ANALYSIS OF PROGRAM REPORTERS

An institution's calendar system is used as the primary method for determining whether it is considered a program reporter, an academic reporter, or a hybrid reporter. However, additional guidelines are included in the IPEDS data collection materials. A secondary method for determining reporter type is based on how courses or programs are measured. An institution that "measures courses primarily by contact hours, or offers primarily occupational programs measured in credit hours"[4] is instructed to submit data as a program reporter. On the other hand, an institution that "offers primarily academic programs measured in credit hours"[5] should submit data as an academic reporter. Similarly, NCES advises institutions that exclusively grant degrees (versus certificates) to submit data as program reporting institutions[6], though this is not a formal guideline and exceptions are evident.

In 2010, 35.8% (2,608) of institutions that submitted IPEDS data were program reporters. Of the 301 institutions that were new to the IPEDS reporting universe in 2010, 65.1% submitted data as program reporting institutions. Therefore, while program reporting institutions are not the majority of IPEDS reporters, they are the most common among new institutions. Examining common characteristics among program reporters, and noting how they differ from academic and hybrid reporters, informs decisions about how to improve the IPEDS reporting process for these institutions.

Table 1 presents the distributions of institutions according to assorted types of calendar systems and correlated reporting methods. Since the calendar system serves as the delineator between reporting formats, the classifications of institutions between these variables are distinct. About two-thirds (65.2%) of program reporters utilize continuous calendar systems and the remainder utilize calendars that differ by program. Academic reporters are distributed across several calendar systems while hybrid reporters fall solely within the other academic year category.

Table 1: Calendar Systems of Program, Academic, and Hybrid Reporters

Calendar System	Program (%)	Program (#)	Academic (%)	Academic (#)	Hybrid (%)	Hybrid (#)
Continuous	65.2%	1,700	-	-	-	-
Differs by program	34.8%	908	-	-	-	-
Semester	-	-	73.0%	3,205	-	-
Quarter	-	-	20.3%	891	-	-
Trimester	-	-	3.5%	155	-	-
Four-one-four plan	-	-	3.2%	139	-	-
Other academic year	-	-	-	-	100.0%	288
Total	100.0%	2,608	100.0%	4,390	100.0%	288

Source: NCES IPEDS Institutional Characteristics Survey, 2010.

As detailed in Table 2, a large majority of program reporters are for-profit (82.8%) compared to smaller segments of public (12.6%) and private, not-for-profit (4.6%). Over two-thirds (71.2%)

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[4] IC Header instructions for less-than 2-year institutions, Part B – Organization – Calendar System.
[5] IC Header instructions for less-than 2-year institutions, Part B – Organization – Calendar System.
[6] Conversation with NCES IPEDS Staff.

Sector	Program (%)	Program (#)	Academic (%)	Academic (#)	Hybrid (%)	Hybrid (#)
Total	100.0%	2,608	100.0%	4,390	100.0%	288

Source: NCES IPEDS Institutional Characteristics Survey, 2010.

Institutional Size and Resources

Program reporting institutions are typically smaller than their counterparts – they enroll fewer students and employ fewer employees compared to academic and hybrid reporting institutions (Table 4). In particular, 56.7% of program reporters have full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollments of 200 or fewer students, and 78.2% have 50 or fewer total employees (full- or part-time). Finally, 71.6% of program reporters have 10 or fewer executive, administrative, and managerial employees, which indicate limited administrative resources.

Table 4: Student FTE and Employee Data for Program, Academic, and Hybrid Reporters

Full-Time Equivalent Student Enrollment	Program (2,608) (%)	Program (2,608) (#)	Academic (4,390) (%)	Academic (4,390) (#)	Hybrid (288) (%)	Hybrid (288) (#)
Median	163	163	1,498	1,498	820	820
200 or Fewer	56.7%	1,479	14.7%	645	15.6%	45
500 or Fewer	80.4%	2,099	26.6%	1,168	30.6%	88

Total Employees (Full- and Part-time)	Program (2,583) (%)	Program (2,583) (#)	Academic (4,352) (%)	Academic (4,352) (#)	Hybrid (285) (%)	Hybrid (285) (#)
Median	19	19	292	292	95	95
10 or Fewer	27.8%	718	2.0%	87	5.3%	15
50 or Fewer	78.2%	2,018	15.2%	662	19.6%	56

Executive, Administrative, and Managerial Employees	Program (2,583) (%)	Program (2,583) (#)	Academic (4,352) (%)	Academic (4,352) (#)	Hybrid (285) (%)	Hybrid (285) (#)
Median	5	5	64	64	23	23
10 or Fewer	71.6%	1,849	12.6%	548	14.0%	40
50 or Fewer	97.2%	2,510	44.4%	1,931	75.1%	214

Source: NCES IPEDS Fall Enrollment and Human Resources surveys, 2010.

