

Supporting Statement for College.gov Account Registration and Inspirational Message Features

U.S. Department of Education

October 20, 2008



1. The Office of the Under Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education (“Department”) seeks clearance and approval for the account registration and inspirational message features on college.gov. The collection of information through college.gov is necessary in order to help fulfill the Department’s mission to strengthen the Federal commitment to assuring access to equal educational opportunity for every individual. This includes: “to improve service to students and other participants in the student financial assistance programs authorized under title IV, including making those programs more understandable to students and their parents.” (P.L. 105-244, Section 101, Part D, Section 141(a)(2)(A)).

The Secretary of Education’s Action Plan for Higher Education calls for expanding the accessibility, affordability and accountability of higher education for more Americans. In response to this action plan, and based on input and feedback from students and the higher education community, the Department created college.gov.

College.gov serves as a primary source of information and resources about planning, preparing and paying for postsecondary education, including 2- or 4-year colleges and universities, vocational and career schools. More importantly, college.gov is intended to provide inspiration and hope to all students (with a focus on low income and first generation students), and encourage them to consider and pursue a postsecondary education.

College.gov was released on May 25, 2008. A second release is scheduled for December 2008 and will expand the student engagement aspect of the site by enabling students to create and share inspirational and motivational messages about why they want to go to college. These account registration and inspirational message features are critical for fully engaging students in the site and for providing inspiration and hope to students (especially targeting underrepresented populations) that a postsecondary education is possible.

2. College.gov’s target audience (“users”) is 9th-12th grade high school students. The site also provides some content for parents/guardians and counselors/teachers.

The purpose for including the account registration and inspirational message features in college.gov is to enhance the interactivity and engagement aspects of the site. These features are critical for fully engaging students in the site, for keeping their interest and attention, and for providing inspiration and hope to students (especially to underrepresented populations) that a postsecondary education is possible. The features also support the peer-to-peer aspect of the site and provide relatable role models of students “just like them” that can show that higher education is possible for all students.

Web site users have the option of registering with college.gov. In order to register, a user selects the registration link, inputs seven data elements and, after providing consent to the site's terms and conditions, submits that information to the Department.

Once the account registration process is completed, a user has the option of creating his or her own inspirational message by uploading a photo and adding an "I'm Going" statement about why he or she wants to pursue education beyond high school. The inspirational message (hereafter "billboard") is saved within college.gov and can be shared with others.

After a user creates a billboard, he or she can choose to (1) have the billboard featured on college.gov's home page (visitors can browse through approved user-generated billboards); (2) send his or her family, friends and other supporters a link to the college.gov home page with the billboard; (3) add a tool to his or her Facebook profile that displays the billboard and lets friends provide messages of support and encouragement; or (4) add the billboard to any of his or her other web sites.

Finally, when a user registers, the user can indicate if he or she would like future e-mail updates from college.gov. The e-mail update function is a planned future enhancement. By selecting this option, the user will be able to receive occasional updates and reminders about the application and financial aid process relevant to his or her grade level (once available).

3. All information is collected in an electronic format through the college.gov Web site.
4. The Web site's collection is not duplicated within the U.S. Department of Education, and, to our knowledge, is unique in government.
5. The collection of information does not impact small businesses or other small entities.
6. Without the account registration and inspirational message features, the Department will not be able to provide tools and functionality on the college.gov Web site that will attract and engage the target audience of 9th-12th grade high school students. College.gov will also lose the peer-to-peer aspect of the site and will not be able to feature students and their inspirational stories that can provide the motivation and hope (particularly to underrepresented populations) that college is possible.
7. The Web site does not collect information in a manner that would invoke special circumstances.
8. We have published the required Federal Register Notices allowing public comment.

The Secretary of Education's Action Plan for Higher Education calls for expanding the accessibility, affordability and accountability of higher education for more Americans. In response to this action plan, the Under Secretary held regional summits and embarked on a listening tour where she met with students and representatives of the higher education community to find out what was working, and what wasn't working or was missing. These discussions identified the need for college.gov and provided the foundation for its

development. Student discussions also highlighted the need to reach students where they are (on the web) and to provide them with tools and features similar to what is available on sites they currently use. These discussions also formed the basis for the account registration and inspirational message features.

9. No payment or gifts will be given, or otherwise made available, to college.gov registrants.

10. The Privacy Act provides protection to Web site users. Our privacy disclaimer follows. ‘...We collect no personal information about you unless you choose to provide that information to us. If you want to know more about how we record non-personal information about your visit or how we use information that you voluntarily submit...’

Information on the following topics is included in our current privacy policy:

- Non-personal information we record
- Interactive Tools
- Survey
- Security Intrusion and Detection
- Information from E-mail You Send to Us

11. The Web site does not collect information of a sensitive, personal nature (as defined).

12. We estimate that it will take approximately five minutes for a first-time user to register, and then about one minute to logon when they return to the site. Registered users will logon about four times each year after their initial registration. We project that there will be 54,000 users that register on the Web site in FY09. Therefore, the estimated annual hour burden is 8,100 hours. (See below)

Annual Time Estimates (Individual):

Minutes to Register: 5 minutes (one time only)

Subsequent Logins: 4 minutes (1 minute * 4 visits annually = 4 minutes)

Total Annual Time: 9 minutes (5 minutes + 4 minutes = 9 minutes)

Annual Time Estimates (Cohort):

Total Annual Time: 8,100 hours ($9 * 54,000 = 486,000 / 60 \text{ minutes} = 8,100$)

13. There is no annual cost burden to respondents or record keepers.

14. Current cost to the federal government: The cost to the federal government to develop the account registration and inspirational message features will be approximately \$172,662.

Future cost to the federal government: College.gov, like most Internet-based products, will incur annual operating costs. The cost for managing, maintaining and moderating the account registration and inspirational message features will be built into the overall site maintenance and operations costs. The annual cost is estimated to be about \$300,000. This amount is based upon an independent government cost estimate and may be less.

15. This information collection is new, therefore all burden is considered program change.
16. Information collected via the Web site will not be published.
17. The Office of the Under Secretary does not seek approval to exclude the expiration date.
18. Exemptions to the certification requirement are not requested.