Report and Suggestions from IPEDS Technical Review Panel #41:

Managing Reporting Burden

SUMMARY: Based on a review of the current IPEDS data collection, the panel suggests managing the IPEDS response burden through the length and complexity of the IPEDS components as well as through employing additional training and outreach strategies. Comments from interested parties are due to Janice Kelly-Reid, IPEDS Project Director at RTI International, at ipedsTRPcomment@rti.org by July 19, 2013.

On March 19-20, 2013, 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 the reporting burden for institutions. The panel consisted of 36 individuals representing data providers and users including the federal government, state governments, institutions, association representatives, and others.

Overview

The reporting of IPEDS data is mandatory for all institutions that participate in Title IV programs of the Higher Education Act (federal student aid programs). Most of the data collected in IPEDS are mandated through statute, are collected as a result of interagency agreements, or are necessary for the administration of the IPEDS data collection and dissemination. All new or substantially changed items to be collected in IPEDS are reviewed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act. The Paperwork Reduction Act (44 U.S.C. §§3501–3520) requires federal agencies to "justify any collection of information from the public by establishing the need and intended use of the information, estimating the burden that the collection will impose on respondents, and showing that the collection is the least burdensome way to gather the information."[1]

The federal government requires each federal agency to estimate the burden associated with every federal data collection. The IPEDS time burden is an estimate of the amount of time it takes respondents to review instructions, query and search data sources, complete and review their responses, and submit data through the IPEDS Data Collection System. Burden is estimated for each component by type of institution and new/returning keyholder status. The estimated average total response time in 2012–13 for returning keyholders is 156 hours for 4-year institutions, 121 hours for 2-year institutions, and 53 hours for less-than-2-year institutions.

NCES is sensitive to institutional response burden as a result of changes to the IPEDS data collection and has taken steps to identify and develop strategies to minimize reporting burden by making it easier for institutions to report data. Burden has been specifically addressed at two previous TRPs (#29 and #30). Furthermore, in 2010, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) conducted a

---

[1] Copeland, C.W., and Burrows, V.K. (2009, June 15). *Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA): OMB and Agency Responsibilities and Burden Estimates*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.

study on IPEDS burden. GAO contacted keyholders at 22 institutions as well as software providers.[2] The conclusions of the discussions of the TRPs as well as the findings of the GAO report suggested that burden might be effectively addressed through providing increased resources, communication, and trainings for data reporters.[3] As a result, several new workshops were developed as part of the IPEDS training curriculum, outreach was increased with targeted communications to specific institution groups, and new and strengthened resources for IPEDS data reporting were introduced.

RTI convened this meeting of the TRP to discuss strategies for reducing the institutional burden for the more than 7,400 institutions that report data to IPEDS. The panel was asked to consider ways to simplify the components by eliminating potentially duplicative or unnecessary data. Given that many of the items collected in IPEDS are mandated or otherwise necessary, the panel was also asked to explore further strategies that might be helpful to minimize institutional reporting burden.

General Discussion

There are many determinants of IPEDS reporting burden for institutions. The number and complexity of the items of the IPEDS survey components themselves contribute to the amount of time it takes for institutions to report their IPEDS data. Reporting burden may also be affected by the experience of institutional staff and keyholders, institutional organizational structure, and institution size.

IPEDS data are collected for various reasons. Many items are mandated by statute—for example, the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA) requires NCES to post specific information for each institution on the College Navigator website. Other items are collected under inter-agency agreements. In addition, several items are necessary for survey administration. However, a number of items are not mandated by statute, are not part of an inter-agency agreement or are not necessary for survey administration and therefore could be considered for elimination from the IPEDS data collection. The panel examined the IPEDS survey components item by item to consider which items could be eliminated in order to reduce institutional burden while protecting the utility and quality of the data being reported. The panel acknowledged the burden associated with reporting more data than are needed to meet federal requirements. However, simply deleting an item does not necessarily reduce burden. When changes are made to the data collection, keyholders must identify the changes and determine how the changes impact institutional reporting systems and coding structures, and make revisions to report preparation or file upload layout. Therefore, eliminating items from IPEDS that are commonly reported within an institution for purposes other than IPEDS may shift the burden to other preparatory activities, but may not reduce the overall burden.

Discussion Item #1: Institutional Characteristics (IC)

Although many of the items collected in the IC component are not statutorily required to be reported at this time, the panel agreed that there is value in collecting data that can be used to address policy

---

[2] U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2010, August). *Institutions' Reported Data Collection Burden Is Higher Than Estimated but Can Be Reduced Through Increased Coordination.* Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved April 2, 2013, from http://www.gao.gov/assets/310/308691.pdf.

