

Technical Review Panel No. 52 2017 Subbaccalaureate Certificates

Final Actions

Subbaccalaureate certificates are reported to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) in three categories based on the program length, and measured in terms of academic year, with a clock and credit hour equivalency. The less-than-1-year certificate has become a catch-all category for emerging alternative credentials such as stackable certificates and industry credentials, and between 1998-99 and 2013-14, there has been an 88.1 percent increase in the reporting of such awards.

On March 28 and 29, 2017, RTI International, the contractor for the web-based data collection system, convened a meeting of the IPEDS Technical Review Panel (TRP) in Washington, DC to discuss potential classifications to capture the growing category of subbaccalaureate certificates¹ in the Completions survey component and how these changes would impact stakeholders including institutions, researchers, and the Department of Education. The panel consisted of 56 individuals representing institutions, researchers, state governments, the federal government, higher education associations, and other experts.

The TRP discussed the purpose and classification of subbaccalaureate certificates in IPEDS and considered possible alternatives to the classification system to more appropriately measure less-than-1-year programs. The panel suggested segmenting subbaccalaureate certificates that are less-than-1-year in length into two categories. In addition, the panel suggested removing references to academic year equivalencies and to contact hours from certificate award categories as they also have reported to be confusing.

Following the meeting, RTI posted a summary of the TRP suggestions to the web (https://edsurveys.rti.org/IPEDS_TRP/Default.aspx) for public comment. RTI solicited comments by notifying keyholders and coordinators through a “This Week in IPEDS” email announcement and encouraged member associations involved in the TRP to notify their constituents and stakeholders. Comments were left open for approximately 30 days and the comment period closed on June 12, 2017. RTI received 5 comments from interested parties in response to the posting. Following the comment period, RTI outlined recommendations for NCES based on the outcome of the TRP meeting and subsequent public comment period. NCES has taken the actions listed below.

Proposed Changes to the IPEDS Data Collection by Survey Component

NCES requested and received clearance from the Office of Management and Budget for the 2019-20, 2020-21, and 2021-22 IPEDS data collections. The clearance package includes a number of proposed changes to the data collection, including the following proposed changes related to subbaccalaureate certificates as a result of the TRP.

¹ Although IPEDS collects data on postbaccalaureate and post-master’s certificates, the scope of this TRP review is limited to undergraduate certificates.

Changes in Reporting (Cross-cutting Terminology and Definitional Changes), 2019-20

- Replace the term "contact hour" with the term "clock hour."
- Update the definition of "clock hour" to the following definition per CFR 34 600.2:
A period of time consisting of (1) A 50- to 60-minute class, lecture, or recitation in a 60-minute period; (2) A 50- to 60-minute faculty-supervised laboratory, shop training, or internship in a 60-minute period; or (3) Sixty minutes of preparation in a correspondence course.
- Replace the term "formal award" with the term "recognized postsecondary credential"

Changes to Institutional IC Header, 2020-21

- Segment subbaccalaureate certificates that are less than one year in length on ICH (Former category 1 will be split into 1a and 1b)
 - 1a. Postsecondary award, certificate, or diploma of
 - less than 300 clock hours, or
 - than 9 semester or trimester credit hours, or
 - less than 13 quarter credit hours
 - 1b. Postsecondary award, certificate, or diploma of
 - 300-899 clock hours, or
 - 9-29 semester or trimester credit hours, or
 - 13-44 quarter credit hours
- References to academic year equivalencies and to contact hours have been removed from all levels of subbaccalaureate certificates.

Forms and instructions will be available for preview in 2019-20 to give institutions 1-year notice of how new data items will be collected in the future. The preview screens are available from the data collection system, under the Survey Materials option within the Help menu.

Changes to Completions Form, 2020-21

- Segment subbaccalaureate certificates that are less than one year in length on ICH (Former category 1 will be split into 1a and 1b)
 - 1a. Postsecondary award, certificate, or diploma of
 - less than 300 clock hours, or
 - than 9 semester or trimester credit hours, or
 - less than 13 quarter credit hours
 - 1b. Postsecondary award, certificate, or diploma of
 - 300-899 clock hours, or
 - 9-29 semester or trimester credit hours, or
 - 13-44 quarter credit hours

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Forms and instructions will be available for preview in 2019-20 to give institutions 1-year notice of how new data items will be collected in the future. The preview screens are available from the data collection system, under the Survey Materials option within the Help menu.