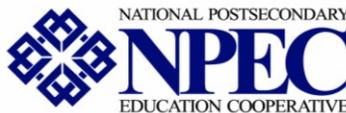


CLARIFYING HOW STUDY ABROAD STUDENTS ARE REPORTED IN IPEDS

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Background

In 2010-11, about 274,000 U.S. students, or 9 percent of undergraduates, were studying abroad in programs across the globe.¹ According to the Institute for International Education (IIE), student participation in study abroad has tripled over the past two decades. Study abroad programs are offered by both 2-year and 4-year institutions, although the extent to which students study abroad varies across institutions. At some institutions a small number of students are studying abroad, while at others, thousands of students may be. The length of study abroad programs can range from a few weeks to entire academic years. Most students participate in short-term programs (summer or less than 8 weeks) or semester-length programs, although some do study abroad for an entire academic or calendar year.²

Recently, questions have been asked about how institutions should report study abroad students in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) data collections, specifically in the Institutional Characteristics (IC), Student Financial Aid (SFA), Fall Enrollment (EF), and 12-Month Enrollment (E12) components. The instructions for all these IPEDS components, with the exception of SFA, direct institutions to exclude students studying abroad. There are no instructions about study abroad students for the SFA component.

IPEDS Component	Instructions regarding study abroad
Fall Enrollment	Exclude "any student studying abroad (e.g., at a foreign university) if their enrollment at the 'home' institution is only an administrative record and the fee is nominal" ³
12-Month Enrollment	
Institutional Characteristics	
Graduation Rates	
Student Financial Aid	None

¹ Institute of International Education (IIE). (2012). "Top 25 Destinations of U.S. Study Abroad Students, 2009/10 -2010/11." *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*. Retrieved from <http://www.iie.org/opendoors>.

² IIE. (2012). "Fast Facts 2011/12." *Open Doors Report on International Educational Exchange*.

³ In the IPEDS glossary study abroad is defined as an "arrangement by which a student completes part of the college program studying in another country. Can be at a campus abroad or through a cooperative agreement with some other U.S. college or institution of another country.

In light of the number of questions associated with reporting study abroad in IPEDS, the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative-IPEDS commissioned this limited-focus study to: (1) better understand the nature of study abroad programs; (2) examine how institutions report students who are studying abroad in their IPEDS reporting; (3) and recommend steps to clarify survey materials.

Study Questions and Methodology

1. What are the different types of study abroad programs offered by institutions?
2. How do institutions report in IPEDS enrollment, credit activity, and financial aid awards for students studying abroad?
3. How should IPEDS instructions be clarified to help institutions better understand how to report study abroad students?

To address the first research question, consultant reviewed study abroad data collected by the IIE and its definitions for study abroad and other terms related to education abroad. Additionally, consultant reviewed the IIE and the National Student Exchange websites and obtained information about off-campus study programs. To address the second research question, in consultation with NPEC-IPEDS, consultant identified nine institutions that offer study abroad and report data to IPEDS and arranged interviews with IPEDS keyholders. The institutions included two public, 2-year institutions; three public, 4-year institutions; one state coordinating board that reports data on behalf of colleges in the state; and three private, not-for-profit 4-year institutions. During interviews with IPEDS keyholders and staff who manage study abroad programs on campus, consultant collected information on the numbers of students participating in study abroad and the IPEDS reporting processes in place for study abroad students. Additionally, institutions provided information on how they reported data on enrollment credit activity and financial aid awards for students studying abroad. The consultant also reviewed each institution's dedicated study abroad web site to gather details on the types of programs offered at the institution. Consultant used the information gathered through the data analysis, institutional interviews, and consultation with NPEC-IPEDS to identify possible ways to clarify IPEDS instructions on reporting study abroad students.

