Report and Suggestions from IPEDS Technical Review Panel #31: Improvements to the Human Resources Component

SUMMARY: Based on a review of the current IPEDS Human Resources component, the Technical Review Panel suggests that a number of changes be made to the survey forms in order to capture data more efficiently and effectively, while also reducing the reporting demands placed on institutions. Comments from interested parties are due to Janice Kelly-Reid, IPEDS Project Director at RTI International, at ipedsTRPcomment@rti.org by September 17, 2010.

On June 29 and 30, 2010, RTI International, the contractor for the IPEDS web-based data collection system, convened a meeting of the IPEDS Technical Review Panel (TRP) in Arlington, VA. The purpose of this meeting was to solicit input from the postsecondary education community on improvements to the Human Resources component. The panel consisted of 49 individuals representing the federal government, state governments, institutions, data users, association representatives, and others. The TRP examined the reporting burden for degree-granting institutions completing the Human Resources component and discussed strategies for simplifying the collection forms and eliminating potentially duplicative or unnecessary data in order to reduce institutional burden and improve the usefulness and quality of the data being reported.

Overview

Each year, postsecondary institutions must report data on faculty and staff through the IPEDS Human Resources (HR) component. For degree-granting institutions, the HR component comprises three sections: *Employees by Assigned Position (EAP), Fall Staff*, and *Salaries*. *EAP* and *Fall Staff* collect headcount data on full- and part-time faculty and staff by various demographic and occupational characteristics, and *Salaries* collects headcount data, total salary outlays, and fringe benefits for full-time instructional staff. The *EAP* and *Salaries* sections are required annually, while the *Fall Staff* section is required biennially in odd-numbered years.

While NCES has taken steps in the past to simplify reporting and ensure data consistency and accuracy in the HR component, data providers have indicated that it remains one of the most burdensome components of the IPEDS in terms of time needed to report. In addition, it is unclear how extensively the data collected through the HR component are used by institutions, policymakers, legislators, or other entities to answer key policy questions. Finally, a recent analysis of the HR component commissioned by NCES, and conducted by an independent consultant, indicates that the survey form currently completed by degree-granting institutions collects more data than are needed to meet federal requirements.

In response to these concerns, the IPEDS Technical Review Panel convened in June 2010 to discuss ways in which the HR component for degree-granting institutions could be improved to better balance reporting burden with the quality and usefulness of the data being collected. Specifically, the panel was asked to consider ways to reduce reporting burden by examining the following questions:

- Could less data be collected?
- Could current data be collected more efficiently and effectively?

Could less data be collected?

Background

The IPEDS HR component meets data collection and reporting requirements as outlined in federal higher education and civil rights laws. Under the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008, NCES must collect data on the number of full-time and part-time faculty and graduate assistants with primarily instructional responsibilities at the institution. In addition, as defined by Titles VI and VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (as amended by the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972) and related regulations, every public and private Title IV postsecondary institution with 15 or more employees must collect and report race/ethnicity and gender data on faculty and staff every two years.

By completing the HR component, institutions are complying with federal regulations to report on the gender and race/ethnicity of their workforce. However, the survey form currently completed by degree-granting institutions collects considerably more data than are needed to meet federal requirements. For example, the IPEDS HR component collects data on the number of staff by race/ethnicity at different salary class intervals. These salary class interval data have not been regularly analyzed and are not required in order to be in compliance with federal regulations. Also, for a number of elements, the HR component collects data that seem to be infrequently used or can be found in other sources—particularly fringe benefit data. Eliminating the salary class intervals and fringe benefit portion of the component would significantly reduce the amount of data institutions are required to report without notably impacting researchers' and others' ability to analyze questions related to diversity and other key issues in the higher education work force.

In light of this, the panel was asked to examine the various sections of the IPEDS HR component and consider whether the level of detail at which the data are collected are necessary for research and policy analysis especially given the amount of burden faced by institutions reporting the data.

Discussion

Salary Class Interval Data

In the *Fall Staff* section of the HR component, Part H collects data on the number of full-time staff on less-than-9-month contracts, 9/10-month contracts, and 11/12-month contracts whose primary responsibility is instruction, research, and/or public service (IRPS) by gender and race/ethnicity. Part H also collects data on the number of full-time IRPS staff on 9/10-month and 11/12-month contracts by salary class intervals, gender, and race/ethnicity. Part I collects the number of full-time non-IRPS staff by salary class intervals, gender, and race/ethnicity. These two parts combined comprise a total of 10 screens and over 900 data cells.

