Tab 12
Enhanced Student Portal and new Student Workspace

Coordinating Board for Higher Education
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BACKGROUND

One of the tactics included in the Blueprint for Higher Education's affordability goal is "Enhance the Journey to College website by allowing students to access and save personalized information about their state financial aid."

In addition, legislation signed into law in 2016 calls on the department to create a website to provide information and resources to help students and their families prepare for college. Section 173.035, RSMo, requires the department to "develop, maintain, and operate a website containing information of public and private institutions of higher education in this state directing students to resources including, but not limited to, academic programs, financial aid, and how academic course credit may be transferred from one institution of higher education to another."

CURRENT STATUS

Student website

In September 2017, MDHE staff used existing resources to develop a student-focused website to provide general information about planning and paying for college and finishing a degree. The Journey to College website (journeytocollege.mo.gov) was developed with responsive design so it is accessible from various electronic devices. Content is added and updated on a regular basis.

Interactive website features

The department needed external assistance to complete the interactive features of the site. The general assembly appropriated $500,000 for the project in FY 2018. Department staff identified four interactive features to add to the Journey to College website to provide students with additional information specific to their individual college and career plans. Those features were broken into phases and prioritized. The first two phases included a redesigned College and Degree Search, and a new Course Transfer Tracker. Those phases were completed in August 2018. The general assembly appropriated $500,000 to continue the project in FY 2019. The final two phases were made public in July 2019.

Phase 3: State Financial Aid Portal

Enhancements to the department's current financial aid portal enables the department to provide more detailed, personalized information about state financial aid individual students might be eligible to receive. The enhancement updates security practices to protect student data and incorporated manual state financial aid programs into the online system. Students can now apply for financial aid online. This phase also included the development of a State Aid Eligibility Estimator. Students answer questions to determine the state financial aid programs for which they may qualify.

Phase 4: Student Workspace

A new student workspace feature allows students to save information related to their specific plans for college, including information from the College and Degree Search, the Course Transfer Tracker, and the State Financial Aid Portal. The workspace is seamlessly connected to the State Financial Aid Portal, automatically storing state aid applications and documents after submission of an application. The workspace provides students with deadlines and reminders to stay on track during the academic year, and has a space to write their own notes and reminders. Students in middle and junior high school can sign up for the workspace and later connect their account to the State Financial Aid Portal during their senior year.

NEXT STEPS

More work on Phases 3 and 4 is currently underway to include small enhancements unable to be completed before the initial rollout of these applications.

Department staff will promote the upgraded website through the channels they already use to promote the Journey to College student website, including social media; publications; outreach events including college fairs, financial aid nights, Apply Missouri, FAFSA Frenzy, and Decision Day events; and communication with high school counselors, college and university admissions and financial aid advisors and college access organizations. Video tutorials and promotions will be developed to help spread the word about these new and exciting features.

RECOMMENED ACTION

This is an information item only.

NO ATTACHMENTS