2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16)

Information on Comparing NPSAS:16 to Prior NPSAS Studies

State and Institutional Aid estimates for undergraduates:
In NPSAS studies prior to NPSAS:16, certain state grants that were administered by institutions (similar to how federal campus-based aid is administered) were classified as institutional grants. Because federal campus-based aid programs are classified by the source of funds and not by who administers the aid, this practice was changed in NPSAS:16 where campus-based state grants are now classified as state aid. This change in methodology mainly affects the aid of undergraduate students attending public institutions in California but led to larger population estimates of state grants and smaller estimates of institutional grants in NPSAS:16 compared with past NPSAS studies.

To promote the analysis of trends in state and institutional aid over time, new state and institutional aid variables were added to the undergraduate files of NPSAS:96, NPSAS:2000, NPSAS:04, NPSAS:08, and NPSAS:12. These variables remove campus-based state grants from institutional grants and add them to state grant variables to be comparable with the NPSAS:16 methodology. The new variables are named the same as the original variables with a "2" as the suffix. The following is a list of the new variables and each one's correlate in NPSAS:16. These should be used to analyze trends in state and institutional aid for undergraduates with NPSAS data:

NPSAS:96 – NPSAS:12   *NPSAS:16 correlate*
STATNEED2   STATNEED
STGTAMT2   STGTAMT
STATEAMT2   STATEAMT
INSTNEED2   INSTNEED
INGRTAMT2   INGRTAMT
INSTAMT2   INSTAMT

Veterans education benefits:
In NPSAS:16, an administrative match to Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) databases was conducted to obtain information on sampled students' receipt of federal Veterans' education benefits and their military service. The VBA data was the main source of identifying military service members, and was the sole source for federal Veterans' education benefits amounts, in NPSAS:16. Benefit amounts include payments made for tuition and fees, books and supplies, work-study, housing, and other education expenses. Estimates of federal Veterans' education benefits in prior NPSAS studies were derived from self-reported amounts, amounts reported by the recipient's NPSAS institution, and stochastic imputation. The values from past studies may not include all the benefits included in the VBA data, particularly housing benefits, which were not explicitly requested from students or their institutions. For the purposes of analyzing these benefits over time, separate variables were created in NPSAS:16, which exclude the housing portion of federal Veterans' education benefits. These variables should be used to compare estimates of federal Veterans' education benefits to prior NPSAS studies, and are listed below:

NPSAS:12   *NPSAS:16*
MILTYPE   MILTYPE2

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VETERAN      VETERAN2
VETBEN       VETBEN2
VADODAMT     VADODAMT2
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Federal Direct Loan annual limits
Beginning with NPSAS:16, top-codes based on annual loan limits were removed from federal Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized loan variables. By law, annual loan limits apply to all students and increase by academic level. However, academic years vary by institution and by program, which allows students to borrow more than the annual limit in the federal aid year (July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016) and for students to progress to higher academic levels with higher borrowing limits within the aid year. Students can also receive more than the annual limit in the federal aid year if they have been awarded loans using a borrower-based academic year that does not coincide with a calendar year. The removal of the top-code used in prior NPSAS studies affects variables like STAFSUB, STAFUNSB, and STAFFAMT. Though estimates of these variables in NPSAS:16 are still comparable to past NPSAS studies, the maximum amount borrowed may appear higher than that of prior studies or what is allowed based on students' levels in school.

Federal loans older than 10 years
In prior NPSAS administrations, federal student loans older than 10 years as of the beginning of the study were excluded from cumulative borrowing and outstanding loan amount variables. In NPSAS:16, this was changed so that loans older than 10 years were included. The main variables affected by this change are FEDCUM1, FEDCUM2, FEDCUM3, PERKCUM1, PERKCUM2, PERKCUM3, BORAMT1, BORAMT2, and BORAMT3. Overall cumulative borrowing estimates remain comparable between NPSAS:16 and past NPSAS studies; however, borrowing estimates for smaller student subpopulations, especially nontraditional mature students, should be interpreted with caution if compared with prior NPSAS studies, as prior administrations may underestimate these amounts.

Puerto Rico
All administrations of NPSAS except NPSAS:87 and NPSAS:12 sampled institutions in Puerto Rico. The approximately 90 institutions in Puerto Rico enroll about 1 percent each of undergraduate and graduate students nationally. In NPSAS:08, students attending institutions in Puerto Rico made up about 10 percent of Hispanic students nationally, compared with NPSAS:16, in which students attending institutions in Puerto Rico made up about 6 percent of Hispanic students nationally. Generally, there are no differences in national estimates when comparing a sample that includes Puerto Rico from one that excludes Puerto Rico, except for estimates that are correlated with Hispanic status. Analysts who wish to compare other NPSAS administrations to NPSAS:87 or NPSAS:12 and are interested in national estimates for Hispanic students, or would like to check if estimates are different when including or excluding Puerto Rico, may filter on COMPTO87 to exclude Puerto Rico.

Disability estimates
Estimates of students with disabilities in NPSAS:16 should be interpreted with caution and not compared to prior NPSAS administrations because of changes to the wording of the interview question used to derive DISMNTAL (the measure of serious difficulty concentrating, remembering, or deciding). In NPSAS:16, examples of eligible conditions were added to the interview question wording and, when

answering this question, students were instructed to include but not limit their responses to a serious learning disability, depression, ADD, or ADHD. Due to this change, the estimates for DISMNTAL and DISABIL2 in NPSAS:16 should not be compared to estimates for DIS17A and DISABLE from prior NPSAS studies respectively.

Distance/online education
In NPSAS:16, the variable DISTEDUC measures whether any courses the student took in the NPSAS year were taught online. This variable differs from ALTONLN in NPSAS:12, which measured whether students had taken all, some, or none of their NPSAS classes completely online. To compare NPSAS:12 with NPSAS:16, ALTONLN in NPSAS:12 should be recoded so that skipped cases (-3) are classified as "None."

In NPSAS:16, the variable DISTALL measures whether a student's entire program at the NPSAS institution was online. To compare these estimates to NPSAS:12, ALTONLN2 in NPSAS:12 should be recoded so that skipped cases (-3) are classified as "No." To compare DISTALL in NPSAS:08 with NPSAS:16, students not in a degree program (UGDEG=4) should be removed, and DISTALL from NPSAS:08 should be recoded so that skipped cases (-3) are classified as "No."