

Developing a Single Student Outcome Survey Component: Merging IPEDS Graduation Rates, Graduation Rates 200, and Outcome Measures

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Executive Summary

This paper explores the feasibility of combining the IPEDS Graduation Rates (GR), 200% Graduation Rates (GR200), and Outcome Measures (OM) surveys. Interviews conducted with institutional stakeholders and data users indicated broad support for merging the surveys. Common themes expressed by interviewees included confusion around having too many completion measures from various sources, not knowing which survey to use, and wanting to combine various aspects of each survey.

NCES introduced OM to answer higher education data advocates' call for including non-first-time, non-full-time students in GR to better represent today's student population. However, it is unclear to what extent OM data are being used. Interviews with stakeholders indicated a lack of awareness of OM metrics among some, and lagging cohorts hindering OM's usability for others. While stakeholders appreciate the inclusion of non-first-time, non-full-time students in OM, they expressed a need to disaggregate data by race/ethnicity and appreciate the ability of GR to do so, further supporting the idea of combining the two surveys.

Following a comparison of survey cohorts, structures, and elements, the authors propose a template for maintaining the legislatively mandated metrics of GR and GR200 while also including students in OM who better represent today's higher education population. Merging surveys may result in an initial increase in burden as institutional reporters adapt to the new template, but in the long run will save time by condensing overlapping data points.

Most importantly, merging the surveys will result in more streamlined data that can be better understood and more widely used by researchers, consumers, and other stakeholders. The authors provide recommendations for moving forward, beginning with a review of the proposed template by NCES and NPEC. Important considerations include institutional burden and data usage. Additional feedback from data users is needed before making any decisions to ensure adequate preparation, transparency, and the ability to adapt to future needs.

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Introduction

The goal of this paper is to explore the feasibility of combining the IPEDS Graduation Rates (GR), 200% Graduation Rates (GR200), and Outcome Measures (OM) surveys. The National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC) commissioned this exploratory paper because combining the surveys would provide the following benefits:

1. A sizeable reduction of taxpayer costs (including multiple survey staff and contractors) by supporting one streamlined survey instead of administering three annual surveys;
2. Ease data reporters' burden of preparing, pulling, and reporting to three surveys instead of one, and
3. Minimize or eliminate confusion that data reporters and users have been experiencing with the three surveys and their measurements (different cohorts, retrospective periods, inconsistent and missing data elements).

The paper addresses the following research questions:

- 1) What are the primary goals of each survey component (GR, GR200, and OM)?
 - a. What metrics/attributes are common across each survey (i.e., cohort(s), timeframe, demographics/characteristics)?
 - b. What metric/attributes are missing in the survey component that is answered by the other component?
- 2) What survey items from each survey component are required by law?
- 4) What logistic and operational considerations should be addressed when merging these three surveys (e.g., schedule and timing to implement a new survey, receiving stakeholder input, or communication plan to data reporters)
- 5) What other data metrics/elements should be collected that would provide the most value for data users?

Interviews conducted with institutional stakeholders and data users for the NPEC paper [*Understanding and Improving the Usage of the Outcome Measures*](#) indicated broad support for merging the surveys. Additional interviews with stakeholders from organizations representing two-year institutions, conducted for this paper, also supported the idea of combining surveys, with the exception of one interviewee. Common themes expressed by interviewees who do not use OM included confusion around having too many completion measures from various sources, not knowing which to use, and wanting to add race/ethnicity and gender (currently collected by GR) to OM.

Background

The GR surveys “provide information on institutional productivity and help institutions comply with reporting requirements of the Student Right-to-Know Act (1990) and the Higher Education Act, amended

(2008).”¹ According to *The History and Origins of Survey Items* report, the GR component was added in 1997-98, and the GR form was added in 1999-2000 “...to allow institutions to report completions within 150 percent of normal time for students in long programs (3 years or longer for 2-year institutions, 5 years or longer for 4-year institutions)” (McNeely, 2023). The GR200 was added with the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA) starting in 2009-10. It is noteworthy that while currently, GR and GR200 cohorts are limited to first-time, full-time students, the GR survey initially reported on part-time, first-time students when it was implemented in 1997 until IPEDS moved online in 2000. The part-time cohort was then removed because it was not required by the Student Right to Know (SRK) Act (RTI International, 2008).