[3] Respondents to the 2010 GAO study ranked the Student Financial Aid Survey component as the most burdensome, followed by Human Resources, and Finance. The report notes that the content of these components may be more complex and are most likely to require collaboration across departments. Institutional Characteristics, 12-Month Enrollment, and Completions were ranked as the least burdensome. Note that the rankings observed in the GAO study may have been influenced by the year the study was conducted (August 2009 to August 2010); major changes were made to the SFA component in 2008-09 and 2009-10 to comply with requirements of the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA), (P.L. 110-315).

questions and provide more detailed information to prospective students and their families. NCES posts several items on College Navigator that consumers use to conduct comparisons based on institutional characteristics.

The panel reviewed the current IC survey component and discussed strategies for simplifying the collection forms and eliminating potentially unnecessary data in order to reduce institutional burden and improve the utility and quality of the data being collected. This review of the IC forms also focused on clarifications to several of the items that could help address changing policy and research needs.

Disaggregation by Gender of the Number of Applicant, Admitted, and Enrolled Students

The group noted that collecting headcounts of the number of applicant, admitted, and enrolled students by gender requires institutions to report considerably more data than are needed to meet federal requirements. Additionally, panelists felt that the data captured in the gender breakdowns are used infrequently. Removing the gender disaggregation portion of this item would reduce the amount of detail that institutions are required to report without notably affecting the information needed to address policy, research, and consumer needs. Therefore, the panel suggested continuing to collect the total number of applicants, number of admits, and number of enrollments, but recommended eliminating the gender breakdowns.

Estimated Fall Enrollment

The panel discussed that the estimated fall enrollment figures can vary greatly from the enrollment figures reported in the Fall Enrollment (EF) component in the spring. At the time of IC reporting, many data providers do not have reliable enrollment estimates. Additionally, data providers have indicated that many institutions project early enrollment counts using their own methods and processes rather than basing estimates on the definitions used in the EF component. The panel pointed out that burden is associated not only with reporting the data but also with providing explanations about the inconsistencies in the two sets of enrollment data. Therefore, the panel suggested eliminating the estimated enrollment section from the IC component.

The group agreed that there is value in having early enrollment counts, and suggested that further study may be helpful to gather additional information on how to best obtain a reliable measure of early enrollment, through IPEDS or another survey. Depending on the information gathered, this topic may be explored in greater detail during a future meeting of the TRP if necessary.

Credit for Special Learning Activities

The Credit for Special Learning Activities section collects information about credits earned prior to admission, specifically whether institutions accept dual credit, credit for life experiences, or advanced placement. Several panelists felt that collecting this information is valuable to address policy and research questions and to inform prospective students of such learning activities. However, other panelists were concerned that the current measure does not adequately convey the wide range of institutional policies and practices for accepting credit for prior learning activities. For example, credit for life experiences is defined as credit earned by students for what they have learned through independent study, noncredit adult courses, work experience, portfolio demonstration, previous licensure or certification, or completion of other learning opportunities (military, government, or professional). Although many institutions will *award* students credit for life experiences, institutions have strict policies on *accepting* credit for life experiences awarded to students by other institutions. Similarly, institutions may *award* credit to students for completing dual enrollment programs, but these institutions may not *accept* transfer credits awarded elsewhere.

After careful consideration, the panel determined that although these items provide useful insights into the types of special learning credits institutions accept, these items as currently constructed may be misleading to consumers and other data users. Therefore, the panel agreed that this topic needs further study to reconcile any definitional inaccuracies and to allow for a better assessment of how these data could be collected more effectively and efficiently in the future.

Special Learning Opportunities

The panel agreed that a number of items on special learning opportunities collect data are infrequently used or can be found in other sources, such as on the institution's website. Additionally, the panel questioned the relevance of several of the items and noted that the original intent may no longer apply. For example, evolving changes in the delivery of learning opportunities allow students to take weekend-only or evening-only classes. In light of this, the panel felt that it no longer makes sense for institutions to report weekend/evening college.

Next, panelists questioned the clarity and utility of the teacher certification and subcertification question. Given certifications to teachers are typically not awarded by institutions but by the state, this question can be confusing to institutions. Further, given the seemingly minimal amount of use of this information, the panel suggested eliminating this item.

Several panelists felt that reporting study abroad opportunities does not impose significant burden because institutions track this information to report to a variety of entities. The panel agreed that there is utility in retaining this item to meet researcher and consumer needs. The panel suggested retaining the item to collect Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) opportunities for the same reasons.

