Completions

IPEDS
Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System

@ipeds_nces
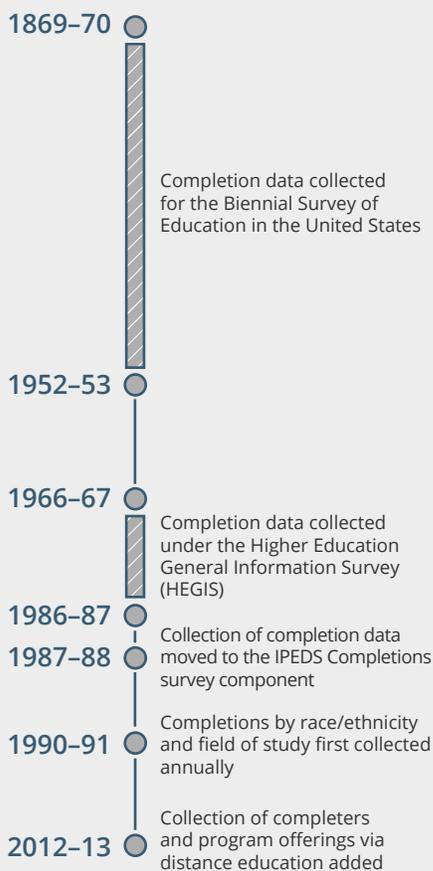
HISTORY AND LEGISLATION

Data on degree completion, by gender and level of study, have been collected by the U.S. Department of Education as far back as 1869–70. Over the years, the collection has expanded to include data on completion of awards other than the degree and to provide more detail on the completer.

SELECTED TIMELINE

1869–70

Completion data collected for the Biennial Survey of Education in the United States

1952–53

1966–67

Completion data collected under the Higher Education General Information Survey (HEGIS)

1986–87

1987–88

Collection of completion data moved to the IPEDS Completions survey component

1990–91

Completions by race/ethnicity and field of study first collected annually

2012–13

Collection of completers and program offerings via distance education added

For more information on the history and origins of IPEDS items, see https://go.usa.gov/xnScC.

ies NATIONAL CENTER FOR EDUCATION STATISTICS
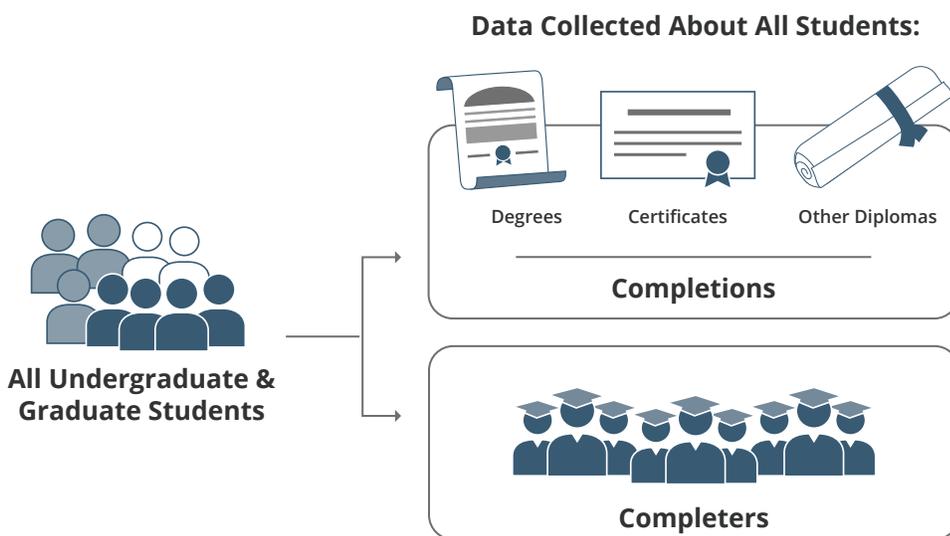Institute of Education Sciences

Introduction

Degree completion data were initially collected to show the condition and progress of education in several states and territories. They have since evolved to become indicators of student, institutional, programmatic, and legislative performance and success. Completions data are used by a number of decision makers, including:

- policymakers to evaluate legislation and programs;
- states to determine funding allocations;
- higher education associations to drive organizational missions and priorities;
- institutions to benchmark against peers;
- parents and students to make college decisions; and
- members of the media to assess the education landscape.

