



Updating and Aligning the IPEDS Institutional Characteristics Survey Component

Authors

Abby Miller and Sue Clery
ASA Research, LLC



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Eileen Brennan, Henry Ford College

Bryan Cook, Association for Public and Land-Grant Universities

Nancy Floyd, North Carolina State University

Tanya I. Garcia, Georgetown University – Center on Education and the Workforce

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Thomas Harnisch, American Association of State Colleges and Universities

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Darby Kaikkonen, Washington State Board for Community and Technical Education

Susan Lounsbury, Southern Regional Education Board

Kent Phillippe, American Association of Community Colleges

Jason Ramirez, National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities

Jonathan Turk, American Council on Education

Content Contact: Tara Lawley at (202) 245-7081 or Tara.Lawley@ed.gov

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Introduction

This paper provides an overview of the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Institutional Characteristics (IC) and IC Header (IC-H) survey components and potential areas for improvement. The IC-H survey includes screening questions about educational offerings and types of students enrolled to determine which other survey components institutions must complete. The IC survey collects basic directory information about institutions, key consumer information for College Navigator, and data that feed into other survey components, including student services and charges. This paper investigates whether opportunities exist to streamline the IC-H and IC survey components by aligning questions within and across other IPEDS survey components, removing or modifying outdated items, improving definitions, or adding new measures that reflect current aspects of higher education. The analysis considers the reporting burden of institutions and the needs of data users: students and families (consumers), researchers, policymakers, and the public.

Background

The IC survey was the first IPEDS survey component and established IPEDS in 1985-86 (Aliyeva, Cody, & Low, 2018). The 1989 Higher Education Act (HEA) required greater transparency through data and led to the addition of student services and admissions to IC. Admissions later became a separate survey component in 2014-15. Student charges were added to IPEDS at that time, as well. They were originally part of the Student Financial Aid (SFA) component and moved to IC in 2000-01.

The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 required information from IC to be posted to College Navigator, including cost of attendance, institutional mission, percentage of students with disabilities, links to institutional webpages with information about student services, and information about alternative tuition plans. Information reflecting the following items, residing on the IC component, are mandated by statute to be included in both IC and College Navigator:

- Mission statement or URL linking to the mission statement
- Alternate tuition plans
- Percentage of undergraduates registered as students with disabilities
- Tuition and fees (undergraduates)
- Room and board
- Cost of attendance (first-time students)
- Expenses (books, supplies, and other)
- Athletic associations (degree-granting institutions only)

In 2010-11, a few items, such as degree and program offerings, were moved from the IC component to a new component, the IC-H survey. These items determine applicability of other survey items and the survey versions used for the remaining IPEDS survey components. Based on suggestions from a Technical Review Panel (TRP) in 2012, NCES added questions about military and veteran services to the IC-H survey, and additional institutional feedback led to the addition of academic libraries and distance education items in 2016-17.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this analysis:

- 1) What institutionally characterizing data are relevant to IPEDS data users and other stakeholders? How do characteristics of interest vary by institutional sector?
- 2) What characteristics of interest are missing from the IC data collection, limiting the usefulness or utilization of IPEDS? Regarding the missing characteristics of interest:
 - a. What data are needed?
 - b. Are relevant data currently available through other IPEDS components? Are there limitations or challenges with the currently available IPEDS data?
 - c. Are relevant data collected by other reliable sources? Are there limitations or challenges with those sources?
- 3) Does the IC component include characteristics that are no longer widely used that could potentially be removed?
- 4) Can the current IC data collection be improved through changes to definitions or instructions to better answer research questions and reflect trends occurring in the postsecondary landscape?
- 5) Can the calendar cycles and reporting periods of the IC and other IPEDS survey components be realigned to reduce institutional reporting burden and improve data quality? If so, how?

Methodology

The authors employed an environmental scan, descriptive data analysis, and qualitative interviews with nine stakeholders. The resulting quantitative and qualitative data identify gaps and potential items for updates. A summary of the specific steps follows.

1) Environmental Scan: The authors conducted an internal scan of IC and IC-H data, as well as an external scan of related higher education datasets.

- Internal scan
 - Reviewed the IC calendar in conjunction with the remaining IPEDS components' reporting calendars.
 - Reviewed data elements currently collected by IPEDS IC and IC-H, potential areas of overlap both within these components and across other IPEDS survey components, and potentially outdated or unclear items.

- Reviewed IC and IC-H survey item formatting and flow for potential areas of improvement.
- External scan
 - Reviewed noteworthy national data collections, other than IPEDS, that collect data related to institutional characteristics.
 - Compared IC and IC-H items to comparable items on relevant external surveys.

The authors referred to the 2018 NPEC paper *History and Origins of Survey Items for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System* for additional information regarding the IC and related IPEDS components.¹

2) Interviews with Stakeholders: The authors conducted nine interviews with non-federal professionals in the higher education community who are well-versed in IPEDS data to gain their insight into how the IC component is used and can potentially be streamlined.² The authors interviewed data users and reporters from a variety of postsecondary sectors (i.e., public, private, 4-year, 2-year) and organizations to ensure inclusion of a broad range of perspectives.

NCES staff who manage and have expertise in the survey components also provided feedback on background about potential areas for improvement. The limit of nine stakeholder interviews excludes these interviews with federal employees.

A semi-structured interview protocol guided the stakeholder interviews (see appendix B). Interview participants were assured anonymity. No individual or institution is named in this report.