Student Services

The student services offered by institutions remain fairly constant over time and panelists questioned the relevance of asking data providers to respond to this item each year when many institutions will always report the same information. Panelists pointed out that retaining these responses would significantly reduce institutional burden if nothing has changed. Therefore, the panel suggested that when possible, survey screens should be prepopulated based on the information provided by the institution in the previous collection.

Additionally, the group agreed that there is utility in collecting information on selected student services and felt that a more focused review should be conducted to assess whether the items currently collected fully address changing policy and research needs.

Distance Education Opportunities

The panel agreed that there is value in collecting data on distance education opportunities to address policy questions and provide detailed information to students and their families. However, an important distinction should be made between *programs* offered via distance education and *courses* offered via distance education. Many institutions offer one or more online courses, but not all required coursework for a particular program can be completed exclusively via distance education. Given the possible ambiguity of what is meant by distance learning "opportunities," panelists felt that this information might be misleading to those consumers who are interested in programs that can be completed exclusively online.

Panelists pointed out that if this question is not necessary for survey administration, it may be duplicative of data reported in greater detail elsewhere in IPEDS through two of its components—the Completions survey component and the Fall Enrollment component. An item was added to the

Completions component to collect, by Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code and award level, whether a program is available to be completed completely through distance education. Additionally, the Fall Enrollment component was revised to collect data on the number of students enrolled in any distance education courses and the number of students enrolled in exclusively distance education courses. Therefore, data reported in other components may be used to derive distance education indicators. Eliminating the collection of this item reduces the level of burden while maintaining the data necessary for research and policy analysis.

Discussion Item #2: Completions (C)

In addition to data collected as mandated by HEOA, the collection of race/ethnicity and gender data in vocational programs is mandated by the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act. Furthermore, both the Civil Rights Act and the NCES Reauthorization mandate the collection of completions data. Completions data are used by the Department of Education, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, business and industry, the military, and other groups that need to recruit individuals with particular characteristics and skills. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) uses these data in reviewing compliance with antidiscrimination statutes, and the Department of Justice uses them when court suits are brought in civil rights cases. The data are used by the Bureau of Labor Statistics and State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees in making estimates of trained manpower. The Department of Agriculture uses the data for program information on agriculture and home economics, and the National Science Foundation uses IPEDS completions data for studies of degree production in science, mathematics, and engineering fields. The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching uses completions data in its institutional classifications, which are widely used in research on postsecondary education institutions.

Completions by CIP Code and Award for Second Major Field of Study

The panel agreed that data on second majors provides context for understanding the number of degrees conferred by field of study. However, several panelists were concerned that coding inconsistencies may decrease comparability of the data across institutions and questioned whether the existing data are being reported—and used—correctly. Second majors are reported for associate's, bachelor's, master's, and doctor's degrees when a student receives a single degree with majors in two or more program specialties. Institutions report the degree in one program (first major) and report the program specialty as a second major. Accordingly, most institutions use their own methods and processes to designate how the program specialties will be reported.

Despite concerns about comparability and the necessity of this data at the national level, the panel was hesitant to eliminate the collection of completions by CIP code and award level for the second field of study without first studying the true impact this would have on the existing completions data.

Distance Education Programs

Based on previous TRP discussions, an item was added in 2012–13 for institutions to indicate, by CIP code and award level, whether the program is available to be completed completely through distance education. The panel agreed that these data (1) provide valuable consumer information to prospective students and their families, (2) help describe the scope of distance education, and (3) allow institutions to compare their distance education activities to those of their peers.

Although some institutions already had methodologies in place to identify distance education offerings at the program level, many institutions faced a significant burden in addressing these changes during the initial year of implementation. The panel felt that the increased burden was associated not only with responding to the addition to the data collection but also with manually

keying responses for each program. Additionally, the point was raised that the fields in the import specifications collect data in a different order than the fields in the blank form and resulted in challenges for institutions that upload data files. To reduce the unnecessary level of burden, the panel suggested preloading each screen with checkboxes with a default response of "no" with the ability for institutions to change to "yes" as needed.

The panel also suggested that NCES continue to work with the vendors of student information system software when changes are made related to data elements collected to ensure that tools within that software are aligned with IPEDS reporting requirements and updated regularly.

Unduplicated Count of Completers by Gender and Race/Ethnicity

Starting in the 2012–13 collection year, an item was added to collect the total number of students who earned degrees or certificates, by gender and race/ethnicity. Although these data are not specifically mandated, policymakers and other data users have expressed an interest in understanding the number of postsecondary graduates entering the workforce and the demographics of these students.

After careful consideration, the panel agreed that it is not advisable to recommend changes to items collected in the first year of implementation. The panel was concerned with making recommendations prematurely and suggested that once the data collected on completers by gender and race/ethnicity become more expansive, a future TRP can revisit this topic and assess the need for collecting these data.

