



Maxine Joselow '16

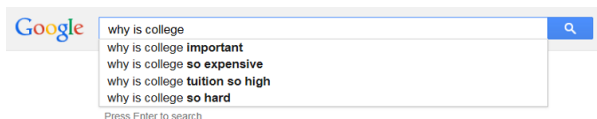
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EDUCATION 7/29/2015 @ 11:56AM | 8,605 views

Dear Google, Why Is College So Expensive?

We turn to Google in times of need, relying on the search bar to solve our most pressing questions and concerns. It turns out that data obtained from Google searches offers a pretty neat window into our national anxiety about why college has become so expensive, and whether a college education is worth it.

When you type “why is college” into Google, it automatically suggests “why is college so expensive” and “why is college tuition so high.” When you type “will college,” it suggests “will college pay off.”



Entering the territory of wishful thinking, the phrase “if college” calls up “if college was free.” And putting things in context, the phrase “how to pay” conjures “how to pay for college” and “how to pay for college without parents” before “how to pay taxes” and “how to pay off credit card debt.”

The frequency of Google searches for variations of the phrase “college cost” has doubled in the last decade as tuition has skyrocketed. [The College Board reports](#) that tuition at private four-year colleges increased at an average of 2.1% a year, while tuition at public four-year colleges increased at an average of 2.8% a year. To put this into perspective, tuition at [Yale University](#) rose 16.5% from [\\$38,850](#) in the 2004-5 academic year to [\\$46,500](#) in the 2014-15 academic year.

The popularity of these searches reflects the lack of transparency surrounding the net price of college, or the actual price that students and families pay, says Laura Perna, professor of higher education at the [University of Pennsylvania](#) and president of the Association for the Study of Higher Education. Unlike the sticker price, which is the published price of tuition and fees, the net price is the price of tuition and fees, room and board, textbooks and supplies minus any grants and scholarships that a student receives.

“You don’t know the actual out-of-pocket costs until you’ve applied, been accepted, applied for financial aid and gotten that financial aid award letter,” Perna says. But schools are federally mandated to provide information about net cost, and the College Board and the U.S. Department of Education feature net cost calculators on their websites, she says.

The rate of Google searches for variations of “college cost” has also increased in the last month, as President Obama and presidential candidates have fueled a national dialogue on tuition-free college. Since [Obama proposed tuition-free community college](#) in January, Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders has introduced a bill to make public college tuition-free. In July, Oregon became the second state after Tennessee to offer free community college to eligible in-state students with the passage of [Senate Bill 81](#).

“When there’s discussion of funding of higher education in the media, that might heighten folks’ awareness of these issues of college cost,” Perna says.

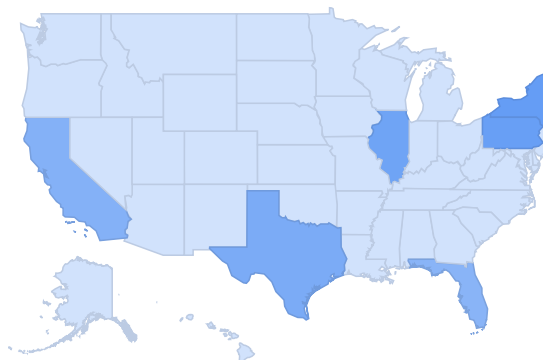
Google searches for variations of “college cost” see a slight rise in early November and early April. These dates coincide with the November 1 deadline for many early decision or early action applications, as well as the April 1 release of many admissions decisions. Still, interest in these terms remains relatively high throughout the year.

Higher education experts attribute this interest during periods without application deadlines to the fact that parents, rather than applicants, are largely the ones doing the searching.

“The kids are very interested in the layout of the school, and what vibe it has,” says Terry Wilfong, president of the College Options Foundation, which aims to assist high school students in preparing for college. “The parents are interested in only one thing: the cost.”

“Parents are always trying to figure out how to pay for this college monster without negatively impacting their chances of retirement,” says Andy Hickman, cofounder of College Quest Alliance, an organization of academic and financial college experts. Ideally, parents should start saving for college when their child is born and start truly planning for college expenses when their child enters eighth or ninth grade, Hickman says.

Search volume for college expensive. Web Search. United States, Past 12 months.



The most people search for variations of the phrase “college expensive” in New Jersey, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. It may be no coincidence that these states contain three Ivy League Institutions—[Princeton University](#), [Harvard University](#) and the [University of Pennsylvania](#)—with tuition, room and board upward of \$60,000.