3) Data Analysis: The authors analyzed IC and IC-H data by institution level and control to identify questions that may be extraneous based on the responses. For example, IC collects a number of binary yes/no questions about whether institutions offer specific student services. The authors analyzed the responses to these questions to determine whether any services are offered by all or no institutions and therefore may be considered for elimination or updating.

Findings

A summary of findings for each data collection method follows.

Environmental Scan

External Survey Comparison

We compared data elements from the IC survey to elements from two other national surveys that collect information about institutional characteristics: the Common Data Set (CDS) and

¹ Available at: https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/pdf/NPEC/data/NPEC_Paper_IPEDS_History_and_Origins_2018.pdf

² The maximum number of interviews is set at nine because any more would require a full Office of Management & Budget (OMB) data collection clearance, which usually takes six to nine months.

College Board’s American Survey of Colleges (ASC). The purpose of this comparison is to answer the research questions about what relevant data are collected by other sources, what information is currently missing from IPEDS, and which questions are no longer relevant. These two external surveys, each updated annually, provide a gauge for questions of interest to institutions and consumers, which can help determine areas of IC that may need to be updated.

The CDS initiative “is a collaborative effort among data providers in the higher education community and publishers as represented by the College Board, Peterson’s, and U.S. News & World Report. The combined goal of this collaboration is to improve the quality and accuracy of information provided to all involved in a student’s transition into higher education, as well as to reduce the reporting burden on data providers” (Common Data Set Initiative, 2019). The ASC “is a Web-based survey of nearly 4,000 accredited undergraduate colleges and universities in the U.S. The survey collects information of use to high school students, parents, and school counselors about the characteristics of each college including programs, costs, application requirements, and deadlines. This information then appears in each participating institution’s College Search profile, and in a series of four college guidebooks published by the College Board. Annual Survey data is also used to compile educational statistics for the Trends in Higher Education Series of annual research reports” (College Board, n.d.). Some of the ASC questions borrow from CDS, so there is some overlap. However, ASC has additional questions that focus on consumers.

Table 1 displays IC-H questions, with the exception of screening questions specific to IPEDS, and similar questions collected by CDS and ASC. Under Part A – Educational Offerings, the question about the type of institution or programs is slightly different. Whereas IPEDS asks reporters to select all of the categories that apply, such as academic or occupational, ASC asks institutions to select up to two descriptors, which can be either by function (community college, junior college, university, branch, etc.) or by college/program such as business or liberal arts. The CDS does not ask a similar question.

The options for levels offered are largely the same across the three surveys, with one exception—CDS and ASC ask institutions whether they offer transfer and terminal degrees, but IPEDS IC does not. In addition to collecting information about level and control, ASC asks whether the institution is a 2-year college that awards bachelor’s degrees (IC-H collects similar information through Carnegie Classifications, see table A-1).

Table 1. IPEDS IC-H, CDS, and ASC questions

ITEMS	IPEDS	CDS	ASC
Part A – Educational Offerings			
Types of instruction/programs offered (academic, occupational, continuing, adult, etc.)	x		
College description (choose 2 - by function i.e., community college, university, branch, virtual, military or by college/program)			x
Part B – Organization			
Control	x	x	x
Levels	x	x	x
Sub-baccalaureate certificate/diploma	x	x	x
Associate	x	x	x
Transfer		x	x
Terminal		x	x
Bachelor’s	x	x	x
Postbaccalaureate certificate	x	x	x
Master’s	x	x	x
Post-master’s certificate	x	x	x
Doctoral degree research/scholarship	x	x	x
Doctoral degree – professional practice	x	x	x
Doctoral degree – other	x	x	x
Other	x		x
2-year colleges: can students complete a bachelor's degree?			x
Predominant Calendar System			
Academic year reporting method: Semester; quarter; trimester; 4-1-4 or similar plan	x	x	x
Program reporting method (differs by program; continuous basis)	x	x	x
Hybrid/mixed reporting method	x		

Table 2 displays Parts A and B of the IC survey compared with similar questions on CDS and ASC. Neither CDS nor ASC collects institutions’ mission statements. The IPEDS IC survey collects more information about services and programs for servicemembers and veterans than the other surveys; however, CDS and ASC ask more detailed questions about credit for military experience, including the maximum amount of credit and various tests accepted.

Table 2 – IC Survey Parts A and B, CDS, and ASC questions

ITEMS	IPEDS	CDS	ASC
IC Survey			
Part A – Mission Statement	X		
Mission statement URL	X		
Part B – Services and Programs for Servicemembers and Veterans			
Yellow Ribbon	X		
Credit for military training	X	X	X
Military credit transfer policies (admissions survey) - ACE, CLEP, DSST, maximum number of credits, policy on website		X	X
Dedicated point of contact	X		
Recognized student veteran organization	X		
Member of DOD Voluntary Educational Partnership MOU	X		

The ASC survey asks the most questions about special learning opportunities (27), followed by CDS (18), and IPEDS IC (7), as shown in table 3.