As previously noted, the collection of race/ethnicity and gender data by salary class interval is not mandated by any federal Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) regulation for elementary, secondary, or postsecondary institutions. In addition, the panel noted that the data reported in these sections do not appear to be used regularly by institutions or state systems. Given the amount of effort that goes into reporting these data when compared with the seemingly minimal amount of use, the panel suggested removing the salary class interval screens from the HR component entirely. This includes all of Part H and all but the last screen in Part I (the headcount of full-time non-IRPS staff by primary function, race/ethnicity and gender, which is not captured anywhere else in the component). The panel agreed that eliminating these nine screens will help streamline the *Fall Staff* section and significantly reduce reporting burden without noticeably affecting researchers or policymakers in any way.

Fringe Benefit Data

The panel also examined the fringe benefits portion of the *Salaries* section (Part F). On the two screens in this section, institutions are required to report projected fringe benefit expenditures paid to full-time instructional staff on 9/10-month and 11/12-month contracts. A number of panelists noted that this is one of the most problematic and burdensome sections of the HR component. In addition, panelists indicated that the expenditures data reported in this section are typically estimates since reporting is based on a November 1 census date and actual expenditures have not yet been captured for the full year. Therefore, most institutions must project benefit expenditures using their own methods and processes.

The panel agreed that two important pieces of information related to benefits data should be collected in some capacity: (1) which benefits are being offered, and (2) the expense to the institution for providing these benefits. However, the group noted that the data currently collected in the HR component do not seem to supply this information accurately.

The panel consequently determined that there seems to be very little use for these data as currently reported. Panel members agreed that the burden of reporting these data is too great given that the data reported are estimates.

The panel further noted that for all sectors except private for-profit institutions, the IPEDS Finance component collects total actual amounts for salary and benefit expenses of staff. Although these data typically run two years behind, the panel noted that the numbers are likely to be more accurate than those reported in the HR component and should be adequate for performing cost analyses.

As a result of this discussion, the panel suggested eliminating the fringe benefits screens from the *Salaries* section of the component. Removing these two screens would significantly reduce institutional burden, and panel members agreed that while there is value in collecting more detailed information about the types of benefits provided by institutions, the HR component is not the appropriate instrument for collecting this information. Instead, the panel suggested that further study be done on this issue to determine how this information could best be collected—either through IPEDS or another survey—and that this topic be revisited during a future meeting of the TRP, if necessary.

Could current data be collected more efficiently and effectively?

Background

In addition to identifying and eliminating unused portions of the HR component, the panel was asked to consider potential ways that the component could be updated and improved for more efficient and effective data collection. The component currently collects data on faculty and staff at postsecondary institutions in multiple ways. For instructional staff alone, institutions with 15 or more full-time staff are required to report data by (1) primary occupational category and tenure status, (2) contract length, gender, academic rank, and tenure status, (3) tenure status, academic rank, gender, and race/ethnicity, and (4) contract length, gender, race/ethnicity, and salary class intervals. In addition, a study of other EEO data collection forms submitted by private sector companies, K-12 school districts, and state and local governments revealed that the data collected through the IPEDS HR component is far more complex. For example, elementary and secondary school systems report data for full-time staff in 18 occupational categories, while the IPEDS forms require data for full-time staff in 30 occupational categories.

The panel was asked to examine the possibility of streamlining data collection for instructional staff—eliminating and/or consolidating redundant portions of the component and clarifying existing definitions for reporting data in order to improve the overall quality of the data reported.

In addition, the panel was asked to assess the need for collecting any additional data items to address changing policy and research needs. For example, while the IPEDS HR component serves as a comprehensive source of information on the overall demographics and salaries of the postsecondary education workforce, there is currently a high level of interest among policymakers in collecting these data by discipline. Given the considerable burden that reporting these data would impose on institutions, the panel was asked to examine both the necessity and feasibility of collecting data on faculty discipline by Classification of Instructional Program (CIP) code at this time.

Discussion

Primary Function/Occupational Activity Categories

In examining the occupational categories currently used for reporting data in the HR component, the panel focused on the issue of how to define “instructional staff” and other “faculty” members. The consensus of the group was that the current categories are somewhat ambiguous and subject to interpretation. For example, it was noted that while some universities use the “primarily research” category to include research staff in IRPS reporting, others do not report any staff on this line because research staff may be categorized as “other professionals.” The panel expressed concerns that an inability to distinguish between the existing categories is causing institutions to report data incorrectly or aggregate all four IRPS categories into one, resulting in broad inconsistencies in reporting.

