



NEWS RELEASE

March 11, 2009

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VIRGINIA EDUCATION WIZARD OFFERS ONE-STOP COLLEGE, CAREER PLANNING

*Virginia's Community Colleges launch online tool to help Virginians
make informed choices*

RICHMOND, Va. – With Virginians increasingly looking for educational resources that deliver value and align with jobs in today's economy, Virginia's Community Colleges are unveiling an online tool to guide prospective students and their families in making informed college and career choices. The Virginia Education Wizard is a one-stop, online resource that brings together real-time information to help students walk through the front door to postsecondary education.

“Choosing a career and finding the educational path and financial resources to get you there has become increasingly complicated over the years – and it doesn't need to be that way,” said Dr. Glenn DuBois, chancellor of Virginia's Community Colleges. “The Wizard brings together all the information prospective students and families need today to make smart choices about their future. Everything is available with a simple keystrokes, whenever and wherever users are in their journey.”

The Virginia Education Wizard (www.vawizard.org) provides:

- **Assessments:** The Wizard assessment tests ask users to rank what is important to them on the job and to identify their strongest work-related interests. Based on data provided during the assessments, the Wizard recommends career options that align with users' interests and work values, such as jobs linked by investigative interests or those that align with artistic or enterprising interests.
- **Career paths:** The Wizard leverages real-time data to report what current jobs are paying in local Virginia markets, highlighting jobs where workers are in demand. Users who



- already know their career interests can explore either individual or clusters of careers to learn more about job requirements, including education and training.
- **College curriculum:** The Wizard outlines the community college curriculum, including options at local campuses closest to each user and workforce training opportunities for people seeking to begin or restart a career quickly. The tool dovetails information from public and private four-year institutions to help students take the right courses to qualify for guaranteed transfer agreements to continue their education. The Wizard also connects users directly to the community colleges' online application and registration process.
 - **Financial aid and college costs:** Users receive a projection of their expected college costs based on the curriculum and schools they select. The Wizard also guides users through applying for financial aid and provides equivalent tuition at other Virginia state colleges for applicants to compare and assess which education plan they can best afford.

Development of the Wizard

Virginia's Community Colleges developed the proprietary Wizard with \$2.5 million in federal funds. Dr. Craig Herndon, director of career and education resources, orchestrated the tool's overall design. Programming was completed by Richmond-based Chmura Economics & Analytics and internal IT professionals at Virginia's Community Colleges. The career and jobs features draw in real-time market data pulled from Chmura Economics & Analytics.

"Today, we are used to going online to do everything from shopping to planning our travel – all at one stop," DuBois said. "We saw an opportunity to bring together information available in different places and present it in a way that asks many different questions of students to help them figure out their educational and career journey. What is most compelling about the Wizard is that it integrates the information that users need, so they can make informed choices."

The Wizard's life-like online guide, Ginny, walks users through different features and helps users build their profiles, which then tailors information according to their interest. The site, which complements the campus counseling staff, also directs students to take the right educational programs that align with their targeted outcome of job credentials, an associate's degree or guaranteed transfer to a four-year institution.

As students select their career and curriculum, the Wizard builds a schedule and prompts them by e-mail when more action is needed, such as for important dates in college transfer. The site also includes videos that give more information about career options or site services.

Moving forward, Virginia's Community Colleges are exploring partnerships with organizations such as the Virginia Department of Education, the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), the Education Credit Management Corporation and the Virginia College Savings Plan to develop an expanded version of the Wizard, to be released later in 2009.



Supporting informed choices

In today's tight economy, students and their families are becoming ever more diligent about spending their education dollars wisely. The Wizard can help them make strategic choices that maximize those investments by outlining a specific plan that will get students efficiently to the launching point of their career.

For example, most community college students historically are on part-time paths, taking classes for about six years. These students often are balancing competing issues that take time and energy from their academic pursuits, including an extra job, children, marital changes and illness. The Wizard outlines the increased financial aid options for full-time students so that users can compare the financial impact of their choices.

"Full-time education comes with greater financial aid opportunities, so those graduates can get to work in their chosen field quicker and save more money," DuBois said. "The Wizard allows students to easily lay out the education options available to them and consider the benefits or drawbacks of one plan over another." Students who enroll in full-time course loads, which include 12 or more credit hours in a semester, are 40 percent more likely to be successful in their college experience.

The Wizard can help students pick the right curriculum and earn an associate's degree, making it easier for students to go on to complete a bachelor's degree, or complete workforce training programs and find a job.

"We see too many students who make random course choices that don't take them step-by-step to where they ultimately want to be. The Wizard, in tandem with our counseling teams at every campus, creates a tailored plan and keeps them moving toward that goal," DuBois said.

"Virginia's Community Colleges are critical to helping our residents prepare for relevant, meaningful and strong careers. But pursuing a college degree can be a daunting first step for many people. The Wizard opens the door and creates an easy way for Virginians to identify, pursue and realize their goals."

About Virginia's Community Colleges: *Created more than 40 years ago, Virginia's Community Colleges are 23 individual schools located on 40 campuses across the Commonwealth. Nearly half a million students take classes at one of Virginia's Community Colleges. Together the colleges enroll more than two-thirds of the total public undergraduate population in Virginia. For more information, please visit myfuture.vccs.edu.*

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