

Report and Suggestions from IPEDS Technical Review Panel #40

Additional Selected Outcomes of the Advisory Committee on Measures of Student Success

SUMMARY: To further broaden the coverage of student outcome data and improve the quality of data reported to IPEDS, the Technical Review Panel suggests collecting outcome information on the entering undergraduate cohort by enrollment status. Comments from interested parties are due to Janice Kelly-Reid, IPEDS Project Director at RTI International, at ipedsTRPcomment@rti.org by January 14, 2013.

On October 23-24, 2012, RTI International, the contractor for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) web-based data collection system, convened a meeting of the IPEDS Technical Review Panel (TRP) in Washington, DC. Meetings of the IPEDS TRP are conducted by RTI to identify technical improvements to the IPEDS data collection and dissemination, as well as to foster communication with data providers and users. The purpose of this meeting was to solicit input from the postsecondary education community regarding additional selected outcomes of the U.S. Department of Education's Advisory Committee on Measures of Student Success, particularly its recommendation that outcome information be collected for non-first-time undergraduate students. The panel consisted of 48 individuals representing data providers and users including the federal government, state governments, institutions, association representatives, and others.

Members of the TRP met on February 28-29, 2012 (TRP #37) to discuss improvements to the current IPEDS survey forms and possible additions to the IPEDS data collection that could help provide a more complete picture of student success. TRP #37 suggested that IPEDS should clarify the definition of a degree/certificate-seeking student and expand outcome data collection to include part-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students. Following is a list of the changes discussed in the TRP #37 summary report.

CHANGES SUGGESTED BY TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL #37

Clarify the current definition of a degree/certificate-seeking student for IPEDS purposes to include students who

- received any type of federal financial aid, regardless of what courses they took at any time;
- received any state or locally based financial aid with an eligibility requirement that the student be enrolled in a degree, certificate, or transfer-seeking program; or
- obtained a student visa to study at a U.S. postsecondary institution.

Expand GR200 data collection for 4-year and 2-year institutions reporting on a fall cohort (academic year) as follows:

- collect the status of the part-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking cohort reported in the Fall Enrollment component.

This subsequent meeting of the TRP was convened to discuss the feasibility of expanding IPEDS data collection to include outcome data for non-first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students before implementing the prior TRP's suggestions.

Overview

In accordance with the *Higher Education Opportunity Act* of 2008, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) convened the Advisory Committee on Measures of Student Success (Committee) to advise the Secretary of Education on how best to measure student success at 2-year institutions. The result of the Committee's work was a report, issued in December 2011 (<http://www2.ed.gov/about/bdscomm/list/cmss-committee-report-final.pdf>), which outlines the limitations of current federal success measures and recommends ways to improve these measures. Based on its findings, the Committee developed a series of recommendations for actions that the Department and higher education community should implement in both the short and long term.

In response to the Committee's recommendations, the Department released its action plan for improving measures of postsecondary student success in April 2012. The Department's action plan is designed to improve the quality and availability of student success data at the federal level for consumers, institutions, policymakers, and researchers. As part of the action plan:

The Department will take steps to enhance graduation rate and transfer rate reporting in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The Department has begun to examine the feasibility of broadening the graduation rate cohort to include part-time, degree/certificate-seeking students, and it will examine the feasibility of adding non-first-time degree/certificate-seeking students.

RTI convened this meeting of the TRP to discuss whether outcome measures should be collected in IPEDS for non-first-time undergraduates, and if so, what outcome measures should be collected. The panel was asked to provide guidance on how institutions should report such outcomes in IPEDS and identify potential challenges with reporting data that are comparable across institutions.

Outcome Information for Non-First-Time Students

Background

Degree or certificate-seeking undergraduate students who are entering an institution (i.e. new to an institution) are currently categorized in IPEDS as being either first-time (having no prior postsecondary experience) or as transfer-in (having prior postsecondary experience). Each year, in the IPEDS Fall Enrollment (EF) component, degree-granting institutions report the number of undergraduate students who are part of the following subsets of the degree/certificate-seeking population:

- full-time, first-time (have no prior postsecondary experience and have enrolled full-time with the intent to earn a degree, certificate, or other formal award);
- part-time, first-time (have no prior postsecondary experience and have enrolled part-time with the intent to earn a degree, certificate, or other formal award);
- full-time, transfer-in (have prior postsecondary experience and have enrolled full-time with the intent to earn a degree, certificate, or other formal award); and

- part-time, transfer-in (have prior postsecondary experience and have enrolled part-time with the intent to earn a degree, certificate, or other formal award).

Full-time, first-time students are already the focus of several IPEDS data elements, including the Student-Right-to-Know graduation rates.