Structure of Study Abroad Programs

Study abroad includes programs administered by colleges, universities, or private organizations and can last for a few weeks to entire academic years. The number of students participating in study abroad programs at the nine entities reviewed for this study varied from a few participants to almost 2,000 students over the course of an academic year, with about half of the institutions having between 100 and 400 students participating in study abroad. Study abroad students comprised a small percentage (one to three percent) of enrolled students at most of the nine entities interviewed; however, at one institution, study abroad students reached almost 17 percent of enrolled students in 2012-13.

There are common terms used when discussing study abroad. Institutional staff often referred to the IIE as a common resource used to define various aspects of study abroad. For example, the IIE defines the student's home institution as the "educational institution in the U.S. where an education abroad student is a continuing student, usually working toward the completion of a degree."⁴ The institution where the student attends classes while abroad is called the "host institution." There were common formats for structuring study abroad programs among the institutions interviewed.

1. ***Operated by home institution***—For programs that are operated by the student's home institution, the institution will set up the program, determine credit hours, and establish fees. Faculty from the institution may or may not teach in the program. Faculty members can also serve as advisers or program leaders and sometimes will accompany students overseas. Students are enrolled at the home institution and will often receive graded credit on their transcript. Additionally, students receive their financial aid award from the home institution and, at most of the institutions interviewed, pay tuition directly to the home institution.
2. ***Approved or affiliated programs***—These are study abroad programs operated by another institution or private organization and approved by the student's home institution. Students receive credit toward their degree, which in some cases may be transfer credits from the institution that operated the program back to their home institution. At some institutions, students may receive credits directly from their home institution. Students in these programs may also pay tuition to their home institution and receive financial aid awards through their home institution. The actual term used to describe this study abroad arrangement varied across institutions.

⁴ IIE defines many terms associated with study abroad. The complete glossary of education abroad terms can be found at <http://www.forumea.org/EducationAbroadGlossary2ndEdition2011.cfm>.

3. ***Student exchanges***—These programs govern the reciprocal movement between two institutions. The agreement can be between an institution in the United States and one in another country.⁵ Students enroll at the home institution and receive credit towards their degree for completion of classes in the exchange program. There are also domestic exchange programs, where the agreement is between two institutions located in the United States. For example, the National Student Exchange operates an exchange program for students to attend schools within the United States. Exchange programs can also be established among multiple institutions. There are also regional exchanges where a set of states has agreements to operate student exchanges in specific fields of study.
4. ***Classes with educational travel abroad***--Many institutions have classes that include a week or two of travel but do not include studying at another institution in another country. Students are enrolled at the home institution for credit-classes offered on-campus and may travel abroad as part of the class.
5. ***Educationally oriented travel abroad activities***—Students may participate in service learning, internships, or academic extension activities at foreign universities. At most institutions interviewed, students are not enrolled for credit at the home institution and do not receive credit for their participation. Often these activities take place between semesters or during the summer.

Students could also independently enroll in study abroad classes or programs. In these situations, the study abroad program is not operated or approved by the home institution. Generally, students take a leave of absence from their home institution to pursue the study abroad. If the student wants to have credits applied towards a degree at the home institution, the student would need to get approval from the department or faculty advisor prior to enrolling in the study abroad program.

⁵ Definition of student exchange is based on the IIE's Education Abroad glossary, which can be found in section 2.3 at: <http://www.forumea.org/EducationAbroadProgramFeaturesandTypes.cfm>.

Table 1 shows the role of the home institution across the various study abroad programs. For the most part, the home institution has an active and engaged relationship with students who are studying through these types of programs.

Table 1. Summary of home institution role for different study abroad programs

Type of study abroad program	Home institution oversees and manages program	Student enrolled at home institution	Student pays tuition to home institution	Home institution processes financial aid	Home institution awards credits
Operated by home institution	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Approved or affiliated program	No	Yes	Most	Yes	Depends on program
Student exchanges	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Classes with educational travel abroad	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Educationally oriented travel abroad activities	Depends on program	No	No	No	No
Student arranged study abroad	No	No	No	No	No

Institutions with study abroad opportunities may offer any or all of the five different types of programs described in this report. For example, one community college offered only an institutionally-operated study abroad program, while several of the 4-year universities offered institutionally-operated study abroad programs, affiliated or approved programs, student exchanges and educationally-oriented travel abroad activities.

