

Response to the Comment Request on the  
**Integrated Postsecondary Education  
Data System (IPEDS) 2024-25 through  
2026-27**

**Docket Number: ED-2024-SCC-0040**  
**May 3, 2024**

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## Comment on Information Collection Request for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 2024–2025 Through 2026–2027

### Introduction

Through annual data covering nearly 6,000 Title IV postsecondary institutions (colleges, universities, and technical or vocational institutions), and the many reports on national trends they enable, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) provides an invaluable public resource for researchers, policymakers, students, and families. As the data source for public-facing tools like the College Navigator, IPEDS is a particularly valuable resource for people engaged in the college choice process who seek reliable and comparable information on an institution’s enrollment, degrees awarded, tuition and fees, average net price, student financial aid, average graduation rates, and other important student outcomes. Disaggregating data by gender, race and ethnicity, Pell recipient status, transfer status, and part-time enrollment status can further enhance the utility of these metrics.

Mathematica welcomes the opportunity to respond to the information collection request pertaining to proposed changes to the IPEDS Student Financial Aid (SFA) survey component to inform the efforts of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for continual improvement. We are a nonpartisan research and data analytics organization with a mission to improve public well-being. For more than 50 years, Mathematica has worked closely with federal agencies, including the U.S. Department of Education and NCES; higher education institutions and systems; foundations; grantees; and other partners in the evidence community. A core component of Mathematica’s work is collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data on a wide range of topics, including education, labor, and social policy. With this response we draw on our experience supporting the development, implementation, and evaluation of postsecondary educational programs and providing technical assistance to federal and state agencies, foundations, and other organizations that support educational, career, and social outcomes. A variety of Mathematica’s postsecondary work has benefited from the use of IPEDS data, making us an interested stakeholder in potential changes to its survey components.

### Response to SFA Survey Component planning

- 1. NCES is considering collecting aid data on additional student categories to better understand how different student categories are being awarded aid. The additional student categories would include all students (graduate and undergraduate) and all full-time degree/certificate-seeking students, allowing the opportunity to derive values for other categories including graduate students, non-first-time students, and less-than-full-time students.**

**Please list the benefits of adding these additional student categories.**

IPEDS data are vital for monitoring equitable college opportunities and outcomes, which enhances understanding, supports inquiry, and can ultimately lead to positive social change. Next, we highlight two key benefits of adding the proposed student categories to the SFA Survey Component.

*Fostering equitable research*

Vital for advancing equitable research practices is identifying institutional or other factors that contribute to disparities to develop or study strategies that can improve outcomes of historically marginalized and understudied communities. Engaging data that allow for disaggregation by subgroups and the examination of outliers are some of the most important ways we conduct equitable research.

Today's learners increasingly [desire nontraditional pathways](#) into and through their postsecondary education and express [concern](#) over the costs and value of postsecondary education. Thus, there is a great need for aid data from the SFA Survey Component on additional student categories. These data will offer a fuller understanding of how institutions award aid to different students. We see this as particularly important in terms of non-first-time students and less-than-full-time students enrolled in either undergraduate or graduate programs of study. [Evidence](#) indicates these learners, particularly part-time students, trail traditional (for example, full-time and first-time) students in important outcomes, such as completion rates. IPEDS data have been critical for identifying these outcome gaps, but there remains a need to understand the role that financial aid might play in these gaps.

An institutional perspective can also enhance equity given the [large variation](#) that exists across postsecondary institutions in the United States. Having data about aid awarded to subgroups such as less-than-full-time students will open myriad opportunities to monitor trends within and between institutions based on sector, mission, institutional category, open admissions policy, and other characteristics.

*Providing better, more complete, and more transparent information on the costs of attending college*

Reliable and comparable information on the costs of attending college is critically important for numerous stakeholders, especially students and families. For prospective and returning students, complete and transparent information on tuition and fees, average net price, and student financial aid is [essential](#) given that a postsecondary education is one of the greatest financial investments people make in their lifetime, reflected by student loan debt being the [second largest source of debt](#) in the United States.

Online tools such as the College Navigator provide an exceptionally valuable resource for students who weigh numerous considerations in deciding on the best college or university for themselves to attend. Among those considerations, arguably none is more critical than the cost of attendance. However, published studies have demonstrated disparities between what students actually pay to attend a particular college or university (after taking into account the financial aid received) and the average net price shown on [institutional websites](#), the College Navigator, as well as the information provided through many institutions' [net price calculators](#). Incomplete information on what they might actually pay to attend a particular college or university increases the likelihood that students will make suboptimal decisions about where or whether to enroll.

Collecting aid data through the SFA Survey Component on additional student categories will lead to more complete information on the aid awarded to different categories of students and holds promise for increasing the transparency in costs of attendance for prospective or returning college students. We see this as an important enhancement and an essential public resource that responds to intensifying public scrutiny toward the [value of higher education](#), and [institutional accountability](#) for serving students educationally, as well as through financial counseling and career services. Accurate,

transparent, accessible, and reliable information on institutional student aid awards is essential for enhancing the functionality and value of IPEDS.

**Are there other data collections where these data are already collected?**

To our knowledge, no other public data sources capture institutional aid data annually across the universe of Title IV institutions comparable to those currently obtained by the SFA Survey Component, and none enable disaggregation by the student categories being considered.

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