Other leading states include Texas, California and Florida. All of these states were victims of budget cuts to public higher education following

the recession. Florida in particular saw a \$2,745 reduction in state spending per student from 2008 to 2014, [according to the Pew Charitable Trusts](#).

Budget cuts to public higher education can lead to both spending cuts and tuition hikes, Wilfong says. “When you’re talking funding cuts to a state institution, they’re typically going to do one of two things: reduce the enrollment numbers or increase tuition and fees. They’re typically not going to lay off employees,” he says.

As many students find themselves plunged in student loan debt after graduation, they may question whether college was worth it. Over the last decade, searches for “student loan debt” and the national student loan debt have both tripled. The country’s student loan debt currently stands at [\\$1.2 trillion](#)—higher than its credit card debt.

Yet many higher education experts point to overwhelming evidence that a college education pays off in terms of higher earnings and lower chances of unemployment.

“A host of benefits are positively correlated to a higher level of education,” Perna says. “I’m persuaded by the data I’ve seen that the costs are worth the benefits.”

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**Maxine Joselow** Forbes Staff*I write about the use and misuse of the college experience.*

EDUCATION 6/18/2015 @ 11:35AM | 5,454 views

Fixing Up Your Facebook Page For College Admissions: A Booming Business

Lanre Badmus deleted his Twitter account before the start of his junior year at Westfield High School in Westfield, NJ. He also made his Instagram account private and changed his name on [Facebook](#) to a nickname before the start of his senior year. For all of this secrecy, you would think Badmus was trying to hide something from the government or law enforcement. Instead, he was simply applying to college.

“I was sort of afraid colleges would look at my profiles. I didn’t want any of my social media rants to come back and bite me in the college admissions process,” Badmus says, adding that he often posted angry Facebook statuses about his favorite sports teams losing big games and Instagrammed pictures of bikini-clad models.

When Badmus announced he would attend the [University of North Carolina, Wilmington](#) next year, he immediately changed his name on Facebook back to his real name. “It took a weight off my shoulders,” he says.

Like Badmus, many high school students worry that admissions officers will disapprove of their online behavior. A [recent survey](#) by Kaplan Test Prep suggests this fear is not unfounded – 35% of admissions officers surveyed had visited an applicant’s social media page, and 16% had found something online that negatively influenced an applicant’s chances.

In response, a new group of online reputation [management](#) firms aims to optimize what admissions officers would see if they Googled an applicant. Many of these firms feature a play on the word “reputation” in their name, including [Reputation.com](#), [Integrity Defenders](#), and [BrandYourself](#).



Some students worry a wry Facebook post or Tweet could cost them a college acceptance letter.

Students can pay the firm Integrity Defenders \$59.99 a month to make their social media pages showcase their strengths, such as their talent in soccer or painting. For a steeper fee of \$629 a month, Integrity Defenders will clear the first page of Google results of unwanted links, such as an article in a local newspaper about a high school expulsion. And for \$1,329 a month, the firm will bury any undesirable links on the third page of Google results, where Lori Randall Stradtman, author of *Online Reputation Management for Dummies*, [jokes you could hide a dead body](#).

Around 10% of Integrity Defenders’ clients are students, and most of them are looking to “highlight their skills and accomplishments,” says Alan Assante, president of Integrity Defenders. “We also have folks who had a minor scuffle with their high school or the law that doesn’t portray them in the best light, and we can help them clear that up as well,” he says.

The online reputation management industry is rapidly changing and expanding, Assante says. When Integrity Defenders was founded in 2009, only a few firms sought to help high-profile executives and companies improve their images. But several new firms have recently burst

on the scene, and some – including Integrity Defenders – cater to average individuals like college applicants.

“There are so many new players, and you constantly hear new names being thrown out there,” Assante says. “It’s an exciting time to be in the industry for sure.”

BrandYourself, another online reputation management firm founded in 2010 with more than \$5 million in venture capital, serves mainly college students and professionals seeking to polish their online presences for potential employers, says BrandYourself CEO Patrick Ambron. But some parents also sign up their children applying to college, he says. Most parents choose the service that costs up to \$100 a year and notifies clients when they need to hide negative search results or promote positive search results.

The educational and admissions consulting firm [IvyWise](#) adopts a different tactic than online reputation management firms. Rather than supervising students’ online presences, IvyWise counselors encourage students to monitor what they share on the Internet themselves.