Table 3. IC Survey Part B – Special learning opportunities, CDS, and ASC questions

ITEMS	IPEDS	CDS	ASC
Part B – Special learning opportunities			
Accelerated program		X	X
Advanced placement credits	X		X
Combined bachelor's/graduate programs			X
Cooperative education program		X	X
Credit for life experiences	X		X
Cross-registration		X	X
Double major		X	X
Dual credit/enrollment	X	X	X
English as a Second Language (ESL)		X	X
Exchange student program (domestic)		X	X
External degree program		X	X
Formal business partnerships			X
GED preparation/test center			X
Honors program		X	X
IB credit			X
Independent study		X	X
Internships		X	X
Liberal arts/career combination		X	X
Off-campus semester (sea/UN/Urban/NY/DC)			X

ITEMS	IPEDS	CDS	ASC
Part B – Special learning opportunities			
Professional licenses - preparation/testing, by area			X
ROTC	X	X	
Student-designed major		X	X
Study abroad	X	X	X
Summer: extensive/limited offerings			X
Teacher certification	X	X	X
Weekend/evening college	X	X	X
Weekend/extended class times			X
Other (specify)		X	X

In Part C – Student Services – Other Student Services, IC has a broad question about whether institutions offer academic/career counseling services. ASC, however, asks about nine specific services under the Academic Support Services header (table 4). Other services collected by IC—employment, placement, and remedial—are currently listed separately from academic/career services but could be listed as sub-items under that broad category.

Table 4. IC Survey Part C – Other student services

ITEMS	IPEDS	CDS	ASC
Part C – Other student services			
Academic/career counseling services	X		
First generation/underrepresented			X
Learning center			X
Pre-admission summer program			X
Reduced course load			X
Remedial instruction			X
Study skills assistance			X
Tutoring			X
Writing center			X
Other academic support services			X
Academic support services offered on weekends/evenings			X
Computer services/workstations			X
Employment services (current students)	X		
Freshman orientation			X
On-campus daycare	X		
Placement services (completers)	X		
Remedial services	X		
Transfer services/advising (admissions survey)			X

The remaining Other Student Services items, shown in table 5 below, are asked only in the IC survey with the exception of distance education, which is asked as a special learning opportunity question on CDS and ASC (see table 3).

Table 5. IC Survey Part C – Other student services

ITEMS	IPEDS	CDS	ASC
Part C – Other student services			
Academic library services: Physical facilities; An organized collection of printed materials; Access to digital/electronic resources; A staff trained to provide and interpret library materials; Established library hours; Access to library collections that are shared with other institutions	x		
Alternate tuition plans: Tuition guarantee; Prepaid plan; Payment plan; Other	x		
Distance education opportunities/distance learning	x	x	x
All programs offered exclusively via distance education program; Levels offering distance education opportunities (undergraduate, graduate)	x		
Disability services: Percentage of undergraduates registered as students with disabilities	x		

All three surveys collect student charges (tuition and fees) for all full-time undergraduate students for the full year (ASC notes, however, that “If costs vary by class, provide Freshman costs,” table 6). IPEDS requests an average, while the other two surveys ask institutions to report the “typical” amount.

IPEDS IC provides a separate section within student charges to report room and board costs and collects additional room and board information for first-time students in the price of attendance section. ASC collects varying room and board costs (on/off campus, with/without family) for all undergraduates, while IPEDS collects this information for first-year students only. IPEDS collects an overall room and board average for all undergraduates.

Both CDS and ASC collect information about books and supplies and other expenses for all undergraduates, while IPEDS IC collects this information for first-time students only.

Table 6. IC Survey Part D – Student charges

ITEM	IPEDS	CDS	ASC
Part D – Student charges			
Tuition and fees – amount			
Application fee	X	X	X
Average tuition for full-time undergraduates: in-district, in-state, out-of-state	X	X	X
Required fees for full-time undergraduates	X	X	X
in-district, in-state, out-of-state fees	X		
Per credit hour charge for undergraduate students: in-district, in-state, out-of-state	X	X	X
Graduate student charges	X		
Doctor’s-professional practice, by program	X		
Tuition and fees – policies			
Number of credits per term a student can take for the stated full-time tuition		X	
Do tuition and fees vary by year of study (tiered plan)?		X	X
Do tuition and fees vary by undergraduate instructional program?		X	
% paying more than reported average		X	
Tuition exchange/reciprocity (regional)			X
Tuition payment plans	X		X
Room and board – amount			
Estimated expenses (books and supplies, transportation, other)		X	X
Room and board	X		X
On campus, off-campus/family			X
Room and Board – policies			
Offer institutionally controlled housing	X		
First-time students required to live on campus	X		
Housing capacity	X		
Coed/men’s/women’s housing		X	X
Specialty housing		X	X
Offer board/meal plans	X		
Number of meals/weeks in maximum plan	X		
Price of Attendance (first-time students)			
Published tuition and required fees, in-district, in-state out-of-state	X		X
Tuition guarantee/increase	X		
Books and supplies	X		
Room and board	X		X
Price of Attendance (first-time students)			
On campus, off-campus/family: room and board, other expenses	X		

Table 7 displays additional items on the three surveys. IPEDS IC collects information about membership in athletic associations, while ASC asks about intramural, intercollegiate, and club sports. In addition, ASC collects information about specific extracurricular student activities. The questions about intramural sports and unique facilities are both in the first general section about institutional characteristics on ASC.

Table 7. Other IPEDS IC, CDS, and ASC survey items

Other	IPEDS	CDS	ASC
Athletic association	x		
Intramural/intercollegiate/club sports			x
Student activities			x
Unique facilities (museums, observatories, accelerators, nature preserves, other)			x

IPEDS IC Formatting and Organization

In addition to their content, we reviewed IC and IC-H for survey item formatting and organization to identify potential areas of improvement. Given the nature of IC linkages to other survey components, some of the formatting and organization of these sections may be difficult to change due to technical requirements and the need to report trends. In addition, the following observations are based on the survey form for 4-year academic reporters; minor differences may exist on survey forms for other institution types.

