

Report and Suggestions from IPEDS Technical Review Panel #7

First-Professional Degree Classification

PROPOSAL SUMMARY: IPEDS should revise the reporting requirement with regard to first-professional degree programs by institutions based on a revised definition and the acceptable inclusion of additional degree programs from the Classification of Instructional Programs.

The IPEDS Technical Review Panel (TRP) on the First-Professional Degree Classification met on February 23-24, 2004. In attendance were 20 individuals, representing federal government, state government, institutions, national data users, accrediting bodies and professions. The panel considered the current reporting requirements for first-professional degree programs and proposals to either eliminate the category or to expand and redefine it.

Background:

Since the 1950s, the degree classification pertaining to the first-professional degree has remained unchanged in both its definition and in the list of included degree programs. IPEDS defines a first-professional degree as: An award that requires completion of a program that meets all of the following criteria: (1) completion of the academic requirements to begin practice in the profession; (2) at least 2 years of college work prior to entering the program; and (3) a total of at least 6 academic years of college work to complete the degree program, including prior required college work plus the length of the professional program itself. (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Glossary 2004 at <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/glossary/>). The four discipline areas (10 fields) in which first-professional degrees are defined include law, medicine, other health fields, and theology.

In recent years, representatives from a number of fields have approached NCES about expanding the category to include their particular field of study as "first-professional." In contrast, there have also been calls from the field to eliminate the discrete designation because either the category as currently defined lacks cohesion and is an eclectic mix of degree programs, or because the policy significance of the category is diluted due to frequent aggregate reporting using a broader "graduate and professional" category.

Presented with the option of eliminating the category, several members of the group expressed concern over the loss of historical trend data, as well as possible ripple effects in areas such as licensure, medical reimbursement, and insurance.

In discussing the definition of first-professional, the TRP recognized that the necessary training and entry to practice in first-professional fields is generally controlled by professional licensure, that such training is only available through study that goes beyond the baccalaureate level, and that the necessary training generally requires at least three

years of postbaccalaureate-level study (though not necessarily the completion of a baccalaureate degree).

Issues Addressed:

- Should the distinct category pertaining to the first-professional degree level be eliminated?
- If yes, should "first-professional" still be definable by a collection of CIP codes?
- Should the category CIP codes be restructured to include different (additional) programs of study as first-professional?
- Is there a mechanism for the inclusion of additional CIP codes as first-professional in the future?
- Is the current definition of a first-professional program sufficient?
- If no, what components of the definition are currently insufficient, and how might they be rewritten to better reflect the current status of first-professional degree programs?
- What is the impact on program authorization, accreditation, and reporting if the definition is changed?

Proposal: The TRP suggested the following:

- That IPEDS redefine "first-professional" as follows:
 - General Definition: An award that requires postsecondary study of the basic body of knowledge and skills required to function as an entry-level professional in certain fields specified for reporting purposes by the U.S. Department of Education. These awards require the completion of a program that meets all of the following criteria: completion of the program provides the academic prerequisites necessary for licensure in a recognized profession; the program requires at least 3 years of postbaccalaureate study; and the degree is awarded after a period of study such that the total registered time to degree, including both pre-professional and professional study, equals at least 6 full-time equivalent academic years.
- The current list of first-professional degree programs includes: Chiropractic (D.C. or D.C.M.); Pharmacy (Pharm.D.); Dentistry (D.D.S. or D.M.D.); Podiatry (Pod.D., D.P., or D.P.M.); Medicine (M.D.); Veterinary Medicine (D.V.M.); Optometry (O.D.); Law (L.L.B., J.D.); Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.); and Theology, which consists of Divinity/Ministry (B.D., M.Div.) and Rabbinical and Talmudic Studies (M.H.L., Rav.).
- Along with the current collection of CIP codes defined as first-professional, additional CIP codes should be added for acceptable reporting as first-professional degree programs. Included in the list for consideration and comment are the following programs:
 - audiology, physical therapy, architecture, professional engineering (such as chemical, physical, electrical, and civil), occupational therapy, naturopathic medicine, clinical psychology, social work, acupuncture/traditional Chinese medicine, and certain business professions (such as financial planning, master of accounting, brokerage, actuary).

What are the reporting implications of this proposal?

Under this proposal, institutional reporting to IPEDS would be minimally effected, as the basic usage of this category would remain intact. Fields emerging or evolving to fit the definition of first-professional could be petitioned to NCES for reclassification.

There are various concerns with regard to the implementation of an expanded category of first- professional degree programs, including the loss of trend data, changes in institutional classifications, and the identification of programs for inclusion. Trend data would be reliant on identifying specific CIP codes, rather than the degree level. As the highest degree awarded is one consideration for institutional classification, NCES and others will need to consider the application of this particular criterion. And, application for inclusion should be limited to the professional accrediting bodies of the respective professions.

When will this be implemented?

Pending receipt of comments from the higher education community and concurrence with this proposal, NCES would like to implement this new definition for reporting first-professional degree and enrollment information with the Fall 2005 data collection. As with all changes to IPEDS, the first collection year would be optional, the second year use of the new definition would be mandatory.

For any data collections prior to the implementation date, institutions should continue to report data on first-professional degree programs under the existing definition, available in the current edition of the Classification of Instructional Programs.

Comments:

NCES is concerned about how a change in data collection and reporting of the current first-professional degree classification will impact institutional data and its use in informing policy, as well as the ability to comply with these new requirements within the timeframe presented. We encourage interested parties to send any comments or concerns about this proposal to Jeff Weber at jweber@cpe.state.in.us by May 15,2004. Please **include the following in the email subject line: First-professional TRP - Proposal comments**. Copies of your email should also be sent to [Elise Miller](#).