The GAO report (2010) on IPEDS burden indicates institutional size can both increase and decrease institutional burden. Although larger institutions have higher reporting burden estimates due to larger enrollments, they typically dedicate staff to handle these reporting functions[7]. Alternately, employees tasked with completing these surveys at smaller institutions may be senior-level staff, such as department directors, deans, or chief executives. The GAO report acknowledges that at the smaller institutions included in the review, "generally the keyholder was a high-level school administrator for which institutional reporting was a minor aspect of his or her responsibilities…these staff may have less sophisticated IT skills or expertise in working with institutional data so IPEDS reporting may be more time-consuming even though they have smaller numbers of students and staff to report on[8]" (p. 15). Program reporting institutions have

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[7] United State Government Accountability Office, August 2010.
[8] United State Government Accountability Office, August 2010.

the smallest staff sizes compared to academic and hybrid institution, and staff members' experiences with IPEDS data may also be the most limited.

A recent NCES report[9] indicates the burden estimates by institution type and keyholder experience (Table 5). The largest burden is estimated at 4-year institutions, while the smallest occurs at less-than 2-year institutions. However, keyholders' level of experience also impact the IPEDS burden estimates. At all three institution levels, estimates of burden for new keyholders are 49% to 51% higher than estimates for retuning keyholders.

Table 5: Time Burden Estimates by Institution Type and Keyholder Experience

Institution Level	Estimated Range	Estimated Average
4-year Institution		
New Keyholder	150-273 hours	212 hours
Returning Keyholder	100-182 hours	142 hours
2-year Institution		
New Keyholder	117-219 hours	169 hours
Returning Keyholder	78-146 hours	112 hours
Less-than 2-year Institution		
New Keyholder	60-108 hours	75 hours
Returning Keyholder	40-72 hours	50 hours

Source: NCES, February 2011, p. 2

Data from the IPEDS Help Desk indicate that 17.6% of program reporting institutions had new keyholders in 2011-12, the highest percentage among all three reporting types (Table 6). It is a logical interpretation that many program reporting institutions face significant challenges in efforts to comply with reporting demands because they are, on average, decidedly smaller than their counterparts, and smaller institutions characteristically face challenges in reporting data due to staffing limitations.

Table 6: New Keyholders at Program, Academic, and Hybrid Reporting Institutions

Reporting Type	Institutions with New Keyholders (#)	Institutions with New Keyholders (%)	Total Institutions
Program Reporters	439	17.6%	2,496
Academic Reporters	556	14.5%	3,836
Hybrid Reporters	49	15.1%	196
Total	1,044	15.7%	6,640

Source: RTI International, Keyholder Data, 2011-12.

An examination of additional aspects of institutional capacity (beyond staffing and enrollments) demonstrates that program reporting institutions vary relative to their counterparts in other respects. The average ratios of support staff per 100 FTE students for institutions of assorted calendar systems are depicted in Table 7. On average, program reporters typically have less administrative and professional staff per FTE student available to support the operations of the institutions compared to their academic counterparts (2.57 compared to 5.95).

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[9] *Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) 2011-2014, Supporting Statement Part A, OMB No. 1850-0582 v.10*, National Center for Education Statistics, February 2011.

Table 7: Average Administrative and Professional Staffing per 100 12-Month FTE Students[10]

	Program Average	Program (N)	Academic Average	Academic (N)	Hybrid Average	Hybrid (N)
Staffing per 100 12-Month FTE Students	2.57	2,129	5.95	4,116	3.32	243

Source: NCES IPEDS Institutional Characteristics, 12-Month Enrollment, and HR Surveys, 2009-10.

Institutional capacity measured in a different way is presented in Table 8. Program reporters' total revenues and additions per FTE student are, on average, about one-third of the levels observed for academic reporters ($9,997 compared to $29,617). Therefore, program reporting institutions are smaller in terms of total scale of operations and in terms of support staff and revenues, and their available resources are more limited than those of academic and hybrid reporting institutions.

Table 8: Average Total Revenues and Additions per 100 12-Month FTE Students[11]

	Program Average	Program (N)	Academic Average	Academic (N)	Hybrid Average	Hybrid (N)
Revenue per 100 12-Month FTE Students	$9,997	2,129	$29,617	4,116	$12,967	243

Source: NCES IPEDS Institutional Characteristics, 12-Month Enrollment, and Finance Surveys, 2009-10.

Largest Programs

A program reporting institution's largest academic program, identified as the program with the largest number of students enrolled, is used when submitting cost of attendance and student financial aid data to IPEDS. Across all program reporters, the largest programs are Cosmetology (43.3%), Medical/Clinical Assistant (13.8%), and Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse Training (9.5%) (Table 9).

Table 9: Largest Programs as Reporting for Student Charges

CIP Code	Program	(%)	(#)
12.0401	Cosmetology/Cosmetologist, General	43.3%	1,129
51.0801	Medical/Clinical Assistant	13.8%	359
51.3901	Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurse Training	9.5%	248
51.3501	Massage Therapy/Therapeutic Massage	3.8%	99
12.0402	Barbering/Barber	2.4%	60
Other		27.3%	1,895
Total		100.0%	2,607

Source: NCES IPEDS Institutional Characteristics Survey, 2010.