Completions data in IPEDS

IPEDS data are collected as counts at the institution level and do not contain individual student information. The Completions (**C**) survey component collects data on undergraduate and graduate completions and completers in a 12-month period. COMPLETIONS are the counts of postsecondary awards granted. COMPLETERS are the counts of students granted postsecondary awards. Additionally, **C** collects whether or not the institution offers a field of study via distance education.

Data Collected About All Students:

Degrees   Certificates   Other Diplomas

Completions

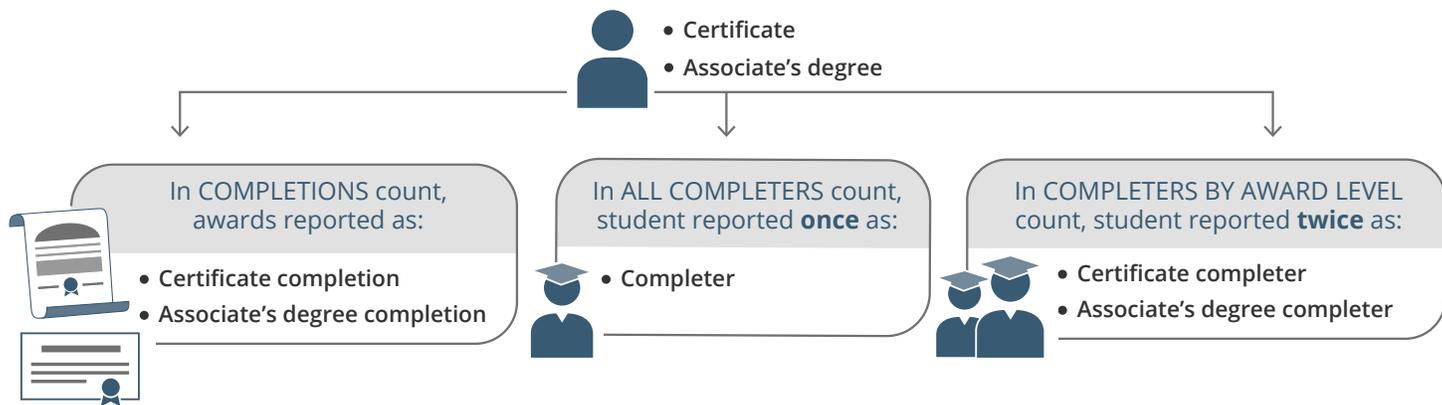**All Undergraduate & Graduate Students**

Completers

What's the difference between completions and completers?

One student may be granted multiple awards during an academic year (e.g., a dual degree). Thus, it is very likely that an institution's count of completions (awards) is greater than its count of completers (award recipients). Users of these data should note the differences between completions and completers and that the count of completers is collected in two ways. The first way counts all completers, while the second way counts completers by award level (e.g., number of associate's completers, number of bachelor's completers). The table below shows the differences.

| | COMPLETIONS | COMPLETERS | |
		ALL	BY AWARD LEVELS
Counts	Awards	Award recipients	Award recipients
Duplication	Duplicated (i.e., each award reported once but multiple awards may be reported for one recipient)	Unduplicated (i.e., completer is reported once regardless of how many awards (s)he earned in an academic year)	Unduplicated for each award level (i.e., completer is reported once in each award level but can be reported in multiple levels)
# of award levels used for reporting	11	Not applicable	7
Reported by			
Gender	✔	✔	✔
Race/ethnicity[1]	✔	✔	✔
Award levels[2]	✔		✔
Fields of study	✔		
Age			✔
Whether completion is a 1st or 2nd major	✔		

The following example illustrates the difference between the two completers counts.