Finally, institutions may offer off-campus study programs that are based at other institutions within the United States. Students take classes at a host institution located within the United States and earn credits that can be applied towards degree requirements at their home institution. Similar to study abroad programs where the host institution is located in another country, students pay tuition to and receive financial aid from their home institution.

Institutional Practices Reporting Study Abroad Students in IPEDS

Practices differed across the entities for determining which study abroad students were included in IPEDS reporting.

Programs Operated by the Home Institution

All nine entities included students enrolled in institutionally-operated programs in IPEDS enrollment data. According to institutional representatives, the student is a matriculated student in the institution's data system and enrolled in credit classes recorded with a study abroad code. One institutional representative interviewed noted that there are some institutions that do not report any study abroad students, including students enrolled in institutionally-operated programs. A few institutions did not think that study abroad students would be excluded and were confused as to the reason why an institution would exclude these students from IPEDS enrollment data.

Approved or Affiliated Programs

At institutions that also offer study abroad through approved or affiliated programs, some reported the students in their IPEDS enrollment data and some did not. For institutions that included students enrolled in approved or affiliated study abroad programs, the students were considered matriculated at the institution and included in the institution's data system. In the data system, the student's classes were coded using a "placeholder" code for credits until the end of the semester when study abroad credits would be transferred from the host program to the home institution. Additionally, home institutions collected tuition from students, paid the host institution or provider of study abroad, and processed financial aid awards. According to institutional staff, these actions were more than being an institution of "administrative record" and, therefore, per IPEDS instructions, they should report the students. Institutions that did not report students enrolled in approved or affiliated programs did so based on the institution's interpretation of what it meant to be enrolled at the institution. For example, according to one institutional representative, study abroad students in approved programs were not being taught by faculty from their institution; thus, they did not consider them enrolled at the institution and did not include them in IPEDS enrollment data.

Student Exchanges, Classes with International Travel, & Educationally Orientated Travel Abroad

Across the nine entities interviewed, there were also variations in reporting students participating in study abroad student exchanges—some students were included in IPEDS enrollment data and some were not. None of the entities included in their IPEDS enrollment data students who were participating solely in educationally oriented travel abroad, internships, or service learning that did not award credits because these students were not earning credit or had taken a leave of absence from the institution to participate in these types of study abroad activities.

Potential Impact of Different Institutional Practices on IPEDS Reporting

As a result of inconsistencies in how institutions are reporting study abroad students, there is the possibility that some students may be counted twice in IPEDS reports or not counted by any institution. The following hypothetical scenarios highlight how these inconsistencies could affect IPEDS reporting:

Hypothetical Scenario #1—“Student Is Not Counted:” A student’s home institution is University A. The student is enrolled in a study abroad program approved by University A but operated by University B. University A interprets IPEDS instructions and determines that it is only serving as the institution of administrative record and does not include student in its IPEDS enrollment data. University B assumes that the student is counted as enrolled at University A and does not include the student in its IPEDS enrollment data—the student is not included in IPEDS enrollment data by either university.

Hypothetical Scenario #2—“Double Counting:” A student’s home institution is University A. The student is enrolled in a study abroad program approved by University A but operated by University B. University A interprets IPEDS instructions and determines that it is serving as more than the institution of administrative record and includes the student in its IPEDS enrollment data. University B counts students enrolled at their university when they are enrolled in classes taught by faculty from University B. The student is counted as an enrolled student at both universities and included in IPEDS enrollment data for both universities.