“What I tell students is first of all, if you’re going to post something, make sure it passes the grandma test. If you don’t want grandma to see it, don’t post it,” says IvyWise CEO Kat Cohen, noting that admissions officers may interpret pictures of students holding red Solo cups as signs of underage drinking.

Cohen worries that students who use online reputation management firms to hide disciplinary proceedings aren’t telling the truth to colleges or growing from their mistakes. The Common Application includes a section where students must reflect on what they learned from these incidents, she says, and one IvyWise client wrote an outstanding essay about how he matured from cheating on an exam that won him admission to his top-choice school.

Still, students can rest assured that some admissions officers simply don’t have the time or interest to scope out their online behavior.

“We do not consider social media in going through their applications. We’re not going to students’ Facebook pages or doing any sort of Google search of them in the review process,” says Jennifer Hantho, senior associate dean of admissions at [Carleton College](#), a selective private college in Northfield, MN.

“Social media really doesn’t play a role – we usually just rely on the information given in the application to make a decision,” says Alaina Dunn, associate dean of admission at [Pomona College](#), a selective private college in Claremont, CA that admitted a record low of 9.8% of 8,091 applicants this spring.

“Quite honestly, we just don’t have the time,” Dunn says. “We have so many applications to read that the extra step of reading someone’s social media page just isn’t that realistic. And I don’t think it would be very helpful.”

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Legislation shows shifting attitudes

By Maxine Joselow

Monadnock Ledger-Transcript

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After almost five years of gubernatorial vetoes blocking medical marijuana legislation, New Hampshire is set to become the 19th state in the country, and the last in New England, to allow seriously ill people to use marijuana for medical purposes.

The state Legislature passed a bill sanctioning medical marijuana on June 26 , and the bill now awaits final approval of Democratic Gov. Maggie Hassan.

The Legislature passed two medical marijuana bills in 2009 and 2012, only to have former Democratic Gov. John Lynch veto them , but Hassan has said she will sign the recent medical marijuana bill into law.

“Medical marijuana will ease the suffering of New Hampshire’s seriously ill patients,” Hassan wrote in support of the bill in an email to the Ledger-Transcript Tuesday. “This is a compassionate policy that can help patients seeking relief from certain conditions when other treatments may not be effective.”

House Bill 573 permits patients suffering from cancer, multiple sclerosis, HIV/AIDS and other conditions to possess up to two ounces of marijuana upon their doctors’ recommendations. Patients will obtain the marijuana from one of four nonprofit, state-authorized “alternative treatment centers.” The N.H. Department of Health and Human Services must license two alternative treatment centers within the next 18 months.

State Rep. Douglas Ley, (D-Jaffrey), said in an interview with the Ledger-Transcript on Wednesday he voted in favor of the bill because it had strong constituent support. He added that he hopes decriminalizing marijuana for medical purposes will lead to decriminalizing the drug for recreational use. "I support decriminalization of possession of marijuana in small amounts. Medical marijuana is just an opening," Ley said.

State Rep. Susan Emerson, (R-Rindge), said she too voted in favor of the bill, though for different reasons than Ley. Emerson said she backed the bill because she hopes medical marijuana will relieve seriously ill people's suffering.

"I really feel that this is a good thing for sick people. Why shouldn't we relieve a person's pain and agony?" Emerson said.

Emerson added that, unlike Ley, she only supports the decriminalization of marijuana for medical purposes. "I have always voted against legalizing marijuana, because I feel that it's a gateway drug to heroin and cocaine and other things. But I think it's a good thing for people who are suffering," Emerson said.

House Bill 573 was the result of a compromise between different versions of medical marijuana bills passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate. The compromise eliminated a provision that the House originally approved that would have let patients grow their own marijuana, instead of receiving it from alternative treatment centers. Hassan said she would not sign the bill if it included the home-grow option, citing concerns from law enforcement agencies about the difficulty of regulating home marijuana cultivation.

"I heard concerns from the law enforcement community regarding their ability to enforce a home-cultivation provision," Hassan wrote in her email to the Ledger-Transcript. "By eliminating this provision, I believe this bill provides the appropriate level of regulation needed for the use of medical marijuana."

The compromise also reduced the number of alternative treatment centers in the state from five to four, and eliminated post-traumatic stress disorder from the list of conditions eligible for medical marijuana treatment.

The Legislature dropped PTSD from the list of conditions because many legislators felt the most effective treatment for PTSD is consulting a physician, not using marijuana, Hassan wrote. "The use of medical marijuana by those who suffer from PTSD can discourage them from seeking appropriate mental health care," she wrote.

