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| Date: | May 1, 2014 |
| To: | NPSAS:16 Technical Review Panel |
| From: | Jennifer Wine, Director, NPSAS:16 |
| Subject: | TRP Meeting Executive Summary |

The first technical review panel (TRP) meeting for the 2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16) was held in Washington, DC on January 28 and 29, 2014. The purposes of the meeting were to

1. Review the history of financial aid and administrative records data collections at NCES,
2. Present applications used and data elements collected in recent records collections,
3. Discuss key issues in each section of the student records instrument and obtain specific guidance from panelists, and
4. Continue to build positive relationships with institution staff and work towards reducing burden on data providers.

This memorandum describes the background of the record collection, and then summarizes the information presented to and recommendations made by the TRP. A meeting agenda and meeting slides from each presentation are posted on the TRP website as well.

**Financial Aid and Administrative Records Collections in NCES Studies**

The primary sources of data for the NCES postsecondary studies are the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), student interview, administrative records (Central Processing System, National Student Loan Data System, National Student Clearinghouse, and SAT/ACT matches), transcripts, and student records at institutions. Student records provide data on enrollment, student budget, and nonfederal aid; these data are not (reliably) obtained from other sources.

Planning for the NPSAS:16 student records collection is underway. For NPSAS:12, student records data were collected from about 1,700 institutions and covered a single academic year. The number of sampled students in each institution averaged about 90, with a range of 10 – 300 students per institution depending on the size of institution. NPSAS:12 offered multiple modes of providing data that allowed a variety of data entry and file upload options.

In 2013, after the third round of interviews for the 2002 Education Longitudinal Study (ELS:2002), a Financial Aid Feasibility Study (FAFS) was conducted to determine the likelihood of postsecondary institutions being able to provide financial aid data up to 8 years old. To ease burden on institutions, each was assigned a 3-year time period, the oldest time being 2004-05 through 2006-07. Because the ELS:2002 10th grade cohort was first sampled from high schools, students were dispersed across many postsecondary institutions, resulting in student samples that were much smaller than for a NPSAS, averaging 3.6 students per school. Overall participation rates were high with 87 percent of selected institutions providing data for 91 percent of the students sampled.

**Approaches to Records Collection**

Panelists discussed how participation in an NCES student records data collection should work or does work at their institutions. Generally, the data request would come through the Institutional Research (IR) office first, and panelists agreed that is the preferred approach for most requests, except transcripts. Transcript requests are most often handled by the registrar’s office. Panelists agreed that it would be helpful to know how often they will be expected to provide the same data to NCES. If there are frequent requests, panelists indicated that they would be more inclined to develop a script to extract data from their databases.

**Institution Enrollment List Data Elements**

Items collected on the enrollment list were presented and discussed. These included indictors needed to identify students for their potential inclusion in longitudinal follow-up studies. The first-time beginner (FTB) flag identifies potential sample members for the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS). The graduating senior flag identifies potential sample member for the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B). Panelists suggested that RTI align the IPEDS and BPS definitions of first-time student, if possible. If it is not possible, they suggested that RTI at least highlight the differences in definitions. As recommended by panelists, RTI will provide more guidance on definitions and discuss some items in the upcoming focus groups, such as degree program and veteran status.

**Student Records Data Element Review**

TRP members were invited to review the student records data elements collected for NPSAS:12 and the ELS:2002 Financial Aid Feasibility Study, examine findings related to data quality from those collections, and read the data element comparison report. Panelists were asked to recommend improvements to the data elements, definitions, and to the student records application used by institutions. Specific data elements requiring TRP input were discussed by section. The key concerns and suggestions of the TRP members are described below, organized by section of the student records application.

***Institution Information Section***

*Term Information*

* + Collecting institution-level term information is problematic for institutions with continuous enrollment, particularly those that are clock-hour schools.
  + Even credit hour institutions on traditional academic calendars may have several different and overlapping terms, with varying start and end dates, which would make it impossible to use a common set of terms for all students.
  + RTI will consider whether or not we should collect any term information, at the institution-level, at the start of data collection. We will discuss this with the focus groups.

*Placement Exams*

* Placement exam items were collected in NPSAS:12 to serve as an indicator of remediation.
* Panelists suggested other, more direct questions for determining remediation.