Unduplicated Count of Completers by Level and Gender, Race/Ethnicity, and Age

Panelists agreed that collecting data on the total number of completers 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). Since duplication exists when students complete multiple programs within the same degree level, having both an unduplicated count of all completers and an unduplicated count of completers by level increases transparency and provides context for understanding the number of students completing postsecondary education programs. Additionally, the demographics of these students (particularly their age), is a matter of growing interest to U.S. policymakers and legislators.

As noted in previous discussion, the panel was concerned with assessing the utility of the data collected in its first implementation year. Without knowing how the data will continue to evolve or what reporting requirements will be mandated in the future, the panel was hesitant to recommend changes to this item at this time.

Discussion Item #3: 12-Month Enrollment (E12)

There are no specific mandates for the data in the E12 survey component. Enrollment figures based on the unduplicated head count of students enrolled over a 12-month period are particularly valuable for institutions that use nontraditional calendar systems and offer short-term programs. Because this enrollment measure encompasses an entire year, it provides a more complete picture of the number of students these schools serve. Additionally, FTE enrollment is calculated based on instructional activity and is used in computing expenses by function per FTE and revenues per FTE. As a result of this discussion, the panel recommended no changes to this component.

Discussion Item #4: Fall Enrollment (EF)

The NCES authorizing legislation requires the collection of data on access to postsecondary education. The collection of data by gender and race/ethnicity are required by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and the collection of data by gender is required for compliance with Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972. The required data are total full-time and part-time undergraduate and postgraduate enrollment, and enrollment by CIP code, by gender, and by race/ethnicity. In addition, the HEOA requires NCES to publish several pieces of information relating to the EF component.

In addition to these legislative requirements, the OCR uses EF data in reviewing compliance with antidiscrimination statutes. EF data are used by the Bureau of the Census, the National Science Foundation, and state education agencies for economic planning, labor forecasting, and policy formulation. States use the data on first-time freshmen by state of residence to monitor the flow of students across state lines.

Enrollment, by Age

Data on enrollment, by age, are collected in odd-numbered years. The age distribution of enrolled students offers insight into the changing demographics of undergraduate enrollment across institutions. Having an understanding of the extent to which adult, or nontraditional students, are enrolled is important for policymakers and others when designing strategies to improve educational attainment.

The panel agreed that capturing age distribution is important for detailed projections of enrollment by institution type and age, and thus is essential to maintain the same level of detail currently collected. Institutions use the students' dates of birth to report the enrollment by IPEDS age categories, and the panel agreed that collecting enrollment by age in odd-number years does not impose an undue reporting burden on institutions.

Enrollment by Distance Education Status

The data collected through the Completions component focuses on programs that can be completed through distance education, rather than the number of students enrolled in distance education courses or programs.

Data on the number of students enrolled in any distance education and the number of students enrolled exclusively in distance education provides comprehensive and comparable information about the scope of distance education nationwide. Collecting further information on the physical location of distance learners relative to the state in which the institution is located can be used as a basis for conducting additional analysis on topics such as in-state distance learners or the proportion of international students enrolled in distance education programs. This also provides important context for understanding patterns of enrollment in terms of migration and residence.

As a result of this discussion, the group acknowledged that there is some degree of burden associated with reporting distance education data initially, but the value of the data justifies the imposed burden.

Number of Non-Degree/Non-Certificate-Seeking Undergraduates Who Are New to the Institution

The panel agreed that the number of non-degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates who are new to the institution provides important context for evaluating whether the graduation rate data are representative of the institution's entire undergraduate enrollment.

Retention Rates

The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA) requires institutions to *disclose* these data, but there is no requirement to report them to IPEDS. However, many institutions are required to track student progression to report to states and accrediting agencies. Therefore, panelists felt that reporting these rates to IPEDS would not impose an undue burden. The panel agreed that including these items in the IPEDS data collection helps institutions in complying with disclosure requirements and ensures that the rates are calculated in a way that is consistent and comparable across institutions.

Discussion Item #5: Human Resources (HR)

For compliance with the Equal Employment Opportunity Act of 1972, Fall Staff data are to be collected biennially, by gender and race/ethnicity, from institutions that have 15 or more full-time employees. The data required include staff counts by occupational categories, race/ethnicity, and gender. In addition, the HEOA requires NCES to publish the number of full-time and part-time faculty and the number of graduate assistants with primarily instructional responsibilities.

The HR component has undergone a major revision in order to align the categories with the 2010 Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) codes, used by all federal agencies. 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.