The panel also noted that the current categories do not include distinctions for instructors of not-for-credit courses. This is a particular problem for 2-year institutions, which frequently have staff whose primary role is instruction (and are reported accordingly in the HR component), but who teach non-credit courses exclusively. IPEDS enrollment data only capture for-credit enrollments and thus there is inconsistency across the survey components.

In order to address these concerns, the panel suggested that the primary function/occupational activity categories used in the *EAP* section of the component be revised as follows:

Existing Categories

- Primarily instruction
- Instruction/research/public service
- Primarily research
- Primarily public service
- Executive/administrative/managerial
- Other professionals (support/service)

- Technical and paraprofessionals
- Clerical and secretarial
- Skilled crafts
- Service/maintenance

Suggested New Categories

- Professional:
  - o Executive/administrative/managerial
  - o Instruction
    - ▪ Primarily instruction
      - Exclusively credit
      - Exclusively not-for-credit
      - Combination credit/not-for-credit
    - ▪ Instruction/research/public service
  - o Research
  - o Public Service
  - o Other professional

- Technical and paraprofessionals
- Clerical and secretarial
- Skilled crafts
- Service/maintenance

Additionally, in order to streamline data collection across component sections, the panel suggested that data on full-time staff by academic rank, tenure status, race/ethnicity, and gender in the *Fall Staff* section (Part G) be collected for instructional staff only (e.g., the primarily instruction and instruction/research/public service categories), rather than for all IRPS staff, as is currently done. This will better align the *Fall Staff* section with the *Salaries* section (which collects data exclusively on instructional staff), ensure consistency across sections, and help reduce institutional reporting burden. Part I of the *Fall Staff* section (the headcount of full-time, non-instructional staff by primary function, race/ethnicity, and gender) would then be expanded to include the research and public service categories.

Faculty Status Categories

The panel also examined the faculty status categories currently used in the HR component, and whether these categories could be streamlined or collapsed to reduce institutional burden. The group agreed that the distinction between faculty who are tenured, on tenure track, and not on tenure track is a key institutional policy issue, so maintaining at least the same level of detail in collecting these data is necessary.

In addition, the point was raised that many institutions are moving away from the traditional tenure system and are relying increasingly on renewable contracts instead. An important distinction here lies in the length of the contract (e.g., less-than-annual, annual, or multi-year contracts). This trend is not currently being captured in IPEDS but is likely to be an ongoing and increasing practice at many institutions.

In order to capture these data and more accurately reflect the changing dynamic of the higher education work force, the panel suggested that the form be simplified for reporting faculty status categories in the HR component and be revised as follows:

New screening question: Does your institution have a tenure system?
Yes/No

If NO tenure system, then the following categories will be displayed:

- Multi-Year Contract
- Annual Contract
- Less-Than-Annual Contract
- Without Faculty Status

If YES tenure system, then the following categories will be displayed:

- Tenure Track
  - Tenured
  - On Tenure Track
- Non-Tenure Track
  - Multi-Year Contract
  - Annual Contract
  - Less-Than-Annual Contract
  - Without Faculty Status

This change will increase the number of screens in Part G of the *Fall Staff* section from four screens to six for institutions that have a tenure system; however, the panel agreed that capturing faculty status data by race/ethnicity and gender is extremely important for workforce equity analysis purposes, and as such it is essential to maintain at least the same level of detail currently collected.

Additionally, the panel suggested that the instructions for the Non-Tenure Track category stipulate that the data reported in this category include staff from any schools within the institution that do not have a tenure system.

Reporting Graduate Assistants

Currently, when reporting data on part-time staff in the *EAP* section, institutions are required to provide a headcount of any graduate assistants working at the institution by primary function/occupational activity. Given that the 2010 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes define graduate assistants as "graduate *teaching* assistants" responsible for

> *"...assisting faculty or other instructional staff in postsecondary institutions by performing teaching or teaching related duties"*

the panel was asked to examine whether the research, public service, executive/administrative/managerial, other professionals, technical and paraprofessional, clerical and secretarial, skilled crafts, and service/ maintenance functions are applicable and should be reported for graduate assistants. Federal mandates require a headcount of graduate assistants involved in instructional activities, but reporting in the other functional categories is not required.

The group suggested that since there *are* graduate assistants performing these other roles, some sort of distinction should be made to ensure that data are reported correctly—although not necessarily at the level of detail currently required. Therefore, the panel suggested removing the graduate assistant column from the part-time section and implementing a new, condensed screen in the *EAP* section specifically for graduate assistants. This screen would collect data in the following three categories, each subdivided by medical versus nonmedical personnel:

- graduate assistant—teaching,
- graduate assistant—research, and
- graduate assistant—other.