Several institutional staff voiced other concerns about inconsistencies in how institutions are interpreting IPEDS instructions to count study abroad students. At some institutions the proportion of students studying abroad can be large. Thus, if some institutions are not reporting study abroad students while others are including them, enrollment numbers may not be comparable. A few staff noted that if IPEDS enrollment data are not truly comparable then creating derived variables, such as endowment per student or faculty-staff ratios, may also not be comparable across institutions. Several institutional staff also noted that it did not make sense to exclude study abroad students from IPEDS enrollment

data when the tuition and fees the students pay are included in tuition revenue reported on the IPEDS finance survey.

The various ways that institutions interpret IPEDS instructions for counting study abroad students could also affect the Graduation Rate (GR) and Institutional Characteristics components for a small number of institutions. There are a few institutions where first-time students enroll in a study abroad program in their first semester. According to institutional staff, these students are enrolled at the institution and, therefore, included in their GR cohort. However, if an institution did not report any study abroad students in IPEDS, it would not include students studying abroad in their first semester in the GR cohort.

Actions That Could Improve IPEDS Instructions Related to Study Abroad Students

Given the multiple interpretations by institutions on how to report study abroad students, the current IPEDS instructions related to study abroad students could be improved. In general, most institutional representatives felt that study abroad students should be included in IPEDS enrollment data. As one representative stated, “Study abroad is a different way to deliver education to their students.” But they want to be sure that the data being reported are comparable across institutions. Under the current instructions, insufficient guidance is provided to institutions on how to determine whether all or some study abroad students should be reported in IPEDS. To ensure that IPEDS data are comparable, instructions should be clear regarding which study abroad students should be reported. Some possible actions include:

1. Rewrite the current guidance in the IPEDS instructions and FAQ

Current IPEDS instructions suggest that institutions should exclude students whose home institution is just an administrative record and the fee is nominal. References to “administrative record” and “nominal fee” in the IPEDS instructions should be removed because these terms are not clear to institutions and have been interpreted in multiple ways. Furthermore, the FAQ that refers to students who have studied in a foreign country for a short period of time should be rewritten.

2. Provide a clearer definition of “enrolled.”

The key characteristics of an “enrolled” student at a particular institution should be identified and clearer guidance provided to institutions on how they can determine if they should be reporting a student as enrolled. Institutions should be instructed

whether to base enrollment determination upon the awarding of credits and instructional activity or upon the payment of tuition.

3. Describe clearly to institutions which study abroad students should be excluded and which should be reported based on enrollment criteria.

IPEDS instructions should be explicit about which study abroad students should and should not be included in IPEDS. In general, study abroad students should be reported in IPEDS. The challenge is determining which institution should report the student. Typically, if an institution is awarding credits to a student, that institution should be reporting that student on the Fall Enrollment and 12-Month Enrollment components. IPEDS instructions could include illustrative examples of how to make such a determination, perhaps with a table similar to Table 1 in this report. Also, instructions should make explicit where discrepancies in reporting between the IPEDS survey components may occur.

4. Replace the use of “study abroad” terminology with a term that more accurately reflects today’s postsecondary environment.

Lastly, the term “study abroad” may be too narrow for today’s environment of learning off-campus. Using this term focuses only on students who study in other countries and does not address how institutions should be reporting students who study off-campus at a U.S. based institution. IPEDS could use a broader term, such as “off-campus study,” when referring to students studying in these programs and provide more clarity on whether these students should be reported in the same manner as students studying in other countries.

Conclusions

Institutions are currently interpreting IPEDS instructions on how to report study abroad students in multiple ways, resulting in different counting practices. As a result IPEDS data on enrollment, financial aid, faculty ratios, and other areas are not completely comparable. Some institutions have interpreted IPEDS instructions strictly and have excluded any study abroad students from their reporting. Other institutions have interpreted the instructions more broadly and report some or all of their study abroad students. Due to these differences, it is likely that institutional IPEDS enrollment data may not be comparable. There should be clear and consistent measurement methods on whether study abroad students should be included in the IPEDS data collection. Moreover, the term *study abroad* needs to be broader to encompass the myriad of off-campus study programs that exist in higher education.