselors and educators who provide information to students about financial assistance for college are sometimes faces with questions such as, "Is college worth it?" In 2013, the Florida Legislature passed a bill to provide economic and workforce outcome data for graduates of all public postsecondary institutions in the state, which can be a useful resource when discussing the costs and benefits of a postsecondary education with students and families.

Florida Scholarship and Grant Programs

Link(s): <http://www.floridastudentfinancialaid.org/ssfad/home/uamain.htm>, https://www.floridastudentfinancialaidsg.org/pdf/nm4c_brochure.pdf (Money for College brochure)

The Florida Department of Education's Office of Student Financial Assistance (OSFA) administers a variety of state-funded grants and scholarships to assist Florida students with the cost of their postsecondary educations. Visit this site for detailed eligibility and award information for over ten state aid programs. OSFA also offers a brochure, which has a briefer, printable version of the state's financial aid programs.

The Guide to Federal Student Aid: Funding Your Education

Link(s): <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/sites/default/files/funding-your-education.pdf> (handout), <http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/Types-of-Federal-Student-Aid-Reference-Sheet.pdf> (one-page reference sheet)

More than \$150 billion in federal student is available through grants, work-study and loans every year. This handout and worksheet serve as quick references for students and parents who would like to learn about federal student aid programs, their eligibility criteria and award amounts.

Financial Aid Toolkit

Link(s): <http://www.financialaidtoolkit.ed.gov/tk/>

The Financial Aid Toolkit, a resource from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Federal Student Aid, provides information and outreach tools for counselors, college access professionals, nonprofit mentors and others. It includes videos, infographics, how-to guides, presentation templates and a variety of other financial assistance resources.

College Scorecard

Link(s): <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/>

The College Scorecard, which is offered by the U.S. Department of Education, provides students and families the critical information they need to make smart decisions about where to enroll for higher education. The interactive tool highlights key indicators about the cost and value of institutions across the country to help students choose schools that are well-suited to meet their needs, priced affordably, and are consistent with their educational and career goals.

College Abacus, Pell Abacus

Link(s): <https://collegeabacus.org/>, <https://pell.collegeabacus.org/>

College Abacus is a one-stop, secure search site that helps students and families compare the net price estimates of 5,000+ colleges. Pell Abacus, released in September 2015, is a tool that helps students who qualify for Free or Reduced Lunch to get net price estimates quickly without answering detailed financial questions that would require a parent or tax form.

Debt by Degrees

Link(s): <https://projects.propublica.org/colleges/>

Also referred to as "ProPublica's College Scorecard," the Debt by Degrees database utilizes the trove of new data released with the U.S. Department of Education's new College Scorecard. Users can view data by state or drill down by institution for detailed information on how much low-income students pay for college, how much debt they accrue, how many are repaying their loans and what their income is after graduation.

Big Future

Link(s): <https://bigfuture.collegeboard.org/>

Find colleges, learn how to pay for college then make a step-by-step plan with Big Future, a college information portal created by The College Board. Big Future's college search function allows users to find postsecondary institutions by test scores and selectivity, academic program, a college's cost and even which institutions have application fee waivers available.

Florida College Application Week Toolkit

Link(s): <http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/2015/09/24/october-is-florida-college-application-month/> (includes Apply Yourself Coordinator and Student Guides)

Florida College Access Network offers a free "how-to guide" for educators, counselors and community members interested in hosting a College Application Week event. The toolkit, which is adapted from toolkits created by the American College Application Campaign (ACAC) and Michigan College Access Network (MCAN), provides valuable information on how to navigate to and through the college application process and how to plan and host a College Application Week event. It also includes a student guide to help navigate the college going process.

Florida CAN Webinar: How can we help students make better college decisions?

Link(s): <http://www.floridacollegeaccess.org/event/florida-can-webinar-how-can-we-help-students-make-better-college-decisions/> (reports, slides, webinar recording)

Florida College Access Network hosted a webinar in October 2015 highlighting New America's College Decisions Survey, a series of briefs revealing what prospective college students know about the college search and financing process and how they decide where to go to college. New America's College Decisions Survey, written by webinar presenter Rachel Fishman, interviewed over 1,000 prospective and beginning college students with findings featured in five briefs released during the summer and fall of 2015.