*Institution Aid*

* An aid type option of “grants/scholarships – non-need, non-merit” should be added.
* The definition of “need-based” aid needs to be made clear in the student records collection.
* Examples should be provided to help institutions classify their programs correctly.
* RTI will consider including an “other, specify” program type category in the field test study in order to identify possible new types or see where there is confusion.
* For customized institution aid, there is no need to collect the name/title of the aid programs. Only the aid type and amount need to be collected.

***Enrollment Section***

* Credit accumulation guidelines should be provided for each level and some consideration given on how the options are presented. For example, *first year* is not synonymous with *freshman.*
* A “graduate student – unclassified” option for the *class level* item should be added.
* *Tuition and fees charged* is difficult to report. RTI will conduct additional analysis on this topic using the NPSAS:12 data. Definitions and help text should be expanded.
* The panelists recommended using the IPEDS options for *residency for tuition purposes* (in-district, in-state, and out-of-state).
* Rather than fitting student enrollment into institution-level terms or monthly indicators, panelists think it is best to simply collect term start and end dates for each student. As indicated in the institution term section, this will be discussed with focus groups.
* Institutions with continuous enrollment (especially those that also use clock hours) would not know what to report for *enrollment intensity* (full-time, half-time, less-than-half-time). It was suggested that RTI consider using the FSA definitions for enrollment intensity and to consider a separate measure for clock-hour institutions.

***Financial Aid Section***

* In order to better account for missing financial aid data, the financial aid screening (gate) questions should be made more obvious and all should be presented before asking for amounts.
* A summary box with a calculated total aid amount would be helpful for quality control.
* Grants and scholarships are not always interchangeable. RTI will be clear on what is meant by grants and scholarships so institutions will know how to categorize their awards.
* RTI should review the graduate assistantship categories used. We will consult the categories used in the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) and the Graduate Students Survey (GSS), and consider re-defining some categories.
* Institutions are not always aware of a student’s private loans. They may know the amount certified, but do not know if the student actually received the loan, and the “type” may be unreliable or unclear.
* Institutions often do not have all the information on who, among their students, are veterans or military service personnel. NCES will continue to collect what can be obtained through student records, will work with IPEDS staff who have relevant experience, and continue to pursue a working relationship with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

***Budget Section***

* Obtaining a full response to the individual student budget items is challenging. RTI will consider collecting the “main” budgets at the institution-level and then feeding those into the student-level data collection as available options, if desired, to ease burden and encourage response.
* RTI will revisit the line items listed in the budget, discussing them with the focus groups, and combining items as it makes sense.
* RTI will look more closely at budget data from NPSAS:12, including how often budgets vary by student within institution, if the missing data are concentrated among specific sectors, and checking our budget items against net price in IPEDS.

***General Student Information Section***

* The item for high school GPA should be added back to the section, even if it isn’t available from all institutions.
* RTI should consider dropping driver’s license number.
* Data should be collected on full date of birth rather than just month and year.
* The request should capture “high school *completion*” rather than “high school *degree*” since, for example, a GED is not a degree.

**Facilitating Institution Participation**

The following suggestions were discussed for facilitating and encouraging participation in the NCES student records data collections:

* The Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) project is a national collaborative effort to create common standards for education data elements. Using its *Align* and *Connect* tools along with a NPSAS public data dictionary, institutions will be able to map data elements from their system to the necessary NPSAS items. The goal is for NCES studies to align to CEDS as much as possible and to encourage its use among institutions.
* RTI should consider building data file specifications and data element guides that are customized for particular SIS vendors (such as FAME, Banner, and Oracle/Peoplesoft).
* Panelists would rather build the same file year to year on current data, than to provide many past years at one time.
* NCES/RTI should explain why these data collections are important, but be clear in stating that institutional participation in the study is voluntary. They should appeal to an institution’s desire for statistically-sound data, and offer demonstrations for institutions on how to use PowerStats.
* Data that institutions already provide for regulatory reporting should be leveraged, if possible.
* The student records data request should provide well-defined specifications, with clear definitions and more help text and examples.
* RTI should not change file formats, data elements, or response options with each collection. Specifications should remain stable.
* Institutions should be sampled very early, and offered early training.
* Short videos should be included throughout the data collection application to provide assistance to institution staff.
* NPSAS and other NCES student records studies should work to become more widely known across institutions.
* A specialized campaign should be implemented to recruit private for-profit institutions.
* NCES/RTI should utilize state coordinators more and continue to expand their reach for system-level data.