The OM component “...was first administered in the 2015-16 collection to provide alternative measures of student success to reflect more accurate graduation rates for the 2-year sector for purposes of the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990” (McNeely). Conversations about OM began after the HEOA charged an Advisory Committee on Measures of Student Success (CMSS) to “...advise the Secretary of Education on how to assist 2-year degree-granting institutions of higher education in meeting graduation rate disclosure requirements outlined in the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA)” (RTI International, 2012).

The CMSS found the “federal graduation rate measure is incomplete and does not adequately convey the wide range of student outcomes at two-year institutions” and recommended adding a part-time cohort to GR (Committee on Measures of Student Success, 2011). A series of Technical Review Panels (TRPs) met to clarify definitions of the new part-time and non-first-time cohorts. The establishment of OM as a new, separate survey as opposed to an expansion of GR does not appear to be part of these TRP discussions. A TRP report from 2014 states, “As a result of TRP suggestions and public comments, NCES requested clearance to implement a new Outcome Measures (OM) component in the Winter collection to collect more comprehensive measures of student success for a broader group of students” (RTI International, 2014). Following initial implementation, Pell recipient cohorts were added to OM in 2017-18 after much discussion in response to community interest and to meet HEOA requirements. Outcomes from both OM and GR are included in NCES consumer tools College Scorecard and College Navigator, along with several other measures from other sources.

While higher education organizations that advocated for OM cohorts value the new survey, it is unclear to what extent OM data are being used. Interviews with stakeholders indicated the various completion metrics and lagging cohorts are confusing to data users. The NPEC paper [Understanding and Improving the Usage of the Outcome Measures Survey Component](#) yielded few examples of OM data analysis in the literature, although it seems some higher education organizations representing two-year institutions are using the data in internal dashboards and benchmarks. Interviewees are largely in favor of merging the two surveys to eliminate much of the existing confusion around overlapping yet slightly different measures between the two surveys. Doing so would also respond to the need for disaggregating OM data by gender and race/ethnicity.

Survey Structures and Items

The OM and the GR surveys collect similarly-themed data, but the structures, metrics, and the students they reflect differ to varying degrees – in some cases, the nuances are only understood by data

¹ <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/survey-components/9>

reporters. The GR surveys measure the share of students completing in 100, 150, or 200 percent of normal time to completion, while the OM survey measures the number of students earning awards, by highest award attained in 4, 6, and 8 years. Another difference is that 2-year and 4-year institutions respond to the same survey form for OM, but the forms for the GR surveys are different for 2- and 4-year institutions. Table 1 provides a summary of the outcome items on each of the surveys.

Table 1. GR, GR200, and OM Survey Items

Survey Item	GR	GR200	OM	Statutory Requirement	Notes
Bachelor's cohort: 4-year institution					
Completion of programs <2 years in 150% of time	x			x	
Completion of programs of 2 but <4 years in 150% of time	x			x	
Completion of BA in 4 years or less	x				
Completion of BA in 5 years	x				
Completion of BA in 6 years	x				
Completion in 150% of time	x			x	
Bachelor's degree within 100% of normal time		x		x	
Bachelor's degree within 150% of normal time		x		x	
Bachelor's degree within 200% of normal time		x		x	Only collected for cohorts in aggregate; not collected by race/ethnicity, gender, or Pell/loan recipients as on GR.
Other degree/certificate-seeking cohort: 4-year institution					
Completers within 150% of normal time	x			x	
Completers of programs < 2 years within 150% of normal time	x			x	
Completers of programs of 2 but < 4 years within 150% of normal time	x			x	
Completers of bachelor's or equivalent degrees within 150% of normal time	x			x	
Degree/certificate-seeking students, 2-year institutions					
Completers within 150% of normal time, total	x			x	
Completers of programs of < 2 year, 150% of normal time	x			x	
Completers of programs of 2 but < 4 years (150% of normal time)	x			x	
Completers within 100% of normal time, total	x			x	100% of normal time is reported on GR for 2-year and less-than-2-year institutions only; 4-year institutions report 100% of normal time on GR200