Instructors by For-Credit or Not-for-Credit Function

Panelists examined the feasibility of creating different versions of the HR forms, based on an institution's sector. Currently, degree-granting institutions that employ 15 or more staff are asked to report instructors in three subcategories based on whether the courses they teach are for-credit or not-for-credit courses. This is appropriate for 2-year institutions, which frequently have staff whose primary role is instruction (and who are reported accordingly in the HR component) but who teach not-for-credit courses exclusively. Panelists pointed out that the operating budgets of these institutions combine for-credit and not-for-credit instructional activities. However, IPEDS enrollment data capture only for-credit enrollment. Capturing a breakdown of instructors by function could be used to reflect the proportion of a given institution's not-for-credit activity.

Although this item addresses issues that are unique to 2-year institutions, reporting this level of detail has also been implemented for 4-year institutions. The panel agreed there is potential utility in collecting sector-specific data, but there was concern that collecting sector-specific data would decrease comparability of the data and reduce the utility of the data for researchers. The panel suggested that further study be done on this issue to examine the extent to which not-for-credit activity measures can be addressed in the IPEDS data collection and suggested that this topic be revisited during a future meeting of the TRP, if necessary.

Tenure Status for Non-instructional Staff

The panel also examined the tenure status categories for noninstructional staff currently used in the HR component and discussed whether these categories could be streamlined or collapsed to reduce institutional burden. Panelists noted that generally speaking, tenure refers to the permanence of the position and that the distinction between faculty who are tenured, those who have no tenure status, and those not on tenure track can be used to evaluate the percentage of the permanent workforce. The panel agreed that since non-instructional staff can have faculty status, capturing this level of detail is important for workforce equity analysis purposes—although it may not be appropriate for all non-instructional occupational categories. Institutions have different policies for designating non-

instructional occupations as faculty-level positions. For example, some institutions make a distinction between "academic faculty," who hold academic rank titles, and "administrative faculty," who may include the chancellor/president, provost, vice provosts, deans, directors or the equivalent, associate deans, assistant deans, and executive officers of academic departments (chairpersons, heads, or the equivalent). While institutions may use different designations of who is functioning as "faculty," there is generally some designation of whether or not an employee has faculty status.

Although collecting the tenure status of only those staff in the postsecondary teachers occupational category could help reduce the reporting burden, the panel noted that there is a high level of interest in this information—particularly as it relates to library faculty and management occupations. Since nonfaculty positions do not have tenure status, the panel suggested eliminating the tenure status differentiation from the following occupational categories:

- business and financial occupations;
- computer, engineering, and science occupations;
- community service, legal, arts, and media occupations; and
- health care practitioners and technical occupations.

Graduate Assistants, by Function

Currently, when reporting data on part-time staff, institutions are required to provide a headcount of any graduate assistants working at the institution by primary occupational category. Federal mandates require a headcount of graduate assistants involved in instructional activities, but reporting in the other functional categories is not required. In addition to the Graduate Assistants – Teaching category, graduate assistants are also reported separately by the following categories: Research; Management; Business and Financial Operations; Computer, Engineering, and Science; Community Service, Legal, Arts, and Media; Library and Instructional Support; and Healthcare Practitioners and Technical. The panel was asked to examine the graduate assistant categories currently used in the HR component and whether these categories could be streamlined or collapsed to reduce institutional burden.

Given the amount of variation that exists within graduate assistant occupational categories and the role of graduate assistants across institutions, the panel determined that it is important to capture data at the most general level. The panel agreed data could be collected more efficiently and effectively by splitting the total headcount of graduate assistants into three broad categories: teaching, research, and other.

Salary Outlays

The group expressed concerns related to the value of the salary data for non-instructional staff as currently collected. The group was concerned about the consistency and validity of the headcounts for salary reporting because there are no clear instructions for assigning employees to a particular SOC code. Further, the SOC is structured in such a way that supervisors of staff in major groups 13-0000 through 29-0000 are classified with the workers they supervise. Given the variation that exists within each category in terms of job capacity, panel members questioned the validity of aggregating the salaries of supervisors and nonsupervisors into one broad measure. The panel agreed that promoting financial transparency of institutions is important but was concerned that the salary outlays as currently collected do not provide the level of detail needed to obtain a greater understanding of what is driving college costs and how much is being spent on personnel.

The panel acknowledged that changes to the HR component were suggested by the TRP held in June 2010, before the alignment with the 2010 SOC required adoption of the new occupational categories. The group felt that there is a high degree of burden associated with reporting salary outlays for noninstructional staff under this new occupational structure and questioned whether the suggestions of the previous TRP are still appropriate. Specifically, the panel questioned whether broad inconsistencies in reporting will result in limited use of the data. The group was split; several panelists advocated eliminating collection of noninstructional salary outlays given the potentially problematic data and substantial reporting burden. Other panelists were concerned that eliminating collection of salary outlays for noninstructional staff may be premature without a clear idea of how the data may be used. However, the group agreed that it would be unwise to require institutions to report additional data solely for the sake of consistency without any greater need. After careful consideration, the panel reached consensus that the scope of noninstructional salary outlays under the new occupational categories is too complex to collect in the HR component at this time, so this section should be eliminated.