Discussion

The panel was asked to consider whether outcome information for non-first-time undergraduate students should be collected in IPEDS.

In fall 2010, there were about 1.6 million entering non-first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students at degree-granting institutions.¹ Non-first-time students accounted for about 33 percent of all entering degree/certificate-seeking students at degree-granting institutions.¹ Several initiatives have been developed by institutions, associations, and other organizations in response to concerns that the current graduation rate data collected in IPEDS excludes large numbers of students enrolled in higher education. The panel briefly reviewed selected initiatives that report on outcomes for postsecondary students to discuss the feasibility of collecting outcome measures for non-first-time students in IPEDS.

Each of the initiatives reviewed use a cohort-based approach to track students and most base the cohort on enrollment status in the fall of entry. In addition to reporting on outcomes for full-time, first-time students, some initiatives report on outcomes for nontraditional student groups such as part-time students, non-first-time students, and non-degree-seeking students. Several initiatives also report outcome information for students by categories other than enrollment intensity or first-time status such as race/ethnicity, age, and Pell Grant recipient status either at time of entry or anytime during enrollment.

In general, the initiatives reviewed use institution-level data on retention, transfer, and graduation as measures of student outcomes. Some initiatives also use other progress and outcome measures to document student success more broadly (e.g., credit accumulation, course completion rates, licensure exam passing rate).

The panel agreed that there is value in collecting more data on outcomes from a broader group of students to address policy questions and provide more detailed information to parents and students. Expanding IPEDS to collect outcome information for non-first-time students would significantly increase the comprehensiveness of outcome data available at the federal level. Although such outcome information could contribute to a more complete picture of student success, collecting information on student outcomes for non-first-time students is complicated by a number of factors. The biggest challenge is developing a measure that is comparable across institutions given the diversity of the non-first-time student population. This population includes students with a wide variety of previous postsecondary experience, such as

- students who have transferred from a 2-year institution to a 4-year institution or from a 4-year institution to a 2-year institution;
- students who have transferred from one institution to another institution of the same level;
- students who have attended another institution, but did not earn or were not able to transfer credits;

¹ Source: IPEDS Fall Enrollment 2010.

- students who had been enrolled at an institution and stopped out for some amount of time before re-enrolling; and
- students who enroll at an institution after earning a degree or certificate at another institution.

The panel acknowledged that these student characteristics provide context to the non-first-time population and considered tracking non-first-time students in separate subcohorts based on level of their prior postsecondary experiences (e.g., students who enter a program with transferrable credits, students who transfer without credit, by sector of previous institution attended). However, the panel agreed that this approach would be too challenging and would substantially increase the reporting burden for institutions. A number of panelists noted that in the absence of a coordinated student unit record system that covers all states, the need for more outcome information must be balanced with the potential reporting burden institutions face in collecting outcome information.

The panel agreed that the clarifications made by TRP #37 to the definition of degree/certificate-seeking students help institutions correctly establish a cohort, while also improving the quality and comparability of the data. To simplify reporting, the current panel suggested that a non-first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate student for IPEDS purposes would include any entering undergraduate who is not a first-time student and is seeking a degree or certificate.

Degree/certificate-seeking students must include students who

- received any type of federal financial aid, regardless of what courses they took at any time;
- received any state or locally based financial aid with an eligibility requirement that the student be enrolled in a degree, certificate, or transfer-seeking program; or
- obtained a student visa to study at a U.S. postsecondary institution.

The panel suggested further breaking out the non-first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students by part-time and full-time status. Having separate data on the full-time, non-first-time cohort and the part-time, non-first-time cohort is valuable for providing outcome data that reflect the diverse student populations.

TRP Suggestions for Collecting Outcome Data for Non-First-Time Students in IPEDS

Next, the panel was asked to consider what outcome data to collect for non-first-time students and how to collect such data. The panel reviewed the suggestion made by TRP #37 to collect the status of the part-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking cohort reported in the EF component at several points in time. The panel agreed that the coverage of progress and outcome measures suggested by TRP #37 is broad enough to reflect the diverse student characteristics of non-first-time undergraduate students. Therefore, the panel agreed that it makes sense to align the cohorts and report on the status of the part-time, first-time cohort and the non-first-time cohort at the same time in the following mutually exclusive categories:

- Received formal award:
 - Subsequently enrolled at the reporting institution;
 - Subsequently enrolled at another institution; or
 - Subsequent enrollment unknown.

- Did not receive formal award:
 - Still enrolled at the reporting institution;
 - Subsequently enrolled at another institution; or
 - Subsequent enrollment unknown.