The panel suggested that each category be clearly defined to avoid incorrect reporting, and that institutions be instructed to report data in the "graduate assistant—teaching" category strictly as defined in the 2010 SOC codes. The panel also suggested adding a screening question that asks if an institution has graduate assistants.

Reporting Salary Outlays

The *Salaries* section of the component includes two screens that collect salary outlays for full-time instructional staff by gender and academic rank for staff on 9/10-month and 11/12-month contract lengths/teaching periods. For each row of data, an average salary is calculated by dividing the specified salary outlays by the total number of staff reported for each gender and academic rank category.

A definition of "salary outlays" is not currently, and has never been, provided in IPEDS. The panel agreed that defining what is meant by "salary outlays" would be helpful in improving the consistency of the reported data. The group also expressed concerns related to the value of the data as currently collected, noting that the calculated average salary is essentially an aggregate average only useful for very rough comparisons with other institutions. It was further noted that the difference between 9-month salaries and 10-month salaries can be very great, such that lumping the two together may not be producing the most accurate data.

To address these issues, the panel suggested eliminating the contract length differentiation from the screens in this section, effectively reducing the number of screens in Parts D and E of the *Salaries* section from five screens to three. Instead, the panel suggested including a worksheet for reporting the number of staff on 9-month contracts, 10-month contracts, 11-month contracts, and 12-month contracts by gender and academic rank. For each gender and academic rank category, the system would then calculate:

- the total number of staff reported (i.e., the sum of the values entered for each contract length), and

- the total number of months covered (i.e., the sum of the staff reported for each contract length multiplied by the number of months in the contract).

An additional column would then be added to the existing Part E screen after the salary outlays column indicating the number of months covered by those salary outlays in order to calculate a weighted monthly average salary.

The panel also discussed the utility of measuring salary outlays for non-instructional staff. Currently institutions are only required to report this data for full-time instructional staff (although some salary information is currently collected for full-time non-instructional staff through the salary class interval screens in the *Fall Staff* section). The panel agreed that there is interest in this information—particularly as it relates to the executive/administrative/managerial category—and that collecting salary outlays for all occupational categories would be valuable in terms of obtaining a greater understanding of what is driving costs at institutions and how much is being spent on personnel. However, the consensus of the group was that it would not be worthwhile to capture this data at the same level of detail required for instructional staff. For example, the panel noted that given the amount of variation that exists within each category in terms of job capacity, a gender breakdown would not be useful here.

Therefore, the panel suggested adding the following additional screen to the *Salaries* section, to be displayed immediately after the existing salary outlays screen:

Total Salary Outlays for (full-time staff only):
Executive/administrative/managerial
Other professionals
Technical and paraprofessionals
Clerical and secretarial
Skilled crafts
Service/maintenance

These totals would not be disaggregated by race/ethnicity or gender so as not to impose undue additional reporting burden on institutions.

Reporting Faculty Discipline by CIP Code

In examining the possibility of collecting faculty data by discipline, the panel agreed that these are very important data that should be collected in some way in the future. However, given the level of institutional burden associated with reporting data by CIP code, the panel felt that this issue should be studied further before the panel makes any further suggestions to better determine how these data could be collected efficiently and effectively without overburdening institutions.

While the group consensus was that it would probably be preferable to collect data by discipline on full-time faculty and full-time faculty salaries, panel members did not feel that they had enough information to make a more definitive suggestion at this time. The panel suggested that a more focused review be conducted on how best to implement a change of this kind, and that the topic be explored in greater detail during a future meeting of the TRP if necessary.

Summary of Proposed Revisions to HR Forms for Degree-granting Institutions with More than 15 Employees

Below is a list of the changes included in the discussion sections above.