New Hires

Degree-granting institutions and related administrative offices that have 15 or more full-time staff report the number of full-time permanent staff who were included on the payroll of the institution for the first time (new to the institution) or after a break in service and who were still on the payroll of the institution as of the HR census date. The collection of new hires by race/ethnicity and gender adds a level of complexity, and panelists were unsure how extensively the data on new hires are used. The group also expressed concerns related to the value of the data as currently collected, noting that the period of reporting provides a snapshot of new hires at one point in the fall rather than a full year of data. Although these data can be used to analyze hiring trends, panelists felt that these data are only useful at the aggregate level.

Therefore, the panel suggested that NCES conduct additional research to determine whether these data are needed for compliance with other federal regulations outside of IPEDS (e.g., EEOC). If these items are not required, the panel suggested eliminating the new hires collection from the Human Resources component. Removing these items would significantly reduce institutional burden, and the group agreed that while there is value in collecting detailed information about diversity and other key issues in the higher education workforce, IPEDS may not be the appropriate instrument for collecting this information at this time.

Discussion Item #6: Student Financial Aid (SFA)

The data collected in the SFA component are required by HEOA.

Discussion Item #7: Graduation Rates (GR) and 200% Graduation Rates (GR200)

Mandates for collecting graduation rates data appear in both the Student Right to Know Act (SRK) and HEOA. NCES is required to publish graduation rates for 100 percent, 150 percent, and 200 percent of normal time to completion. The Graduation Rates component also collects the URL for the institutional dissemination of student-athlete graduation rates (if available), satisfying the HEA requirement that those data be reported to the Department of Education.

The panel was asked to examine whether these items could be streamlined or collapsed to reduce institutional burden. Institutions that offer bachelor's degree programs and determine degree intent upon entry separate students in the revised initial cohort into two groups or subcohorts: (1) students entering bachelor's or equivalent degree programs and (2) students seeking other than a bachelor's degree (associate's degree, certificates, etc.). The system calculates the overall 4-year average

completion/graduation and transfer-out rates of full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking students for the student cohort (bachelor's subcohort and other degree/certificate-seeking subcohort). Additionally, the system calculates 4-year, 5-year, and 6-year graduation rates for the bachelor's or equivalent degree-seeking subcohort. The panel agreed that having data on the two subcohorts provides important context to the graduation rates for institutions that offer one or more bachelor's degree programs but grant the majority of degrees at the associate's level. Therefore, the panel agreed that the value of the data justifies the burden.

To reduce the burden, the panel suggested adding a screening question (or using an institution's previous response) to determine applicability for reporting data in each section of the Graduation Rates components.

Discussion Item #8: Finance (F)

Although there are no legislative mandates for the specific items in the Finance component, the NCES authorizing legislation requires the collection of data on the financing and management of education, including data on revenues and expenditures. The content conforms to the accounting and financial reporting standards issued by the Financial Accounting Standards Board (FASB) and the Governmental Accounting Standards Board (GASB). Furthermore, the U.S. Census Bureau uses IPEDS finance data for its Annual Survey of State and Local Government Finances, the U.S. Department of Commerce uses the finance data in developing gross national product accounts, and state agencies use the data for planning and policy evaluation.

Data collected in the Finance component are widely used across all sectors, at the state level and in work such as the Delta Cost Project. Therefore, panel members felt that a more focused review should be conducted to evaluate the utility of the data collected in the Finance component. Panelists agreed that a future meeting of the TRP should convene to solicit the input of financial experts and explore this topic in greater detail.

Furthermore, NCES has taken steps to minimize burden by collecting data associated with institutions' General Purpose Financial Statements (GPFS). Institutions' financial accounting policies and procedures are the basis for reporting these data, and the panel was hesitant to suggest changes that would result in deviations from the GPFS.

Discussion Item #9: Additional Measures for Reducing Burden

After discussing each component, the panel discussed additional measures that could be taken to reduce reporting burden. While controlling IPEDS response burden through managing the length and complexity of the IPEDS components is one strategy, NCES also seeks to manage response burden in other ways. Previous TRPs and studies have suggested improvements to available resources for IPEDS reporting and training. In reviewing the survey components, the TRP examined issues that affect reporting burden and discussed strategies and additional steps to enable institutions to be more effective and efficient in preparing IPEDS data.