In a 12-month period, student earned:

- Certificate
- Associate's degree

In COMPLETIONS count, awards reported as:

- **Certificate completion**
- **Associate's degree completion**

In ALL COMPLETERS count, student reported once as:

- **Completer**

In COMPLETERS BY AWARD LEVEL count, student reported twice as:

- **Certificate completer**
- **Associate's degree completer**

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[1] In 2007 the U.S. Department of Education changed the race/ethnicity categories. The transition in IPEDS took 2 years. When trending race/ethnicity over time, visit https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/Section/Resources to read about this change.
[2] Categories and definitions for post-bachelor's award levels were revised in 2008–09 and took 3 years to fully implement. See https://go.usa.gov/xQNQp for more detail.

Why are award levels different for completions vs. completers?

C collects completions and completers at all postsecondary award levels, from certificates to doctor's degrees. However, completions contain more detailed award levels than completers.[3] This is an effort to minimize the likelihood of duplicated completer counts when students earn similar certificates in the same year.

How are fields of study collected?

Given the variety of program titles at individual institutions, IPEDS uses the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP)[4] to collect completions data by fields of study or majors. The CIP provides a standardized method for institutions to code their instructional programs, so that the information can be reported reliably and accurately.
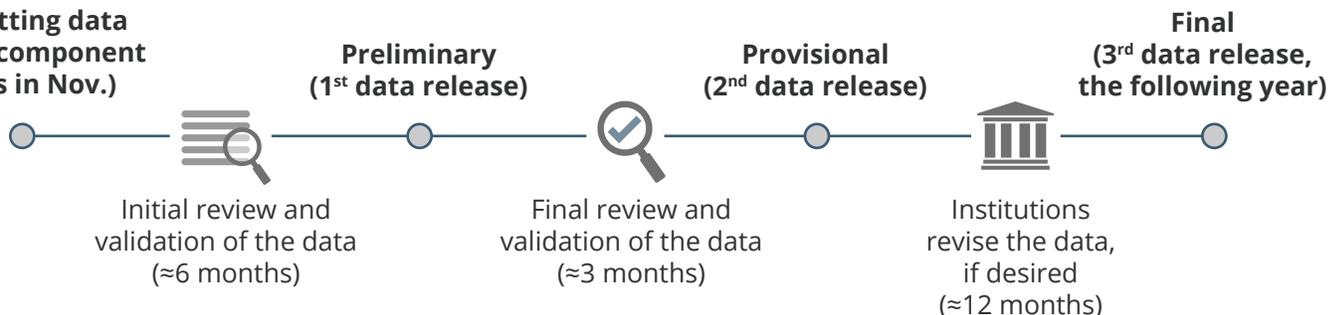
The CIP program titles and descriptions are generic categories into which completions data can be reported and may not represent the exact major or field of study used by individual institutions. Postsecondary institutions use six-digit CIP codes when completing the **C** survey component. When trending **C** data, note that CIP codes are updated approximately every 10 years, and the distribution will change as new CIP codes are added.

Example of CIP Codes for Civil Engineering Programs

CIP CODE	PROGRAM TITLE
14.0801	Civil Engineering, General
14.0802	Geotechnical and Geoenvironmental Engineering
14.0803	Structural Engineering
14.0804	Transportation and Highway Engineering
14.0805	Water Resources Engineering
14.0899	Civil Engineering, Other

What is the data release process?

Institution finishes submitting data (survey component closes in Nov.)

Preliminary (1st data release)

Provisional (2nd data release)

Final (3rd data release, the following year)

Initial review and validation of the data (≈6 months)

Final review and validation of the data (≈3 months)

Institutions revise the data, if desired (≈12 months)

NOTE: Times are approximate (≈).

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[3] For a complete crosswalk of completions to completers award levels, visit https://go.usa.gov/xQNQw.
[4] For more information about the CIP, visit https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/cipcode.

