

Technical Review Panel No. 53 Evaluating Distance Education Elements in the IPEDS Data Collection

Final Actions

Although the IPEDS distance education data collection is relatively new, the postsecondary landscape is constantly changing due to advanced and improved technologies. Distance education, particularly online education, has evolved with the advent of new communication and educational technologies and increasing demand for flexible learning opportunities. Institutions use a wide spectrum of technologies to deliver instruction through a variety of delivery modes—completely distance education, traditional or in-person instruction, and a combination of technology and traditional instruction, often referred to as “hybrid” or “blended” instruction. Additionally, the term “distance education” may not have clear lines that delineate instruction from physical distance because institutions offer online courses to students living on campus as well as to those separated by distance (e.g., across state lines).

On June 20 and 21, 2017, 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 to discuss how IPEDS can best capture information related to distance education to improve stakeholder information. The panel consisted of 50 individuals representing institutions, researchers, state governments, the federal government, higher education associations, and other experts.

The TRP considered potential changes to the current distance education data elements in the IPEDS collection and explored opportunities to add new items to fill information gaps. Suggestions for data collection changes take into account the need for flexibility and uniformity, while also considering the potential burden placed on data reporters.

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 September 9, 2017. RTI received 12 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 distance education as a result of the TRP. Survey components affected are Completions and 12-month Enrollment.

Changes to Completions Form, 2020-21

Refine distance education indicator question:

Is at least one program within this CIP code offered as a distance education program?

- All programs in this CIP code in this award level can be completed entirely via distance education. (Radio button)
- Some programs in this CIP code in this award level can be completed entirely via distance education. (Radio button)
 - At least one program in this CIP code in this award level has a mandatory onsite component. (Checkbox)
 - At least one program in this CIP code in this award level has a non-mandatory onsite component. (Checkbox)
- None of the programs in this CIP code in this award level can be completed entirely via distance education. (Radio button)

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 12-month Enrollment Form, 2020-21

New distance education screen:

Report number of undergraduate degree/certificate-seeking, undergraduate non-degree/non-certificate-seeking, and graduate students that are:

- Enrolled exclusively in distance education courses
- Enrolled in at least one but not all distance education courses
- Not enrolled in any distance education courses

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.