Leverage Higher Education Community Resources

Considering the varying levels of knowledge and expertise about IPEDS, the panel suggested that the higher education community work together to create and share common resources focusing on the best practices and technical efficiencies in collection, storage, reporting, and usage of IPEDS data. The panel suggested that those with less knowledge and expertise would benefit from additional guidance from the higher education community. Data providers would benefit from knowing how other institutions use IPEDS instructions and definitions to identify required data, develop or confirm

data collection methodology, acquire new information if necessary, and create data systems to store the data.

The panel explored several approaches to foster the sharing of resources and noted that the IPEDS listserv provides a forum to facilitate discussion of IPEDS-related questions and topics among IPEDS keyholders, coordinators, and other interested individuals. The listserv is intended to offer IPEDS data providers and users additional tools for collaboration and the opportunity to read and participate in discussions of such topics as best practices, methods for pulling data from student data systems, etc. The panel suggested that NCES consider ways to use discussion forums to foster communications with providers and potential users of the data. Additionally, the group suggested that NCES should provide summaries of the resolution of problems identified on the IPEDS to ensure that correct information is being distributed.

Continuous NCES Review of Survey Instruments, Instructions, FAQs, Edits, Etc.

One way to address the issue of burden is to provide clear and consistent instructions and reconcile inconsistencies in definitions, making it easier for institutions to report data and improving the overall quality of the data reported. Enhancements have been made in the data collection system that allow a keyholder to more easily identify what components have not yet been completed and the deadlines for submission. Additionally, the Resource Center on the IPEDS website was updated to include the data collection and dissemination cycle, upcoming changes for IPEDS surveys, information on reporting students and staff by race/ethnicity, the CIP, and the SOC. The panel suggested that NCES continue to conduct periodic reviews of each component.

NCES Review of Nonapplicable Items from Survey Screens

NCES should continue to review ways to simplify the collection forms and eliminate potentially unnecessary items. To reduce burden, screening questions should be used to determine applicability for reporting a particular category, when possible.

Increase Training Opportunities

Panelists agreed that providing training opportunities to data reporters will help alleviate some of the concerns raised about reporting burden. NCES funds a variety of training opportunities through the Association for Institutional Research (AIR) to help keyholders prepare and report IPEDS data. Additionally, the keyholder can provide contact information for additional institutional contacts specific to student financial aid, finance, and human resources reporting. The panel suggested that these additional contacts would also benefit from targeted trainings on their specific areas of focus. This has also allowed NCES and the IPEDS Help Desk to communicate directly with these contacts about critical issues specific to the survey components in which they are involved, and further enables and encourages keyholder communication with these colleagues and additional data providers at their institution.

Web tutorials are available for each survey component, as well as one specifically for new keyholders. These are free, and are available 24 hours a day. Links to online trainings are available from the Training and Outreach menu on the IPEDS website, through the Data Collection System, the Help menu, and from the Data Provider Center. The component tutorials are also available from the survey screens, so data providers can access just-in-time training as they submit their data. The panel suggested that NCES continue to develop new online training and just-in-time trainings to emphasize key concepts and address areas of confusion.

NCES Communication

Careful management of changes to IPEDS, including consideration of and focus on implementation schedules and communication with data providers, can also help to reduce burden. Because many of the recent changes to the data collection are suggestions from the TRP, the panel recommended calling attention to the panel's burden estimates, next steps, and implications for reporting, which are included in the report and the TRP's suggestions for public comment. When possible, to help institutions prepare for the changes, the TRP should also identify whether the suggested changes will result in the need for additional collaboration between institutional departments.

The group agreed that NCES should continue the use of the "This Week in IPEDS" e-mail bulletin to announce updates related to data release on College Navigator and the IPEDS Data Center. The panel suggested expanding the announcements to include other updates to data dissemination—such as the inclusion of graduation and retention rates on the FAFSA—to better inform the postsecondary community on how their IPEDS data reported are being used.

Additionally, NCES has developed resources for vendors, including the option for them to register as an IPEDS-related vendor to receive e-mails about new information when it is posted. As noted in previous discussion, the panel suggested that NCES continue to work with the vendors of student information system software to ensure that tools within that software are aligned with IPEDS reporting requirements and updated on a regular basis.

Systemwide Error Report

IPEDS coordinators play a central role in resolving inconsistencies or errors in reporting. Currently, coordinators can run an edit report for all the institutions that they oversee, but they must resolve all edit errors and issues with the data institution-by-institution. The panel determined that coordinators would benefit from a tool that displays an aggregate error report for all coordinated institutions and that allows for the editing of multiple institutions at once (batch capability).