Survey Item	GR	GR200	OM	Statutory Requirement	Notes
Completers of programs of < 2 years, 100% of normal time	x			x	
Completers of programs of 2 but < 4 years, 100% of normal time	x			x	
Degree/certificate within 100% of normal time		x		x	
Degree/certificate within 150% of normal time		x		x	
Degree/certificate within 200% of normal time		x		x	Only collected for cohorts in aggregate; not collected by race/ethnicity, gender, or Pell/loan recipients as on GR.
All students, degree-granting institutions					
Highest award received, 4 years			x		OM Reports highest award received at time reference, whereas GR reports the time whether, for example, a BA was completed within the time reference.
Highest award received, 6 years			x		
Highest award received, 8 years			x		
All cohorts					
Transfer out	x		x	x	OM: Transfer status is reported at 8 years. GR: Transfer status is reported at 150% of normal time.
Still enrolled	x	x	x	x	OM: Enrollment status/no award is reported at 8 years only GR: Enrollment status is reported at 150% of normal time. GR200: Whether the student is still enrolled is reported at 200% of normal time.
No award/enrollment status unknown	x		x	x	OM: No enrollment/award status unknown is reported at 8 years only. GR: Enrollment status for non-awarded students is reported at 6 years.

The OM and GR surveys also differ in terms of institutions that report to the survey and which students are included. Institutions with full-time, first-time (FTFT) cohorts report to the GR surveys; institutions that are degree-granting comprise the OM universe. While there is significant overlap, in 2020–21, there were 1,978 institutions that had FTFT cohorts and were included in the GR universe but were non-degree granting so therefore were not included in the OM universe. In 2020-21, 5,624 institutions enrolled FTFT cohorts, and 4,029 institutions of these had degree-granting status. The overlap of degree-granting institutions with institutions with FTFT cohorts—those included both on GR and OM—was 3,646 institutions.²

² See <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data/measuring-student-success-in-ipeds>

The GR surveys are based only on fall enrollments and students enrolling full-time, while OM includes part-time and non-first-time students, as well as those enrolling throughout the year. The OM survey included outcomes for about 8 million undergraduates in 2020-21 compared with the GR survey, which included about 1.7 million undergraduates from 4-year institutions and 884,000 students from 2-year institutions.³ Thus, the GR student universe in 2020-21 was about 32 percent of the OM student universe. Table 2 provides a summary of the institutions that report to each of the surveys, and the students that are included.

Table 2. GR, GR200, and OM Institutions and Students

	GR	GR200	OM	Notes
Institution universe	Institutions enrolling a full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate cohort	Institutions enrolling a full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate cohort	Degree-granting institutions	
Student cohorts	Full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates	Full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates	All degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates	
Cohort timeframe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall cohort for academic reporters. • Full-year cohort for program reporters. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fall cohort for academic reporters • Either fall cohort of full-year cohort for program reporters 	Full-year cohort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OM has only one cohort year for both 2-year and 4-year institutions. • GR has different cohorts.
Subgroups	Race/ethnicity X Gender X Aid Award (Pell/non-Pell; Loan/non-loan) Race/ethnicity X Gender X Degree type: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 4-year institutions: bachelor's or equivalent; other degree/certificate. • 2-year institutions: programs of less than 2 academic years (or equivalent); programs of at least 2 but less than 4 academic years (or equivalent). • Less-than-2-year institutions: do not report subgroups by degree type sought. 	Only in aggregate	Pell/non-Pell X Full-/part-time X First-time/non-first-time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GR: Only 150% of normal time collected by Pell status. Transfer, retention, enrollment/award status unknown not reported. • OM: Pell/Non-Pell Grant recipients collected by full-/part-time status and first-time/non-first-time status.

The OM and GR survey data are collected during the winter collection cycle, and the data files are in the same release cycles. However, the cohort years for which data are collected differs.

Table 3. GR, GR200, and OM Collection Cycles

GR	GR200	OM
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³ Ibid

Collection	December YYYY1 - February YYYY2	December YYYY1 - February YYYY2	December YYYY1 - February YYYY2
Data Year	Students enrolled October 15, YYYY(1 minus 6) for 4-year institutions, YYYY(1 minus 3) for 2-year institutions. Cohort completion by August 31, YYYY1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Academic reporters: Students enrolled October 15, YYYY(1 minus 8) for 4-year institutions, YYYY1 minus 4 for 2-year institutions. Program reporters: Students enrolled September 1, YYYY(1 minus 8) to August 31, YYYY(1 minus 7) for 4-year institutions, September 1, YYYY(1 minus 4) to August 31, YYYY(1 minus 3) for 2-year institutions. Completed as of August 31, YYYY1 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students enrolled July 1, YYYY(1 minus 8) to June 30, YYYY(1 minus 7). Status as of August 31, YYYY1, August 31 YYYY(1 minus 2), August 31, YYYY(1 minus 4).
Time lag	4-year institutions: 6 years 2-year institutions: 3 years	4-year institutions: 8 years 2-year institutions: 4 years	8 years
Provisional release	September/October YYYY2	September/October YYYY2	September/October YYYY2
Final release	September/October YYYY3	September/October YYYY3	September/October YYYY3

Merging the Surveys

Given the overlap between OM and GR surveys in that they collect data reflecting student completion in specific timeframes, combining the GR, GR200 and OM surveys is feasible. However, structures, definitions, universes, and cohorts need to be considered, along with ensuring that mandated data are maintained.

