

## Report and Suggestions from IPEDS Technical Review Panel #23 Collecting Data on Distance Education

**SUMMARY: Based on the evolving changes in delivery modes for postsecondary education and interest in capturing additional data on distance education, the technical review panel suggests modifying the current IPEDS definition of “Distance Education” and collecting additional distance education data within the IPEDS survey. Comments from interested parties are due to Janice Kelly-Reid, IPEDS Project Director at RTI International, at [ipedstrpcomment@rti.org](mailto:ipedstrpcomment@rti.org) by December 3, 2010.**

On April 22-23, 2008, RTI International, the contractor for the IPEDS web-based data collection system, convened a meeting of the IPEDS Technical Review Panel (TRP) in Arlington, VA.<sup>1</sup> The purpose of this meeting was to solicit input from the postsecondary community regarding ways to incorporate distance education into IPEDS data collection. The panel members included 41 individuals representing federal government, state government, institutions, national data users, associations, and others. The TRP discussed evolving delivery modes for postsecondary education (focusing on distance education), differences in distance education between states and between institutions, modifying the current IPEDS definition of distance education, collecting distance education data through IPEDS, and discussing challenges that institutions would face in providing distance education data.

### Background

Since the inception of postsecondary “correspondence-based schools” in the late 1890s, methods of distance education have evolved over time to meet the educational demands of nontraditional students. RTI International called this meeting of the TRP to discuss current data collection practices followed by representative states in the reporting of distance education data, best practices among these, varying definitions of distance education, and how the reporting of distance education might be incorporated into the existing IPEDS reporting structure.

The current IPEDS Institutional Characteristics component allows institutions to indicate whether distance learning is offered, but no additional data on distance education are collected in the IPEDS survey components. Various sample studies, including the federal NPSAS and PEQIS studies, the Sloan Consortium surveys, and the SREB data exchange at the state level, have collected distance education data. However, definitional changes between surveys and collection years do not allow these data to be comparable.

There is a growing interest in collecting distance education offerings both from a consumer perspective as well as a legislative perspective. More than two-thirds of Title IV institutions

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<sup>1</sup> This report and suggestions were not posted for comment immediately following the Technical Review Panel meeting because NCEES resources were dedicated to implementing requirements of the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA), which became law in August 2008, not long after this meeting was held.

offered one or more online courses to students in fall 2006, and approximately one-half of undergraduate students and two-thirds of graduate students participated in online-based programs or courses during this period. There is a challenge of providing a complete, comprehensive picture of postsecondary distance education enrollment and offerings.

**Discussion**

The TRP met and reviewed the implications of *proposed* new reporting requirements included in the proposed Higher Education Act reauthorization bill:

- number and percentage of students taking ANY distance education,
- number and percentage of students taking ALL distance education, and
- number and percentage of courses offered via distance education.

Please note: The 2008 Higher Education Opportunity Act legislation, as passed in August 2008, does not contain any of the proposed distance education provisions for reporting or disclosure.

The panel discussed various definitions of “distance education” and suggested changing the IPEDS definition as follows:

<b>Current Definition</b>	<b>Suggested Definition</b>
An option for earning course credit at off-campus locations via cable television, internet, satellite classes, videotapes, correspondence courses, or other means.	Education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously.

The panel also discussed whether IPEDS instructions should clarify whether the separation between instructor and students is “*exclusive*” or “*predominate*.” The TRP agreed that IPEDS instructions should clarify that requirements for coming to campus for orientation, testing, or academic support services does not exclude the course from being classified as distance education. Also, technologies used for instruction may include the following:

- Internet;
- One-way and two-way transmissions through open broadcasts, closed circuit, cable, microwave, broadband lines, fiber optics, satellite or wireless communication devices;
- Audio conferencing; and
- Video cassette, DVDs, and CD-ROMs, if the cassette, DVDs, and CD-ROMs are used in a course in conjunction with the technologies listed above.

The panel reviewed the IPEDS survey components and discussed how the reporting of distance education data might be incorporated into the existing IPEDS reporting structure in order to improve the accuracy and comparability of data, as well as provide valuable consumer information on College Navigator. Table 1 presents the changes the panel suggested be made to the components.

**Table 1. Suggested Changes to IPEDS Components to Report Distance Education Data**

Survey Component	Suggested Data Items to Report Distance Education Data
Institutional Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separate the 1st subcategory from IC Part C – Question 6: “<i>What types of special learning opportunities are offered by your institution?</i>” [Check all that apply] into a unique IC question to collect whether distance opportunities are offered and at what level.</li> <li>• Number and percent of courses offered completely online</li> <li>• Number of programs offered completely online</li> </ul>
Completions	By CIP Code and degree level, indicate if the CIP is available to be completed completely online
12-Month Enrollment	No changes
Human Resources	No changes
Graduation Rates	No changes
Fall Enrollment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Add a column for students enrolled in ALL distance education in <i>Part A – Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender</i></li> <li>• Add a column for students enrolled in ANY distance education in <i>Part A – Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity and Gender</i></li> </ul>
Student Financial Aid	No changes
Finance	No changes

**More Information:**

**Institutional Characteristics.** A separate question in IC Part C would collect all distance education elements, rather than including distance education as a subcategory in question 6. The percentage of exclusively distance education courses can be calculated when the total number of courses is provided.

- Although the number of programs that are offered online and the number of programs offered traditionally is not required by HEA guidance, the panel suggests that from a consumer information perspective, there is an advantage to collect and publish the number of programs that are available exclusively online.
- The definition of “course” will be provided in the online IPEDS glossary, as HEA language will likely default to the IPEDS definition.
- The panel suggests that a caveat box be provided in IC Part C that will enable institutions to describe unique circumstances. Information provided in the caveat box will be available on College Navigator.

**Fall Enrollment.** The panel suggests that the number of student enrolled in ALL distance education and in ANY distance education should be collected every other year by race/ethnicity and gender, as well as by student level. Collection will occur in alternate years with age data to reduce potential institutional burden.

The number and percentages of courses offered as distance and the percentage of enrollments in distance education will be displayed on College Navigator.

### **What Are the Reporting Implications of These Suggestions?**

After the official IPEDS definition of “distance education” is determined and implemented, the Institutional Characteristics, Completions, and Fall Enrollment survey forms would be modified.

### **Comments**

RTI is concerned about defining distance education such that institutions will be able to provide consistent, comparable, and useful information, while also maintaining a low institutional 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](mailto:ipedsTRPcomment@rti.org) by December 3, 2010.**