Key Terms

Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP)
A taxonomic coding scheme for secondary and postsecondary instructional programs. It is intended to facilitate the organization, collection, and reporting of program data using classifications that capture the majority of reportable data. The CIP is the accepted federal government statistical standard on instructional program classifications and is used in a variety of education information surveys and databases.

CIP code
A six-digit code in the form xx.xxxx that identifies instructional program specialties within educational institutions.

Levels of offering (Award levels)
Information collected in the Institutional Characteristics component which indicates all applicable levels for all credit programs offered at an institution. Award levels are identified on the basis of recognition for their completion, duration, or a combination thereof. Degree-designated award levels indicate those degree levels for which the institution is authorized to make formal awards. Length of study is the equivalent of the number of full-time academic years. For example, at least 1 but less than 2 years refers to the number of credits or the course load that would normally be completed by a full-time student attending within the stated time period.

Postsecondary award, certificate, or diploma (less than 1 academic year)
An award that requires completion of an organized program of study at the postsecondary level (below the baccalaureate degree) in less than 1 academic year (2 semesters or 3 quarters), or designed for completion in less than 30 semester or trimester credit hours, or in less than 45 quarter credit hours, or in less than 900 contact or clock hours.

Postsecondary award, certificate, or diploma (at least 1 but less than 2 academic years)
An award that requires completion of an organized program of study at the postsecondary level (below the baccalaureate degree) in at least 1 but less than 2 full-time equivalent academic years, or designed for completion in at least 30 but less than 60 semester or trimester credit hours, or in at least 45 but less than 90 quarter credit hours, or in at least 900 but less than 1,800 contact or clock hours.

Associate's degree
An award that normally requires at least 2 but less than 4 years of full-time equivalent college work.

Postsecondary award, certificate, or diploma (at least 2 but less than 4 academic years)
An award that requires completion of an organized program of study at the postsecondary level (below the baccalaureate degree) in at least 2 but less than 4 full-time equivalent academic years, or designed for completion in at least 60 but less than 120 semester or trimester credit hours, or in at least 90 but less than 180 quarter credit hours, or in at least 1,800 but less than 3,600 contact or clock hours.

Bachelor's degree
An award (baccalaureate or equivalent degree, as determined by the Secretary, U.S. Department of Education) that normally requires at least 4 but not more than 5 years of full-time equivalent college-level work. Also includes bachelor's degrees in which the normal 4 years of work are completed in 3 years.

Master's degree
An award that requires the successful completion of a program of study of at least the full-time equivalent of 1 but not more than 2 academic years of work beyond the bachelor's degree.

Doctor's degree
The highest award a student can earn for graduate study. The doctor's degree classification includes such degrees as Doctor of Education, Doctor of Juridical Science, Doctor of Public Health, and the Doctor of Philosophy degree in any field such as agronomy, food technology, education, engineering, public administration, ophthalmology, or radiology.
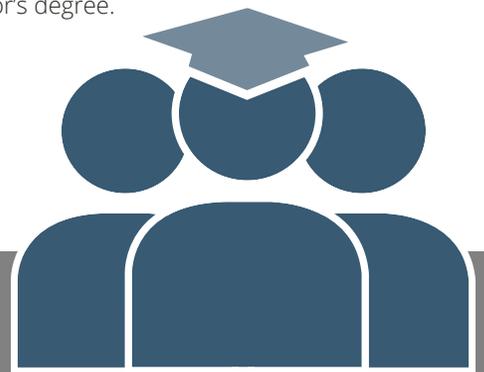
Visit the **IPEDS Use the Data** page at https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/use-the-data for more information.

Contacts

For help using or retrieving data:
IPEDS Data Use Help Desk
1-866-558-0658
ipedstools@rti.org

For press inquiries:
U.S. Department of Education Press Office
202-401-1576
press@ed.gov

For survey component specific questions:
IPEDS Staff
https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/staff-page