The following observations point to potential areas of improvement for the IC form; no layout issues were identified for IC-H. In Part C – Student Services, only one subsection, C)4, collects information about student services. The topics of other subsections, such as credits accepted and learning opportunities, are slightly different from student services. Questions C)3³, C)5 – Library Services, and C)6 – Alternative Tuition Plans, appear to be out of place. Finally, Distance Education is more related to academic offerings, and Disability Services collects information about the percentage of students with disabilities rather than about disability *services*.

The organization of this section is summarized below:

Part C – Student Services

Part C – Student Services – Special Learning Opportunities

1. *Outside credit accepted*
2. *Special learning opportunities*

³ Question C)3: “If your institution grants a bachelor's degree or higher but does not offer a full 4-year program of study at the undergraduate level, how many years of completed college-level work are required for entrance?”

3. *If your institution grants a bachelor's degree or higher but does not offer a full 4-year program of study at the undergraduate level, how many years of completed college-level work are required for entrance?*

Part C – Student Services: Other Student Services

4. *Student services*
5. *Library services*
6. *Alternative tuition plans*

Part C – Student Services: Distance Education

Part C – Student Services: Disability Services

Part D – Student Charges begins with questions about room and board policies separate from the Room and Board Costs section, which appears after Graduate Student Charges (the Undergraduate Student Charges section does not collect information about room and board costs).

It appears as though questions from Undergraduate Student Charges and Room and Board repeat in Price of Attendance, but the latter only collects information about first-time students used in the SFA Net Price calculation. This is potentially confusing because “first-time students” are not specified in the label/header and the term “price of attendance” is used, as opposed to the more common terminology, “cost of attendance”.

The organization of this section is summarized below:

Part D – Student Charges

Questions 1-4 about room and board policies

Part D – Undergraduate Student Charges

Part D – Graduate Student Charges

Part D – Student Charges – Room and Board

Part D – Student Charges – Price of Attendance

Data Analysis

The following descriptive analyses examine IC survey responses by institution level and control to determine whether any survey items appear unnecessary due to either few or nearly all institutions offering a service or program. It appears that services and programs for servicemembers and veterans are well utilized by most institutions (table 8). For-profit institutions are the least likely to offer recognized student veteran organizations (8%) and credit for experience (17%). Community colleges are the least likely to offer Yellow Ribbon program benefits (19%). Nearly all public 4-year institutions (91%) and a majority of public 2-year institutions (84%) have a dedicated servicemember/veteran contact.

Table 8. Services/Programs for servicemembers/veterans

	Yellow Ribbon Program	Credit for military training	Dedicated military contact	Recognized student veteran organization	Servicemember Opportunity College	No military services/ programs	Credit for experience	ROTC
4-year public	50%	86%	91%	74%	74%	2%	49%	59%
4-year private, not-for-profit	69%	50%	52%	22%	35%	17%	41%	32%
2-year public	19%	85%	84%	52%	56%	4%	69%	7%
For-profit (all levels)	44%	25%	35%	8%	17%	38%	17%	0%

Source: IPEDS IC, 2017-18 provisional data, Title IV institutions

Very few institutions offer teacher certification specializations through other institutions (no for-profit institutions and less than 10% of other types of institutions, see table 9). This may be a potential item to consider for elimination. Only 1% and 3% of for-profit institutions offer teacher certification and study abroad, respectively.

Table 9. Special learning opportunities

	Study abroad	Weekend/ evening college	Teacher certification	Teacher certification - specialization	Teacher certification - other institution	Teacher certification - state licensure	No special learning opportunities
4-year public	81%	42%	76%	56%	7%	68%	7%
4-year private, not-for-profit	60%	44%	54%	41%	3%	49%	19%
2-year public	30%	62%	15%	7%	9%	3%	27%
For-profit	3%	48%	1%	1%	0%	1%	50%

Source: IPEDS IC, 2017-18 provisional data, Title IV institutions

Nearly all non-profit institutions offer all library services (table 10). For-profit institutions are less likely to offer these services because many are primarily online institutions. It may not be necessary to include these questions on IC; however, the library survey may be an appropriate place for these questions for all institutions.

Table 10. Library services

	Physical facilities	Print collection	Digital resources	Trained staff	Established hours	Shared collections	No library resources/services
4-year public	99%	99%	100%	99%	99%	99%	0%
4-year private, not-for-profit	95%	97%	94%	93%	92%	90%	1%
2-year public	91%	92%	94%	90%	91%	89%	5%
For-profit	50%	67%	78%	43%	38%	18%	11%

Source: IPEDS IC, 2017-18 provisional data, Title IV institutions

All public 4-year, and nearly all other non-profit, institutions offer academic/career counseling. While some for-profit institutions do not offer academic/career counseling, this may be too broad a category from which to draw any meaningful comparisons. Nearly all (98%) community colleges offer remedial services (the remaining 2% are either branch campuses of 4-year institutions or specialized/technical colleges, see appendix A). Only 1% of for-profit institutions and 7% of 4-year private, not-for-profit institutions offer daycare services.