Continued Exploration for Better Uploading Tools

Many data providers have recognized the ability to upload data as an efficiency for their IPEDS reporting. Although creating a file upload layout to specifications may present an additional burden for institutions initially, this method of data entry may reduce the burden associated with IPEDS reporting in subsequent years if no substantial changes are made to the data collection.

The panel suggested that NCES continue to explore various aggregation tools that would assist institutions with either converting Microsoft Access or Microsoft Excel tables into upload files or allowing these file types to be uploaded directly into the system. By offering new tools to institutions, NCES would take additional steps toward reducing burden and would help users prepare data more efficiently.

Common Education Data Standards (CEDS)

CEDS is a specified set of the most commonly used education data elements to support the effective exchange of data within and across states and for federal reporting. The panel agreed that the common vocabulary could help institutions in developing institutional databases and suggested that further study be done on the extent to which state systems or other data exchanges could be leveraged to shift the reporting burden from institutions.

Discussion Item #10: Component Burden Question

NCES burden estimates take into account the type of institution (4-year, 2-year, and less-than-2-year) as well as keyholder experience, as these have a significant impact on variations in time burden. In 2012–13, a new optional question was added at the end of each component to help NCES continue to improve its estimates of the reporting burden associated with IPEDS. Data preparers were asked to include estimates of the amount of time it took to review instructions, query and search data sources, complete and review the component, and submit the data through the Data Collection System. Responses varied across institution types and sectors (with high outliers in each). While it is expected that there will be variability in the time required to complete IPEDS by different institutions and keyholders, the panel was asked to consider how the question could be improved to accurately reflect the time burden, and—if responses continue to fall outside of the expected range—how to better understand the outliers.

Several panelists felt that there the question wording is ambiguous about including the time spent by the data provider in preparing the component, or whether the estimates should also account for the time spent by coordinators or other campus offices involved in the data collection and reporting process. The panel agreed that more information should be gathered about the level of involvement from other departments, typically providing data or uploading data, and how this affects IPEDS burden. To have more information about time burden and to adjust NCES's estimates, this information should be gathered annually. While the group agreed that the estimates should reflect the time spent by everyone who assists in reporting IPEDS data, the panel was unable to reach consensus on the level of detail to collect (e.g., collect the number of other offices involved with preparing the component, break out time estimates for each activity in the submission process, or include comment boxes to solicit feedback on areas that were particularly burdensome). NCES would appreciate additional comments on this topic, particularly with respect to the appropriate level of detail to collect.

After careful consideration, the panel agreed that there may be value in making these estimates available to keyholders, coordinators, or others for benchmarking, resource allocation, or planning purposes. However, panel members felt that they did not have a clear idea of the potential implications to make a suggestion at this time.

Summary of Proposed Revisions to the IPEDS Components for All Institutions

Following is a list of the suggested changes included in the discussion sections of this report.

Institutional Characteristics:

- Collect *total* number of applicants and admissions and enrolled rather than gender breakdowns.

- Eliminate estimated fall enrollment.

- Remove the categories of weekend/evening college, teacher certification, and subcertification from the list of student services.

- Eliminate distance education opportunities, if possible.

Human Resources:

- To the extent feasible, remove tenure status for the following noninstructional staff categories for full-time and part-time staff:

- o   Business and Financial Occupations;

- o   Computer, Engineering, and Science Occupations;

- o   Community Service, Legal, Arts, and Media Occupations; and

- o   Healthcare Practitioners and Technical Occupations.

- Keep the tenure breakdowns for:

  - o   Postsecondary Teachers;

  - o   Archivists, Curators, and Museum Technicians;

  - o   Librarians; Library Technicians;

  - o   Other Teachers and Instructional Support Staff; and

  - o   Management Occupations.

- Implement new, condensed categories specifically for graduate assistants:

  - o   graduate assistant—teaching;

  - o   graduate assistant—research, and

  - o   graduate assistant—other.

- Eliminate salary outlays for noninstructional staff (if considered appropriate after further research by NCES).

- Eliminate the new hires section (if considered appropriate after further research by NCES).

Next Steps and Reporting Implications

There are no new reporting requirements as a result of this panel. 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. Proposed burden estimates will be submitted to OMB for information collection clearance. The next OMB package will cover the 2014–15 to 2016–17 IPEDS data collections. NCES will plan to revise burden estimates for the 2014-15 collection and beyond based on suggestions from this TRP.

Comments

RTI is committed to reducing the IPEDS reporting burden through potential changes to each of the IPEDS components as well as additional strategies that might be helpful to minimize institutional reporting burden. 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 July 19, 2013.