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[10] Administrative and Professional Staffing levels defined as sum of executive/administrative and managerial and other professionals (support services) variables. Analysis limited to institutions that reported data to 2009-10 Institutional Characteristics, 12-month Enrollment, HR, and Finance Surveys.
[11] Analysis limited to institutions that reported data to 2009-10 Institutional Characteristics, 12-month Enrollment, HR, and Finance Surveys.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING IPEDS DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS FOR PROGRAM REPORTERS

Given the unique characteristics of program reporting institutions, there is a need to ensure that IPEDS data collection materials are clear and consistent, which will improve the quality of data submitted by program reporting institutions and may decrease institutional burden associated with reporting to IPEDS.

Survey resources are currently available to program reporters in the IPEDS Data Provider Center[13]. These include survey component materials (such as forms, instructions, and answers to frequently asked questions) labeled specifically for program reporting institutions; information about upcoming changes to next year's data collection; and a New Keyholder Handbook. Online tutorials that provide an overview of key IPEDS concepts are also available[14], including one tutorial that describes the differences between academic and program reporting institutions[15].

To explore improvements to IPEDS data collection materials for program reporting institutions, nine individuals were contacted to provide first-hand accounts of experiences submitting these data (see Appendix C for participant list). Participants are from the private and public sectors, represent a range of experience with IPEDS (from 2 years to over 20 years), and submit data on a diverse set of programs. The following general suggestions were elicited from this group of interviewees with regard to how to make the IPEDS survey component materials more accessible and useful to keyholders at program reporting institutions.

1. **Review survey component materials for clarity and to ensure consistency.** For example, a secondary method for determining an institution's calendar system is included in the IC Header component based on how courses or programs are measured. An institution that "measures courses primarily by contact hours, or offers primarily occupational programs measured in credit hours"[16] should submit data as a program reporter. On the other hand, an institution that "offers primarily academic programs measured in credit hours"[17] should be classified as an academic reporter. These guidelines are included within the survey submission screens for less-than 2-year institutions, but not in the other three versions of this survey component. (However, this information is included in the narrative edit resources for all four materials.) Although a majority of program reporters are less-than 2-year institutions (71%), the remaining institutions may not be submitting data under the same specifications. As one program reporter commented, "I don't think all keyholders read all the directions. They just jump right in to completing the survey. I have done this myself and realized I have had to read the directions and sometimes re-read them to thoroughly understand them."[18] Another

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[13] https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/
[14] https://www.airweb.org/EducationAndEvents/IPEDSTraining/Tutorials/Pages/default.aspx
[15] http://www.airweb.org/EducationAndEvents/IPEDSTraining/Tutorials/Pages/Reporters.aspx
[16] IC Header instructions for less-than 2-year institutions, Part B – Organization – Calendar System
[17] IC Header instructions for less-than 2-year institutions, Part B – Organization – Calendar System
[18] Program reporter participant comment

REVIEW OF IPEDS DATA COLLECTION MATERIALS

A review of IPEDS data collection materials was conducted to explore refinements that could make the materials more accessible to users. The documents relating to the Institutional Characteristics Header, Finance, Human Resources, Student Financial Aid, and Graduation Rates surveys were reviewed for general clarity, presentation, and economy of language, as well as for adherence to specific standards set forth in FPLG. Based on this review, key elements to consider in revisions of materials include:

- Provide direct access to instructions within the survey forms. FPLG emphasizes the need to minimize cross-references (p. 83). Consistent with this, if the components of survey instructions directly relating to each segment of the survey (e.g., Finance Part B) could be embedded within the page (via pop-up windows, expandable content, or other), it would greatly enhance the accessibility of the data collection instruments. This is also consistent with FPLG guidelines for web content, which emphasize the importance of users being able to find what they need and to deliver content in small "chunks" (p. 94).

- Where possible, lengthy descriptions should be organized into tabular format (FPLG, p. 74). This allows users to quickly access information or particular points of clarification in which they are interested within a complex array of information. Descriptions of conditional responses (if/then statements), in particular, can be clarified with a tabular display.

- Avoid excessive use of acronyms; instead, spell out entries aside from the most frequently listed items (FPLG, p.33). It is recommended that no more than two or three acronyms be used in any given document, yet 10 or more can be found in some IPEDS surveys and accompanying instructions.

- Use appropriate means of emphasis. In order to address concerns of legibility and inferred tone, the FPLG standard (p. 82) is to use bold or italicized text to provide such emphasis, while avoiding the use of all caps or underlines. Visual cues to highlight the nature of data (such as indenting sub-categories) would also enhance readers' understandings.

- Expand and enhance the use of headings (FPLG, p. 11). Frequent use of headings provides immediate context for the encompassed materials and helps users quickly locate or access the information they seek.

- Revise language from passive to active voice (FPLG, p. 20). This clarifies who is responsible and typically involves fewer words.

- Address users through direct use of pronouns (FPLG, p. 30) and change verbiage implying data requirements from "should" to "must." (FPLG, p. 25) Both of these modifications will assist readers in determining what is required and who is required to do it.

- Conduct general editorial reviews. Inconsistencies should be addressed.

Specific examples identified within each of the survey components are presented in the sub-sections that follow in order to provide guidance that could improve the efficiency of data collection.