Table 11. Other services

	Remedial services	Academic/career counseling	Employment services	Placement (completers)	On-campus day care	No services
4-year public	75%	100%	95%	87%	50%	0%
4-year private, not-for-profit	58%	97%	78%	67%	7%	2%
2-year public	98%	99%	89%	80%	40%	0%
For-profit	29%	82%	50%	89%	1%	4%

Source: IPEDS IC, 2017-18 provisional data, Title IV institutions

Most institutions offer a tuition payment plan, but relatively few offer a guaranteed or prepaid tuition plan (table 12). It is likely useful for consumers to know which institutions offer these alternatives.

Table 12. Alternative tuition payment plans

	Any alternative tuition plan	Tuition guaranteed plan	Prepaid tuition plan	Tuition payment plan	Other alternative tuition plan
4-year public	92%	14%	12%	87%	2%
4-year private, not-for-profit	91%	3%	8%	90%	1%
2-year public	83%	1%	7%	80%	1%
For-profit	93%	12%	6%	90%	2%

Source: IPEDS IC, 2017-18 provisional data, Title IV institutions

All institutions—both 2-year and 4-year—are currently required to enter in-district tuition in the student charges section. As table 13 shows, only a handful of public 4-year institutions (12) enter a different amount for in-district tuition than in-state tuition, and some of these institutions appear to be public 2-year institutions classified as 4-year institutions because they also offer bachelor’s degrees.

Table 13. Public 4-year institutions with different in-district/in-state tuition amounts

Institution Name	Published in-district tuition 2017-18	Published in-state tuition 2017-18
Northwestern Michigan College	\$3,111	\$6,468
Jackson College	\$4,640	\$6,944
Alpena Community College	\$3,870	\$6,090
Colorado Mountain College	\$1,560	\$3,528
Tyler Junior College	\$960	\$2,700
Henry Ford College	\$2,304	\$3,984
Lake Michigan College	\$3,060	\$4,725
Midland College	\$1,950	\$3,510
Schoolcraft College	\$2,808	\$4,082
Brazosport College	\$1,950	\$2,970
South Texas College	\$2,100	\$2,400
Oregon State University	\$9,075	\$9,245

Interviews

Interviews conducted with a mix of data users and reporters found overall satisfaction with the IC-H and IC survey components. The majority of suggestions for improvement were minor, although one interviewee would like the IC component to be “more coherent.”

IC Header

The IC-H is “well done . . . [and] serving its purpose” of screening for other survey components and allowing for peer groupings. Interviewees suggested adding the following institutional classifications to enable easier peer group comparisons and reflect current trends:

- Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI) indicator: IPEDS currently has indicators for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Tribal colleges, but an HSI indicator may be more difficult to include because, by definition, the set of HSIs changes every year.
- Institutional membership indicator: An indicator for institutional memberships, such as the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU) and the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities (APLU) could help facilitate peer analyses.
- Bachelor’s degree indicator: Use the indicator for whether community colleges offer bachelor’s degrees (CCBA) developed for NPSAS (or use Carnegie Classifications to create an indicator if feasible).
- Transfer associate’s degree indicator: Ask whether the institution offers associate’s degrees for transfer (currently on Common Data Set [CDS]).
- Facilities data elements: Consider adding facilities, acreage, and square footage. Fiscal Plan Administrators typically report these data, which are of interest when comparing enrollment and facility growth.

IC Survey

Interviewees provided more feedback on the IC survey than the IC-H component. The majority of feedback related to the Student Charges/Cost of Attendance and Student Services sections, with some additional suggestions about distance education and minor wording changes and recommendations about other survey questions.

Student charges

The majority of the feedback on the Student Charges section relates to the transparency of tuition and fees calculations. The representative of a 4-year institutional membership association suggested that, due to the intricacies and nuances of the Student Charges section, it could be its own survey component.

Tuition/Cost of attendance

Interviewees expressed concern that different institutions may be using different definitions when reporting tuition. For example, a single institution can charge different tuitions by

program or level. On the program reporting side in particular, programs vary in length, and there are several different ways to calculate tuition. Without knowing how comparable reported tuitions are, consumers only have a rough idea of costs, and the data are “not useful from a policy perspective.” One interviewee, however, noted that because “tuition is standardized,” consumers “can make comparisons” if they have the knowledge to calculate costs using reported average time to completion or program length in contact hours. It “doesn’t matter if other institutions are on semesters or quarters,” they are able to use the data as reported because it is annualized.

One interviewee’s institution does “not have a single cost of attendance;” rather, cost of attendance “varies by credential,” that is to say the price is different for students seeking certificates, associate’s, and bachelor’s degrees. The options are to “either weight” the different tuition amounts or “pick the most common.” Institutional data reporters often “shy away from context boxes” because their time is limited. In addition, while the IC survey collects an average per credit tuition, “credits can [reflect] . . . a different number of months for each program.”

Typically, institutional data reporters only respond in the open-ended context notes if their data appear “outrageously high.” Another interviewee stated that he does not make use of the context box for tuition, but he does “enter information for all the flags,” such as explaining why fees increased “more than the expected range.” It is “easier to explain” in response to flags rather than add optional, open-ended explanations.

Due to the potential inconsistency of tuition reporting, interviewees suggested the following additional questions be added to the IC survey:

- How many credits does the tuition represent? The survey can provide ranges from which to select.
- Does the institution have differential tuition, overall and by level/program (both yes/no)?
- Does the institution offer tiered pricing by number of credits?