Further, in order to ensure that there is comparable data for all entering undergraduates, the panel also suggested capturing the status of the full-time, first-time cohort in the same mutually exclusive categories. The result would be collecting outcome data in the same format for all degree/certificate-seeking entering undergraduates.

It was noted that collecting data on *any* award received would not be as useful for institutions that award multiple degree levels, or as constructive for addressing policy questions, as collecting data by award level (e.g., number of associate's degree completers, number of bachelor's degree completers). However, the panel agreed that student success can mean many things and felt that making a distinction between certificate and degree completion was too limiting. Further, collecting information on *any* award better accounts for students who receive an award and subsequently enroll at the reporting institution or another institution. There was also a concern that collecting information about subsequent enrollment would imply that institutions are required to track this information. Despite the challenges with measuring transfer activity, the panel agreed with TRP #37 that reporting such information on non-first-time students who are enrolled either full-time or part-time would provide a meaningful measure in the context of progression and completion outcomes.

The panel also discussed several alternative measures of student success such as learning outcomes. However, panelists felt that assessments of student learning are often program-specific, and there are no agreed-upon measures that are comparable across programs or across institutions. Panel members also agreed that promoting transparency in student learning is important but were concerned with meeting the more immediate information needs specifically related to the Committee recommendation.

TRP Suggestions for Timing of Data Submission to IPEDS

TRP #37 examined multiple approaches for collecting the status of the part-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking cohort reported in the EF component at appropriate points in time but did not reach consensus on the level of detail collected or the timing of the status update, and ultimately provided three options to RTI for the Department to consider. The current panel was also asked to consider the intervals at which the outcome information should be collected. Several panelists agreed that reporting on the status of the cohort provides a simple but comprehensive snapshot of student outcomes at a given point in time but were concerned with the level of institutional burden associated with gathering data to report on the cohorts annually. A number of panelists were in favor of collecting the unduplicated counts of students in each of the categories and subcategories at one point in time. Under this option, 4-year degree-granting institutions would track student cohorts for 8 years, and 2-year institutions would track student cohorts for 6 years. Institutions would report the status of the student cohorts only in the final year.

The panel also examined an approach to collect the unduplicated counts of students in each of the categories and subcategories at two points in time. A number of panelists felt the interim update in addition to the status of students in the final year would capture important information about progression. Under this option, 4-year institutions would track student cohorts for 8 years and report the unduplicated counts of students in each of the categories and subcategories in an interim update

at year 6 and in a final status update at year 8. Two-year institutions would track student cohorts for 6 years and report an interim status update at year 3 and a final status update at year 6. Although this approach would require institutions to report on the status of multiple cohorts in a given year, several panelists felt that this approach would provide more detailed progression measures than merely collecting one final status update.

The panel considered expanding data collection to collect the status of students in the following cohorts established in EF:

- full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking cohorts;
- part-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking cohorts;
- full-time, non-first-time degree/certificate-seeking cohorts; and
- part-time, non-first-time degree/certificate-seeking cohorts.

The two options are discussed below.

Option 1: Report an Interim Status and Final Status

Cohort Status Update

- 4-year institutions: report interim status in year 6, with a final update at year 8
- 2-year institutions: report interim status in year 3, with a final update at year 6

Under Option #1, 4-year degree-granting institutions would track the cohorts for 8 years and report the interim status of the cohort in the 6th year after the cohort was established and the final status of the cohort in year 8. Two-year degree-granting institutions would track the cohorts for 6 years and report the interim status of the cohort in the 3rd year after the cohort was established and the final status of the cohort in year 6. In each year of reporting, institutions would submit the unduplicated count of students in each of the award and no-award subcategories shown above.

Option 2: Report Final Status

Cohort Status Update

- 4-year institutions: report status at year 8
- 2-year institutions: report status at year 6

Under Option 2, 4-year degree-granting institutions would track the cohorts for 8 years and report the final status of the cohorts in year 8. Two-year degree-granting institutions would track the cohorts for 6 years and report the final status of the cohorts in year 6.

The panel also considered the most appropriate cohort year to begin collecting the corresponding outcome information. The panel agreed that in order to capture useful and valuable data, it is first necessary to consider how the cohort year relates to the timing of data release. For example, if the changes suggested by the TRP are approved for implementation in 2014-15, under a **prospective** approach:

- 4-year institutions would report interim data on their 2014 cohort in 2020-21 and final data on their 2014 cohort in 2022-23.
- 2-year institutions would report interim data on their 2014 cohort in 2017-18 and report final data on their 2014 cohort in 2020-21.

Given this timing, panelists were concerned that this approach prevents IPEDS from providing immediate answers to policy questions and timely and meaningful measures to consumers.