Below is a suggested methodology for combining the surveys. The high-level main points of this methodology include the following:

- Student outcomes data are defined as on the current GR surveys: graduation rates at 100, 150 and 200 percent of normal time, as mandated.
- Student cohorts include those on the current OM survey: full-time/first time; full-time, non-first-time; part-time, first-time; part-time, non-first-time.

To maintain the ability to disaggregate for student populations, outcomes also are reported by:

- Gender by race/ethnicity
- Pell Grant recipient and non-Pell Grant recipient
- Loan recipient and non-loan recipient

To help visualize this merge, Figures 1 and 2 display sample screen shots of GR and OM. These samples display the structure of the current GR and OM surveys. These examples are taken from specific sections of the surveys, but the survey structure is the same throughout.

Figure 1. GR Screenshot, 2-year institution report of fall cohort within 150 percent of normal time for men

Men

Screen 2 of 5	Cohort year 2020			
	Cohort (Column 10)	Cohort students who completed their program within 150% of normal time to completion		Total completers within 150% (Column 29)
		Completors of programs of less than 2 academic yrs (or equivalent) (Column 11)	Completors of programs of at least 2 but less than 4 academic yrs (or equivalent) (Column 12)	
U.S. Nonresident		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Hispanic/Latino		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
American Indian or Alaska Native		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Asian		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Black or African American		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
White		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Two or more races		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Race and ethnicity unknown		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	
Total men				

Figure 2. OM Screenshot, outcomes after four years

Undergraduate Students	Adjusted 2015-16 cohort	Number of students conferred an award by your institution (Highest Award by August 31, 2019)			Total number of adjusted cohort that received an award from your institution	Percent of adjusted cohort that received an award from your institution
		Certificates	Associate's	Bachelor's		
First-time entering						
Full-time						
Pell Grant recipients		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		
Non-Pell Grant recipients		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		
Part-time						
Pell Grant recipients		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		
Non-Pell Grant recipients		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		
Non-First-time entering						
Full-time						
Pell Grant recipients		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		
Non-Pell Grant recipients		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		
Part-time						
Pell Grant recipients		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		
Non-Pell Grant recipients		<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>		

Figure 3 provides a visual snapshot of how the two surveys can most easily be merged, by adding demographic rows to the existing OM structure. This would maintain part-time and non-first-time cohorts, but for mandated GR outcome metrics. The example below, for 4-year institutions and completion within 100 percent of normal time, reflects FTFT students (additional cohorts can be found in the attached Excel file).

Figure 3. Screenshot of sample merged GR and OM survey: 4-year institutions, completion within 100 percent of normal time, FTFT students

		First-time Entering								
		Cohort	Exclusions	Adjusted Cohort	Completers of programs of < 2 yrs (100% of normal time)	Completers of programs of 2 but <4 yrs (100% of normal time)	Completers of bachelor's or equiv degrees total (100% of normal time)	Non-completers, Still Enrolled	Transferred	No Award, No longer Enrollend
BA-Seeking										
Full-time										
Pell grant recipients										
Subsidized Stafford loan recipients not receiving Pell grants										
Did not receive Pell grant or subsidized Stafford loan										
Men										
		American Indian or Alaska Native								
		Asian								
		Black or African American								
		Hispanic/Latino								
		Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander								
		White								
		Two or more races								
		Race and ethnicity unknown								
		U.S. Nonresident								
Women										
		American Indian or Alaska Native								
		Asian								
		Black or African American								
		Hispanic/Latino								
		Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander								
		White								
		Two or more races								
		Race and ethnicity unknown								
		U.S. Nonresident								
Gender Unknown										
		American Indian or Alaska Native								
		Asian								
		Black or African American								
		Hispanic/Latino								
		Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander								
		White								
		Two or more races								
		Race and ethnicity unknown								
		U.S. Nonresident								

The grid in Figure 3 will be repeated for non-first-time and part-time cohorts, and for the other degree/certificate-seeking cohort (see attached Excel file). The 2-year template will maintain the same structure, but will only report for degree/certificate-seeking students. Figure 4 displays the totality of the 4-year institution cohort. The survey for 2-year institutions will be the same, but will reflect degree/certificate-seeking students only.