An NCES interviewee stated that “NCES is hesitant to tell institutions how or what to report” for tuition and price. One interviewee suggested: “Leverage the context box more, provide pre-scripted text options, . . . such as tuition for liberal arts” or options of several tuitions (e.g., average, highest) from which to make a selection.

Fees

Institutions may not only report tuition differently, but fees as well. Due to tuition freezes in some states, many institutions have had large increases in fees, and the transparency of this information is important for consumers. Additionally, some schools within a college have other charges not reflected in the IPEDS data, such as clinical expenses or laptops.

Room and board

More transparency may also be needed for room and board calculations. An analysis found that institutions in close geographical proximity sometimes have very different off-campus room and board costs (Kelchen, Hosch, & Goldrick-Rab, 2014). More information about how institutions calculate room and board would provide greater consumer transparency.

One interviewee suggested adding a residence category for students with dependents to reflect the growing population of adult students. Currently, the options are on-campus, off-campus (not with family), and off-campus (with family). These options assume that students are dependent and traditional-aged. However, to represent the increasing number of independent students, it may be worth considering the following options:

1. On-campus
2. Off-campus (with family, dependent)
3. Off-campus (with family, independent)
4. Off-campus (not with family)

Student services

Interviewees provided several suggestions for updating the Student Services section to reflect current interests. Some services may be worth including for certain institution types but not others. For example, nearly all community colleges offer remedial services (see analysis below), so it may only be necessary to ask this question of 4-year institutions. Other services, such as “Academic/career counseling services,” may be too broad. Four interviewees suggested breaking this category into more specific options, including the following:

- Career counseling, which not all institutions provide.
- Specific common programs, particularly those such as TRIO which are federally-funded and could be added through an existing roster.
- Health services; mental health counseling; and disability services, as mental health is a growing concern on college campuses, and this option was recently added to CDS. For disability services, one interviewee suggested adding level of accessibility and separating learning and physical disability services.

Two interviewees suggested adding services that better reflect current trends, for example:

- Availability of food pantries and emergency funding to address housing and food insecurity.
- Supports for first-generation students or other special populations.

One interviewee suggested adding an indicator of whether the services are offered for free (however, an NPEC member noted that in some cases, services are free up to a certain usage level, and this information could be misleading).

Special learning opportunities

While most interviewees did not have any suggested changes to the Special Learning Opportunities section, some NPEC members and NCES staff said this section is “all over the board,” and certain questions are outdated or vague. For example, does weekend/evening college mean this option is available for some or all classes?

Interviewees suggested the following as potential additions to reflect current trends:

- Co-ops and internships
- Undergraduate research (co-curricular)
- Service learning
- Honors programs
- ESL programs
- Special education options for teacher certification specializations

Military services

One interviewee suggested adding an option to Services for Servicemembers and Veterans to indicate whether each service is offered to the servicemembers, their families, or both, if this does not impose too much additional burden for reporters. “Credit for military training” is currently an option, but the College Level Examination Program (CLEP) exam, popular among students with military experience, is missing.

Library services

Two interviewees questioned whether the detailed library service questions in IC could be moved to the library survey component. However, it was also noted that IC is the only opportunity for *all* institutions and campuses—regardless of whether or not they are required to complete a library survey—to respond to these questions. These data are not thought to be used often but are kept in the survey to continue historical trends.

One interviewee suggested the following addition:

- Do students have access to scientific journal subscriptions?

Interviewees suggested the following changes:

- Allow multi-campus institutions to complete one library survey: An institution with multiple campuses would only like to complete one library survey but receives an error when it checks “no” on the library screener question for their child campuses.
- Consider the necessity of both screener questions: whether the institution has a library and whether library expenses were greater than \$0. If an institution has a library, it likely accrues expenses.

Distance education

Interviewees suggested the following changes to questions about distance education offerings:

- Add a question about whether the institution offers hybrid distance education/in-person classes. One interviewee suggested adding clarification to the definition or instructions about whether or not a course is still considered online if it has an in-person internship requirement.
- Make the question “Are all the programs at your institution offered exclusively via distance education programs?” conditional, so it only appears if reporters indicate offering online courses or programs in the previous question.
- Review whether distance education questions belong on the IC survey: IPEDS collects information about distance education students through the Enrollment and Completions survey components.
- Ask whether academic or professional programs are offered via distance education and what types of degrees can be obtained via distance education: This might be helpful in addition to whether distance education courses or programs are offered at the undergraduate or graduate levels (as currently collected).

Calendar realignment

The only issue that came up in terms of realigning the schedule with other linked survey components is the repetition of the Cost of Attendance in the fall for IC and the winter for SFA. However, the current schedule was developed to provide consumers with access to cost data as early as possible, from the fall collection, so that institutions can make adjustments to their cost of attendance data, as needed, during the winter collection. Consumers and researchers “want [this information] in the fall;” they “do not want to wait for SFA collection in the winter.” However, financial aid administrators are “still struggling to conduct quality control on financial aid data from the prior year.” They “can’t report earlier than winter . . . otherwise data won’t be accurate.”

For these reasons, the majority of interviewees suggested keeping the current schedule. If data users are “ok with delaying” the release of cost of attendance data, NCES “could put student charges in the winter” to “align better with SFA data when reported.” Currently, “when calculating net price . . . in the winter survey, data reporters have to go back and correct the fall survey. A lot of corrections have to take place.” IC provides charges for the current academic year, while SFA reports the prior year; for purposes of the College Navigator, “students need the current year.”

