

Report and Suggestions from IPEDS Technical Review Panel #14 Peer Analysis System (PAS) Interface Redesign

PROPOSAL SUMMARY: IPEDS data are disseminated through the web-based IPEDS Peer Analysis System (PAS). Over the past several years, the volume of data available through the PAS has grown significantly, and use of the data has become more widespread. To modernize the PAS, making it more user-friendly, more intuitive to use, and more accessible to both experienced and inexperienced users, NCES is proposing a new user interface for the tool. In addition, the new tool will also incorporate new features, such as the ability to produce trend reports using multiple years of data for the same variable.

The IPEDS Technical Review Panel (TRP) on the Peer Analysis System (PAS) Interface Redesign met on November 2-3 in Potomac, MD, to evaluate a prototype interface redesign. The panel members included 28 individuals who are IPEDS data users from institutions, state governments, and the federal government. The panel was selected to represent a cross-section of current PAS users, ranging from the very experienced to the very inexperienced. The panel considered the new PAS interface in comparison to the current PAS interface and evaluated the utility of the new version, as well as considering ways that it could be further improved to serve the needs of IPEDS data users.

Background:

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) developed the PAS for the purpose of disseminating IPEDS data, archiving historical IPEDS data, and providing researchers with easy access to those data. The tool was originally designed to facilitate the comparison of a single institution to a group of comparison institutions, on variables of interest to researchers, but has been enhanced to allow users to export datasets, reproduce survey submissions in facsimile form, and generate statistics, among other things.

The scope of the tool has also evolved over time, to the point where a large volume of data, dating as far back as 1980, is now available through the tool. Additionally, there are now significantly more PAS users relative to a few years ago, due to the growth of interest in IPEDS data and to many PAS training sessions and workshops held throughout the country each year. However, NCES continues to receive feedback that the current PAS is sometimes difficult to use for all but the most adept users.

Proposal:

The TRP panelists unanimously agreed that the new interface demonstrated at the meeting is far superior to the current PAS interface. The panelists noted the ease-of-use, intuitive structure, and new reporting options (such as trend reports) as the primary reasons for their endorsement.

The TRP panelists encouraged NCES to deploy the new tool as soon as possible. In addition, the panelists provided a variety of suggestions to further enhance the tool, its accessibility to users of all skill levels, and utility to researchers.

Comments:

We encourage interested parties to send any comments or concerns about this proposal to Sam Barbett at Samuel.Barbett@ed.gov by March 31, 2006. Please include the following in the email subject line: IPEDS PAS Interface Redesign - Proposal Comments.