Figure 4. Students group collection structure for merged GR and OM survey, 4-year institutions

	First-time	Non-first time
100% of normal time		
BA degree seeking		
Full-time	x	x
Part-time	x	x
Other degree/certif-seeking subcohort		
Full-time	x	x
Part-time	x	x
150% of normal time		
BA degree seeking		
Full-time	x	x
Part-time	x	x
Other degree/certif-seeking subcohort		
Full-time	x	x
Part-time	x	x
200% of normal time		
BA degree seeking		
Full-time	x	x
Part-time	x	x
Other degree/certif-seeking subcohort		
Full-time	x	x
Part-time	x	x

This merged survey will still achieve 4, 6, and 8-year outcomes, with the larger population of students from OM, and will also fulfill the mandated outcomes data from GR.

Merged Survey Logistics

Interviewees noted that the OM survey’s reporting lag time is problematic, and data would be more useful if it is more current. As such, rather than collect 100, 150, and 200 percent of normal time graduation rates for a single cohort, these collections will be staggered to avoid reporting delays. In other words, the 8-year outcomes for 4-year institutions will still be based on an 8-year-old cohort, but 4-year outcomes – and all outcomes for 2-year institutions – can track more recent cohorts to maintain relevancy of the data. Figure 5 provides a sample staggered reporting cohorts for the merged survey, based on 2024 outcomes.

Figure 5. Staggered cohorts for merged GR/OM survey

Completion in →	100% of normal time	150% of normal time	200% or normal time
2-year institutions	2022 cohort	2021 cohort	2020 cohort
4-year institutions	2020 cohort	2018 cohort	2016 cohort

This staggered cohort model was considered at an OM TRP, which weighed both its benefits and burden:

The panel considered whether reporting the outcomes of an entering cohort at one point in time would be sufficient for all completion durations and noted that the stability of completion rates can vary by institution and by type of student, particularly for part-time and transfer students. Reporting the outcomes of an entering cohort at one point in time would mean that an 8-year completion rate would use an 8-year-old cohort—and that the 4-year completion rate would be for a group of students that matriculated 8 years ago and completed 4 years ago. Given the decided need for timely and more complete data on student progression and completion to address policy and research questions, the panel agreed that reporting the status of the entering cohort at one point in time would not be sufficient for all completion durations.

As a result of this discussion, the panel recognized there may be a need to collect the outcomes of cohorts at several points in time. Although this would mean that institutions would report on the status of multiple cohorts from several different entry years in any given collection year, panelists saw the value of collecting data on multiple cohort years to document change and reflect institutional improvement over a period of time. However, they also noted that tracking and reporting multiple cohort years increases the burden and complexity of the data collection. For example, panelists noted the challenges of establishing cohorts retrospectively, particularly for institutions that have implemented new student data systems over the past several years (RTI International, 2014).

Additional details about this discussion, including reporting burden and reporting intervals, can be found in the TRP 45 summary report.⁴

Statutory Requirements

In sum, the statutory requirements for collecting and reporting student success data follow.

The Student Right to Know (SRK) Act requires:

- The completion or **graduation rate for full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who complete or graduate within 150 percent of the normal time;**
- The **transfer-out rate for its full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students who did not complete or graduate from its programs, but subsequently enrolled in another eligible program within 150 percent of the normal time** for completion or graduation (McNeely, 2023).

The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) requires NCES to post on the College Navigator the percentage of **FTFT degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students** who obtain a degree or certificate within:

- normal time for their program, or **100 percent.**
- **150 percent** of normal time.

⁴ https://edsurveys.rti.org/IPEDS_TRP_DOCS/prod/documents/TRP_45_Summary_for_Posting.pdf

- **200 percent** of normal time.

The HEOA also includes the provision that graduation rates are to be disaggregated by:

- **Gender**
- **Race/ethnicity**
- Financial aid status for the following groups: **Pell Grant recipients; subsidized Stafford Loan recipients** who did not receive a Pell Grant, and students who did not receive a Pell Grant or a subsidized Stafford Loan (McNeely, 2023).