One interviewee noted that the two-year “lag time” with net price in College Navigator is a “disservice” and “confusing for families.” Students “can go to other sources” for the same information, including the published tuition on institutions’ websites. One interviewee related that, until recently, one institution conducted its own tuition survey for benchmarking against other institutions, but it switched to obtaining this information from institutions’ websites. Others believe, however, that IPEDS should “be the source for net price . . . reporting the most

recent data.” One interviewee suggested collecting this information even sooner, in a summer collection, as the institutions send tuition bills by late July meaning the information is available even that early.

Other IC survey considerations

Interviewees made the following minor suggestions and comments reflecting IC survey items that do not fall into the categories above:

- Athletics: The first question should be “does the institution offer any sports” (yes/no); subsequent questions can then be conditional, only appearing if the response to the first question is “yes.”
- Articulation agreements: Add a question about whether or not the institution has articulation agreements with other institutions. (This recommendation was also made for the Admissions survey.)
- Website data: A question came up regarding the necessity of collecting all of the websites listed.
- Disabilities: Can this item be moved to enrollment?
- In-district/In-state tuition: The data collection system allows only one yes/no response to the screener question regarding charging different in-district and in-state tuition rates. However, many institutions offer in-state tuition but not in-district tuition. Rather than yes/no, the question should provide checkboxes for each type of tuition offered and only require responses for in-district tuition amounts if that option is checked in the screener question. Only a handful of 4-year institutions report in-district tuition (see table 13).
- Extracurriculars and costs: Add item(s) to indicate whether institutions offer travel and extracurricular opportunities and their associated average costs, including for example, intramural travel.
- College promise: Consider adding an item to gather information about whether institutions participate in college promise or free college programs. (This may be more appropriate for SFA survey.)

Recommendations

The following recommendations take into account the above findings from the environmental scan, interviews, and data analysis. They reflect the areas that emerged as the most in need of updating to reflect the current landscape.

- 1. Increase price transparency.** To address the concern among stakeholders that institutions may not be reporting comparable tuition amounts, consider the following additions:
 - Yes/no questions, as suggested by the interviewees and collected by external surveys, would provide additional context without imposing excessive burden:
 - *Do you offer differential tuition?*
 - *Do you offer tiered tuition plans (by level, year, or number of credits)?*
 - A drop-down menu to reflect what tuition institutions are reporting may provide greater transparency without imposing excessive burden. Drop-down items suggested by interviewees above include:
 - Average or weighted tuition amounts;
 - Degree level, or;
 - Ranges of numbers of credits.
 - The range of tuitions charged (minimum/maximum) in addition to the average.
- 2. Clarify student services.** The existing items under Student Services would benefit from additional clarification:
 - **Remedial services.** The current definition for “remedial services” refers to “instructional activities.” It is unclear whether that includes both remedial instruction and remedial support services and whether remediation is offered as a co-requisite. The other two surveys reviewed for this paper (CDS and ACS) specify “remedial instruction.” This item should be separated into “remedial instruction” and “remedial support services,” or if it only refers to remedial instruction, move the item to Educational Offerings on IC-H.
 - **Academic/career counseling services.** This item is broad, and nearly all institutions report offering academic/career counseling services. It can be split into more specific academic support items as delineated on external surveys, for example learning and writing centers.
 - **Military services.** Add an item to inquire about credit for experience exams and which exams are accepted in addition to “credit for military experience.”
 - **Overall organization:** Review the current organization of Student Services and adjust as possible within the current technical specifications. This may require simply relabeling headers, rather than moving items, to ensure that only services are listed under the “Services” heading and other items are placed in categories with more accurate descriptions.

- 3. Consider updating Special Learning Opportunities.** The following items represent current interests and trends as reflected in interview responses and external survey items. These items would likely be useful information for consumers and researchers:
 - Extended weekend/evening class times, which are of particular interest given the growing populations of adult and working students and the need to accommodate their schedules.
 - Cooperative education programs and internships, to reflect a growing interest in better preparing students for the workforce.
 - English as a Second Language (ESL) and Honors programs, which could both be added to IC-H in Educational Offerings.

- 4. Add mental health and disability services.** Mental health is a growing concern on college campuses, and this information is of interest to consumers. Information about mental health services would be a useful addition, if possible, to separate from academic services. Currently, the Disability Services section does not ask about disability services, only about the percentage of students “who were formally registered as students with disabilities with the institution's office of disability services.” As an NPEC member noted, institutions are statutorily required to offer services to students with disabilities; however, as an interviewee suggested, it would be useful to delineate this information to identify learning services/accommodations separately from physical disability services/accommodations. It may also be useful to ask whether institutions have an office dedicated to disability services. Alternatively, this section of the survey can be renamed to more accurately represent the information being collected.

- 5. Consider adding additional questions about services that reflect current interests and needs.** For example, food pantries, emergency financial aid, and support services for first-generation students are becoming more common due to the needs of today’s students and have attracted a great deal of attention among policymakers, practitioners, and the general public.

The above recommendations should be explored in a Technical Review Panel (TRP) with a variety of stakeholders to determine feasible improvements that would optimize the collection of institutional descriptors for consumers, researchers, policymakers, and other users of IPEDS data. The IC and IC-H survey components collect a wide range of critical data, including student charges and services, that inform important decisions about college selection and attendance and merit further review to ensure fair and accurate institutional comparisons. Future discussions should also consider the ability to adapt to a continually evolving landscape while maintaining the capacity for longitudinal analyses.