Emerson said she was pleased overall with the compromise, but she thought PTSD should have been included in the list of qualifying conditions. "I have encountered many, many young people coming back from the war in Iraq or Afghanistan with PTSD. It is a serious problem. ...I feel that

[medical marijuana] is something our veterans should be entitled to,” Emerson said. She added that she plans to speak with State Rep. Donna Schlachmann (D-Exeter), one of the bill’s main sponsors, about amending the bill to include PTSD at the House’s next session.

Kaitlyn Smith of Greenfield, an occupational therapist, echoed Emerson’s concerns about the fate of PTSD patients in New Hampshire in an interview with the Ledger-Transcript in downtown Peterborough on Tuesday. Smith said she has worked with veterans with PTSD in Colorado and Rhode Island, where small amounts of medical marijuana are legal, and has witnessed the positive effects the drug had.

“I worked very closely with them, so I could see how much better they slept and acted when using it. I’ve seen it work,” Smith said.

Smith also has a personal motivation for supporting medical marijuana access for PTSD patients, since her boyfriend has the condition. He lives in Rhode Island and enjoys legal access to medical marijuana to reduce his symptoms. “My boyfriend gets stuck in a trance and has night terrors. I’ve seen firsthand how terrifying it can be. It’s definitely something I wouldn’t want to experience,” Smith said.

The bill is raising other concerns among local law enforcement officers. Rindge Police Chief Frank Morrill said in an interview with the Ledger-Transcript on Friday he was worried the decriminalization of medical marijuana would make police officers’ jobs harder.

“There’s a significant amount of time and resources that we spend on marijuana cases as it is,” Morrill said, noting that marijuana-related crimes account for a third of all incidents that come before the Rindge Police Department each year. “Putting more people out there with legitimate access to marijuana for medical reasons may potentially complicate our jobs.”

Kenny Finn of Greenfield said he fears the bill will let more marijuana reach the black market. “I hope it’s not abused, and people won’t be using legitimate prescriptions just to get high,” Finn said in an interview with the Ledger-Transcript in downtown Peterborough on Tuesday.

But Morrill said it is unlikely that marijuana meant for patients with medical conditions will be diverted to recreational users, since tight regulations will govern medical marijuana’s distribution. He said he was more concerned that police officers would waste their time and resources attempting to arrest legal medical marijuana users. “If someone is sitting out on their front porch smoking a pipe or a joint out in the open, it might draw attention, and people will report it, and law enforcement will respond, only to find that it’s justified by medical reasons,” Morrill said.

The bill is also sparking a conversation among local health care professionals. No physicians at Monadnock Community Hospital are currently prescribing medical marijuana, since the bill is brand new and no alternative treatment centers have been licensed yet, said Laura Gingras, the hospital’s vice president of philanthropy and community relations, in an interview with the Ledger-

Transcript on Monday. But physicians at MCH may soon have the option of prescribing medical marijuana for patients with cancer, Crohn's disease, multiple sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, glaucoma and other conditions.

"As the regulations are laid out by the state, if other hospitals find a safe and appropriate way to do this, it's likely that Monadnock may as well," Gingras said. "Medical marijuana will be heavily regulated by the state, and we will look to them to provide guidance for both physicians and patients regarding appropriate use of this new treatment option."

But patients will not likely be able to rely on health insurance or medical assistance programs, such as Medicaid, to cover the cost of medical marijuana.

"House Bill 573 does not mandate that health plans pay for the expense of medical marijuana," said Keith Nyhan, director of consumer services at the N.H. Department of Insurance, in an interview with the Ledger-Transcript on Wednesday.

"You cannot require insurance companies to cover this, so it's going to be up to people," Ley said. "It's not a perfect solution by any means...and that's true under any state," he said, noting that all 18 states that have already legalized medical marijuana do not require health insurance companies to cover it.

The bill will not have a financial impact on New Hampshire taxpayers, though. The medical marijuana program will be self-funded by the N.H. Department of Health and Human Services, meaning the department will use revenue generated by the program to cover all expenses of the program, said John Williams, director for legislative affairs at the Department of Health.

The Department of Health estimates that establishing alternative treatment centers, hiring additional staff to run the centers, and issuing identification cards to qualifying patients will cost approximately \$204,000 in fiscal year 2014, Williams said. This cost will be offset by certification fees paid by qualifying patients, licensing fees paid by private contractors for opening alternative treatment centers and private donations from wealthy individuals, he said.

The whole program is not expected to be up and running for another year to a year and a half.

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