The current GR surveys fulfill the capability of responding to the above requirements, and the OM survey adds the capability of capturing data for all students, including full- and part-time, and first-time and non-first-time students. The above methodology for combining the essence of both of the GR surveys and the OM surveys fulfills the statutory requirements while simplifying the reporting process and diminishing confusion for researchers, policymakers, institutional and state-level stakeholders.

Additional Considerations

In addition to the overall structure of the merged survey, the following items may need to be considered:

- **Institution level.** An increasing number of two-year institutions offering Bachelor's degrees are now considered four-year institutions in IPEDS even if they primarily award Associate's degrees. An interviewee noted this is particularly problematic when outcomes are specific to institution level, since 4-year outcomes are misleading when a student is essentially enrolled at a 2-year institution. The interviewee recommended instead using the derived IPEDS variable "Predominantly associate's-degree granting institution," also used by the College Scorecard.
- **Changing survey forms.** Additionally, primarily 2-year institutions that award Bachelor's degrees change from reporting on the 2-year form to the 4-year form. When changing, the institution does not report on consecutive cohorts and now reports on cohorts reported on in the past. For example, the 2022 4-year GR form gathers data reflecting the 2016 cohort, but the 2016 cohort data was gathered on the 2019 2-year GR form. And, because the institution now uses the 4-year form, a significant time-lag occurs for reporting 2019 cohort's associate degree and certificate completions, which will occur on the 2025 GR. Particularly for the public 2-year sector, reporting on different cohorts makes comparisons of outcomes difficult due to using different survey forms, .
- **Limited data on transfer students.** A limitation of GR and OM is that transfer status is only collected for students who did not complete and not for students who earn a credential then transfer. One interviewee noted, "This can lead to a misunderstanding of community college transfer."
- **Attendance status.** An interviewee noted that full-time and part-time are dynamic concepts, as students frequently change their status. As with institution level, "primarily" full or part-time may help improve accuracy, if institutions have capacity to report students this way.
- **Non-first-time.** One interviewee suggested replacing this term with "transfer-in" since a negative label is not as specific and may be unclear. It may be unclear, however, whether "transfer-in" should include students who transfer without credit, and further discussion can explore how the instructions and definitions can account for these students, either under the same label or a separate group.

Conclusions & Recommendations

This review and comparison of OM and GR survey structures and elements suggests that merging the two instruments is feasible and will return the information needed by researchers and consumers who use the data. In fact, merging the two surveys may promote greater data usage by eliminating confusion stemming from overlapping information and nuanced differences that only data reporters can understand. The above reporting framework, in addition to meeting statutory requirements, provides a vehicle for gender and race/ethnicity disaggregates while maintaining OM part-time and non-first-time cohorts.

The next recommended step is to present the proposed templates (attached) to NCES and NPEC members for review, to collect key stakeholder and decisionmaker feedback. It is recommended that this paper be reviewed in tandem with *Understanding and Improving the Usage of the Outcome Measures Survey Component* for a complete picture of the history and development of OM as a separate survey. Institutional researchers must be included in future discussions to help estimate the level of burden associated with merging the surveys, both in the near and longer-term.

Before making the decision to merge surveys, NCES may wish to further investigate OM data usage through download data and a survey or focus groups with a range of data users, including researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and consumers. It is important to maintain transparency and flexibility for future changes, particularly when making a major change to a relatively new survey.

Should NCES move forward with merging the surveys, it is recommended that any communications plan about the changes include sample messaging for institutional researchers to share with their administrators. An interviewee shared that even at two-year institutions, presidents and other administrators are unaware of OM and still believe that IPEDS only provides outcomes for first-time, full-time students, since GR was the sole source of outcomes data for so many years. Communications should also include web pages, blogs, and issue briefs that demonstrate in simple, visual terms what data are included in the merged survey. These communications should have the end user in mind.

Finally, data users are becoming accustomed to interactive, online data tools such as dashboards that allow for the manipulation of various cohorts and outcomes utilizing software such as Tableau. NCES recently held a TRP for improving online IPEDS data tools and may wish to revisit these recommendations with future survey changes in mind. One interviewee suggested adding IPEDS back into the PowerStats tool that allows for easy analysis of NCES sample surveys. In addition, NCES could explore the feasibility of an online, interactive dashboard such as those seen at institutional and state levels. While the Trend Generator tool is a good start, it does not allow for institutional comparisons and seems relatively unknown to data users. Although the cost of developing such a tool must be considered, the increased functionality would likely increase data usage.

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