Panelists noted that many institutions are able to “freeze” student enrollment records at a set point in time to retrospectively identify students to include in the cohort. If the changes suggested by the TRP are approved for implementation in 2014-15, under a **retrospective** approach:

- 4-year institutions would report interim data on their 2008 entering cohort, and final data on their 2006 entering cohort.
- 2-year institutions would report interim data on their 2011 entering cohort, and final data on their 2008 entering cohort.

Although this approach provides more timely data, institutions must look back to determine the enrollment status of students at the time of enrollment, which can make creating student cohorts particularly challenging. For example, it may be necessary for institutions to revise the original cohorts as a result of the clarifications to the definition of “degree/certificate-seeking student for IPEDS purposes” suggested by TRP #37.

IPEDS began collecting the number of full-time and part-time transfer-in (i.e. non-first-time) students in EF for the first time in 2006. In light of this, panel members felt that collecting data on transfer-in students prior to 2006 would significantly increase the time and resources required of institutions to identify the cohort and report on the status of the students.

While the group consensus was that it is preferable to establish the cohort retrospectively in order to address immediate policy needs, panel members were concerned with the level of institutional burden associated with gathering data about students enrolled in previous fall terms. Panelists agreed that reporting outcome information for a cohort previously established in EF provides more timely data but were concerned with data limitations and the ability of institutions to report such data. NCES would appreciate additional comments on the level of reporting burden associated with this approach.

The panel acknowledged the suggestion made by TRP #37 that less-than-2-year institutions be exempt from reporting and suggested no new outcome measure reporting for non-degree-granting institutions. The panel suggested that NCES consider the implications for degree-granting institutions that report on a program basis and that NCES encourage comments from representatives of this sector during the public comment period.

Summary of Proposed Additions to IPEDS for 4-Year and 2-Year Degree-Granting Institutions

CHANGES SUGGESTED BY TECHNICAL REVIEW PANEL #40

Expand data collection for 4-year and 2-year degree-granting institutions reporting on a fall cohort (academic year) as follows:

- collect the status of full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate cohorts;
- collect the status of part-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate cohorts;
- collect the status of full-time, non-first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate cohorts, and
- collect the status of the part-time, non-first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate cohorts.

The status of the cohort is the unduplicated count of students in each of the following mutually exclusive categories and subcategories:

- Received formal award
 - Subsequently enrolled at the reporting institution;
 - Subsequently enrolled at another institution; or
 - Subsequent enrollment unknown.
- Did not receive award
 - Still enrolled at the reporting institution;
 - Subsequently enrolled at another institution; or
 - Subsequent enrollment unknown.

The TRP suggested two potential approaches for the timing of reporting on the status of each cohort. Institutions could be asked to report on each cohort at two different points in time after entry (an interim and a final status); for 4-year institutions data would be collected on a cohort 6 years and 8 years after entry and for 2-year institutions data would be collected 3 years and 6 years after entry. Alternatively, institutions could be asked to report only a final status update for each cohort; for 4-year institutions data would be collected 8 years after entry and for 2-year institutions data would be collected 6 years after entry. Because the TRP did not reach consensus on the intervals at which such data should be collected, NCES would appreciate additional comments on this topic, particularly with respect to the appropriate length of time for part-time cohorts.

Finally, the TRP suggested that institutions report the 2014-15 status of cohorts that were established in previous Fall Enrollment submissions. NCES would appreciate comments on the feasibility of, and reporting burden associated with, reporting the status of past entering cohorts.

Implications on Reporting Burden for Institutions

The panel was asked to estimate reporting burden for institutions, but because of the variability of systems and available data across institutions, no specific burden estimate was determined. The TRP recognized that measuring outcomes related to student success has the potential to impose a high level of burden on institutions. The TRP attempted to minimize burden by aligning the suggested additions to data collected with existing IPEDS components.

Institutions are encouraged to provide estimates of reporting burden for each component during the comment period. The estimate should include time required to review instructions, search data sources, complete and review responses, and transmit or disclose information.

Next Steps and Reporting Implications

Once the TRP summary comment period has closed, RTI will review the comments and provide NCES with final recommendations based on the suggestions of the TRP. NCES will review the recommendations to determine next steps and any reporting implications for IPEDS. Before any changes are made to the IPEDS data collection, proposed changes will be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for information collection clearance. The next OMB package will cover the 2014–15 to 2016–17 IPEDS data collections. NCES would plan to implement any changes based on suggestions from this TRP for the 2014–15 data collection and beyond, with preview screens possibly available in 2013–14.

Comments

RTI is committed to improving the quality and usefulness of IPEDS data. 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 January 14, 2013. As noted above, RTI is specifically interested in the implications on reporting burden as well as on the quality and usefulness of the data elements based on the proposed revisions.