CHANGES SUGGESTED BY TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL

- Remove the nine salary class interval screens. This includes all of Part H and all but the last screen in Part I (the headcount of full-time non-IRPS staff by primary function, race/ethnicity and gender, which is not captured anywhere else in the component).
- Eliminate the two fringe benefits screens from the *Salaries* section of the component.
- Revise the primary function/occupational activity categories used in the *EAP* section (see suggested revisions on page 4)
- Collect the data on full-time staff by academic rank, tenure status, race/ethnicity, and gender in the *Fall Staff* section (Part G) for instructional staff only (e.g., the primarily instruction and instruction/research/public service categories), rather than for all IRPS staff. The *Fall Staff* section (the headcount of full-time, non-instructional staff by primary function, race/ethnicity, and gender) would then be expanded to include the research and public service categories.
- Add new screening question: Does your institution have a tenure system? Yes/No [Part G, *Fall Staff*]
- Revise faculty status categories to include contract faculty (see page 5 for details) [Part G, *Fall Staff*]
- Add a screening question that asks if an institution has graduate assistants.
- Remove the graduate assistant column from the part-time section and implement a new, condensed screen in the *EAP* section specifically for graduate assistants. This screen would collect data in the following three categories, each subdivided by medical versus nonmedical personnel: (1) graduate assistant—teaching, (2) graduate assistant—research, and (3) graduate assistant—other.
- Eliminate the contract length differentiation from the screens in the *Salaries* section, Instead, include a worksheet for reporting the number of staff on 9-month contracts, 10-month contracts, 11-month contracts, and 12-month contracts by gender and academic rank. For each gender and academic rank category, the system would then calculate: (1) the total number of staff reported (i.e., the sum of the values entered for each contract length), and (2) the total number of months covered (i.e., the sum of the staff reported for each contract length multiplied by the number of months in the contract). An additional column would then be added to the existing Part E screen after the salary outlays column indicating the number of months covered by those salary outlays in order to calculate a weighted monthly average salary.
- Add an additional screen to the *Salaries* section, to be displayed immediately after the existing salary outlays screen to collect salary outlays for full-time staff in the following categories: (1) Executive/administrative/managerial; (2) Other professionals; (3) Technical and paraprofessionals; (4) Clerical and secretarial; (5) Skilled crafts; and (6) Service/maintenance. These totals would not be disaggregated by race/ethnicity or gender.

Additional Changes to HR Survey Forms for Degree-granting Institutions with Less than 15 Employees

While the discussions during the TRP focused primarily on data elements and issues involving the HR form for degree-granting institutions that have ***15 or more full-time staff*** (i.e., long HR version), several of the same data elements and issues also exist in the HR form for degree-granting institutions that have ***less than 15 full-time staff*** (i.e., short HR version). Consequently, a few of the proposed changes to the long HR version are also applicable to the short HR version as follows:

- Eliminate the fringe benefits screens from the *Salaries* section.
- Implement the new method of reporting salary outlays in the *Salaries* section.
- Implement the new primary functions/occupational activities for full-time and part-time staff.
- Implement the new method of reporting graduate assistants.

Additional suggestions for the short HR version are to:

- Eliminate the collection of data by faculty status, since institutions that respond to the short HR version report most of their staff in the "Not on tenure track/no tenure system" category or in the "Without faculty status" category; and,
- Combine the *EAP* and *Fall Staff* sections into a single section since both sections collect data on the number of full-time and part-time staff. (For odd-numbered years, the reporting of data by race/ethnicity and gender will be required, and for even-numbered years, the reporting of race/ethnicity and gender will be optional.)

Implications on Reporting Burden for Institutions

RTI is currently assisting NCES in reevaluating its estimates of reporting burden for all IPEDS components and will be seeking input from the community on them. In the case of the HR component, the burden estimate of record is as follows:

Human Resources	
Degree-granting >15 ft form	6.2 hours
Degree-granting <15 ft form	6.2 hours
Non-degree granting form	
For >15 ft	2.5 hours
For <15	2.5 hours

An internal study commissioned by NCES showed that institutions find the HR survey to take more time to complete than indicated in these burden estimates. In addition, a study by the Government Accountability Office indicates that institutions consider the HR component to be second only to the Student Financial Aid component in terms of reporting burden.

NCES plans to increase these base estimates for HR component and therefore seeks input through RTI on the following:

- What is the approximate time required to complete the current IPEDS HR Component? A burden hour is measured as the amount of time it takes institutions to “review instructions, search data sources, complete and review their responses, and transmit or disclose information.” Please indicate which of the forms your institution completes when submitting estimates.

- What would the reporting burden be if the changes summarized in this document were implemented?

What Are the Reporting Implications of These Suggestions?

If the above suggestions are implemented, the Human Resources survey forms will be modified for the 2011-12 data collection year to incorporate the changes suggested by the TRP for capturing faculty and staff data more efficiently and effectively.

Comments

RTI is committed to improving the quality and usefulness of the data on faculty and staff collected through the Human Resources component. **We encourage interested parties to send any comments or concerns about this topic to Janice Kelly-Reid, IPEDS Project Director, at ipedsTRPcomment@rti.org by September 17, 2010.** As noted above, RTI is specifically interested in the **implications on reporting burden as well as on the quality and usefulness of the HR data** based on the proposed revisions.