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Appendix A. Supporting Data

IC-Header Data Elements

The following data elements are available for download or on College Navigator but do not appear as questions on the survey form.

Table A-1. IC-H, CDS, ASC data elements

Survey data elements	IPEDS IC-H	CDS	ASC
Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) regions	X		
Institution's internet website address	X	X	X
Admissions office web address	X		
Financial aid office web address	X		
Online application web address	X	X	X
Online inquiry web address			X
Social media websites			X
Net price calculator web address	X		
Veterans and military servicemembers tuition policies web address	X		
Student Right-to-Know student athlete graduation rate web address	X		
Disability services web address	X		
Sector of institution	X		
Level of institution	X		
Control of institution	X	X	X
Co-ed/Men/Women		X	X
Religious affiliation	X		X
Highest level of offering	X		
Undergraduate offering	X		
Graduate offering	X		
Highest degree offered	X		
Degree-granting status	X		
Historically black college or university	X		
Institution has hospital	X		
Institution grants a medical degree	X		
Tribal college	X		
Degree of urbanization (Urban-centric locale)	X		X
Institution open to the general public	X		
Status of institution	X		
UNITID for merged schools	X		
Year institution was deleted from IPEDS	X		
Date institution closed	X		
Institution is active in current year	X		

Survey data elements	IPEDS IC-H	CDS	ASC
Primarily postsecondary indicator	X		
Postsecondary institution indicator	X		
Postsecondary and Title IV institution indicator	X		
Reporting method for student charges, graduation rates, retention rates and student financial aid	X		
Institutional category	X		
Carnegie Classification 2015: Basic	X		
Carnegie Classification 2015: Undergraduate Instructional Program	X		
Carnegie Classification 2015: Graduate Instructional Program	X		
Carnegie Classification 2015: Undergraduate Profile	X		
Carnegie Classification 2015: Enrollment Profile	X		
Carnegie Classification 2015: Size and Setting	X		
Carnegie Classification 2005/2010: Basic	X		
Carnegie Classification 2000	X		
Land-grant institution	X		
Institution size category	X		
Multi-institution or multi-campus organization	X		
Name of multi-institution or multi-campus organization	X		
Identification number of multi-institution or multi-campus organization	X		
Core-Based Statistical Area (CBSA)	X		
CBSA Type Metropolitan or Micropolitan	X		
Combined Statistical Area (CSA)	X		
New England City and Town Area (NECTA)	X		
FIPS County code	X		
County name	X		
State and 114th Congressional District ID	X		
Longitude location of institution	X		
Latitude location of institution	X		
Data Feedback Report comparison group category created by NCES	X		
Data Feedback Report - Institution submitted a custom comparison group	X		

Public 2-year institutions that do not offer remedial services

Below is a list of the 20 public 2-year institutions that do not offer remedial services; several of these appear to be branch campuses of 4-year institutions, and others are specialized or technical colleges.

Table A-2. Public 2-year institutions that do not offer remedial services

Institution Name
Carolinas College of Health Sciences
Central Carolina Technical College
Charles A Jones Career and Education Center
East San Gabriel Valley Regional Occupational Program
Escuela De Troqueleria Y Herramientaje
Grady Health System Professional Schools
Instituto Tecnologico de Puerto Rico-Recinto de Guayama
Instituto Tecnologico de Puerto Rico-Recinto de Manati
Instituto Tecnologico de Puerto Rico-Recinto de San Juan
Lancaster County Career and Technology Center
Los Angeles County College of Nursing and Allied Health
Mercer County Technical Education Center
Pickens Technical College
Toledo Public Schools Adult and Continuing Education
U S Grant Joint Vocational School
University of New Mexico-Gallup Campus
University of New Mexico-Los Alamos Campus
University of New Mexico-Taos Campus
University of New Mexico-Valencia County Campus
University of Wisconsin Colleges Flex

Appendix B. Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today. ASA Research, an independent research firm, is conducting this research on behalf of the U.S. Department of Education's National Postsecondary Education Cooperative, or NPEC, to investigate whether opportunities exist to streamline the IC survey by:

- Aligning its measures within and across other IPEDS survey components,
- Removing or modifying outdated items,
- Improving definitions, or
- Adding new measures that reflect current aspects of higher education.

Please note, your responses are confidential; no individuals or institutions will be named in the report without your permission.

Questions:

- 1) Do you think the IC component can be improved? If so, how?
- 2) What institutionally characterizing data are of most interest and relevance to you and your stakeholders?
- 3) Are there characteristics of interest that are missing from the IC data collection, limiting its usefulness?
 - a. If yes, what data are needed from within other IPEDS components? From external sources? (What external source(s)?)
 - b. What is the rationale for adding the item(s) to IC?
 - c. Are there limitations or challenges with these data?
- 4) Are there data collected via the IPEDS IC component that you do not find useful?
- 5) Other than those discussed above, are there any current IC element definitions or instructions that can be changed to improve usability and better reflect current trends occurring in the postsecondary landscape?
- 6) Do you have any suggestions for realignment of the IPEDS calendar cycles and reporting periods for the IC and other IPEDS survey components that may reduce institutional reporting burden and improve data quality? If so, how?
- 7) Now, let's review each section of IC-H and IC. Are there any additional changes you would make?

Thank you for taking the time to participate, your feedback is much appreciated. Please contact me if you think of any other items for consideration.