

2019-20 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:20)

Information on Comparing NPSAS:20 to Prior NPSAS Studies

There have been 11 NPSAS administrations covering the academic years ending in 1987, 1990, 1993, 1996, 2000, 2004, 2008, 2012, 2016, 2018, and 2020 (NPSAS:87, NPSAS:90, NPSAS:93, NPSAS:96, NPSAS:2000, NPSAS:04, NPSAS:08, NPSAS:12, NPSAS:16, NPSAS:18-AC, NPSAS:20 and NPSAS:20-AC, respectively).

The NPSAS:20 design is unique among the NPSAS series, as it is the first study to have a regular NPSAS data collection that includes a student survey component similar to NPSAS:16 and earlier rounds, combined with an administrative data-only collection as done in the 2017–18 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, Administrative Collection (NPSAS:18-AC). Additionally, like NPSAS:18-AC, NPSAS:20 was designed to produce undergraduate student data that would be representative at the state-level. With both the survey and the administrative data collection, NPSAS:20 contains 296,000 total respondents and allows for representative analyses of undergraduate students within 30 states. This overall number includes about 80,800 undergraduate and 19,700 graduate student survey respondents attending approximately 2,200 institutions in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, as well as 196,000 undergraduate students who did not take the survey and for whom only administrative data were collected.

A subset of the variables created in NPSAS:20 are comparable to NPSAS:18-AC but are not comparable to administrations of NPSAS prior to 2018. These variables are different primarily due to the lack of student survey data for the students with data only from administrative sources. Another set of variables - “hybrid variables” - are variables that are derived slightly differently for survey respondents and non-survey respondents but have analogs for both samples. These variables include versions that are applicable only to administrative respondents (the standard NPSAS variables), and versions that are comparable to administrations of NPSAS prior to 2018. For example, because a variable for private loan amounts can only be created for survey respondents, variables that are ratios do not include private loans in the numerator for administrative respondents.

Several important differences across studies limit comparisons of NPSAS data over time. This document first provides an overview of considerations that are specific to NPSAS:20 and then lists some other important historical considerations.

NPSAS:20 Considerations

Financial aid variables including private loans. In NPSAS:20, a subsample of undergraduates did not complete a student survey and are considered administrative-only respondents. Without student-reported information on private loans, the percentage of missing data on private loan amounts in NPSAS:20 is too high to accurately estimate and impute private loans for students without a completed student survey. The absence of data on private loans (PRIVLOAN) has cascading effects on other financial aid variables. Variables affected by the absence of private loan data are identified with a suffix “_AC” (for “administrative collection”). These variables are not comparable to administrations of NPSAS prior to NPSAS:18-AC; however, they are comparable to those from NPSAS:18-AC. Analysts wishing to compare NPSAS:20 results with administrations from NPSAS:16 and earlier should choose financial aid variables that do not end

in “_AC.” Students who completed a student survey have data on private loans (PRIVLOAN); thus, non-AC versions of these financial aid variables are available for survey respondents only.

Cumulative financial aid variables that include data on private loans. Cumulative financial aid variables that include data on private loans (e.g., BORAMT1) are not computed for the subsample of undergraduates who did not complete a student survey. The variables are available for survey respondents only.

Degree completion and parents’ education. The absence of a student interview for non-survey respondents in NPSAS:20 also has implications for measuring degree completion in the NPSAS year (PROGSTAT) and parents’ education (PARED1/2, PAREduc). Administrative data alone are insufficient to create versions of these variables for students without a complete student survey that are comparable to administrations of NPSAS before NPSAS:18-AC. Variables describing degree completion and parents’ education that use only administrative data have all been named with a suffix “_AC” and are comparable to NPSAS:18-AC. Non-AC versions of these variables are available for survey respondents only.

Survey-only variables. Some variables in NPSAS:20 come directly from the student survey and are not replicable from administrative sources. The subsample of undergraduate students who did not complete a student survey do not have estimates for these variables. These variables are available for survey respondents only.

Survey respondent definition. In NPSAS:20, a survey respondent was defined as any undergraduate or graduate sample member who was determined to be eligible for the study and completed at least the enrollment and FAFSA sections of the student survey. In NPSAS:16 and previous NPSAS studies that included survey data, respondents were defined as any sampled student who was determined to be study eligible and had valid data from any source for a predetermined list of key variables. These studies had no distinction between survey and study respondents because all respondents were administered the survey.

Gender. The student survey in NPSAS:20 allowed for self-identification of gender, including: male; female; transgender, male-to-female; transgender, female-to-male; genderqueer or gender nonconforming; and a different gender identity. The variable GENDER3 includes these categories and applies only to students who completed a student survey, while the variable GENDER2 is comparable to prior administrations of NPSAS and applies to nearly all administrative student respondents, including those who did not complete a student survey. (Students who reported in the survey that they were genderqueer, gender nonconforming, or had a different gender identity are skipped on GENDER2.)

Graduate assistantships. In NPSAS administrations before NPSAS:20, the student survey collected graduate assistantship amounts through three separate items each addressing a different type of assistantship (teaching, research, or other). To avoid double-counting or an inaccurate division of a total assistantship amount across these three items, the student survey in NPSAS:20 was modified to collect a single total amount of all graduate assistantships.

Income, federal benefits, and tax variables. Without a student survey for non-survey respondents, data on income for FAFSA nonfilers were missing not at random. Because FAFSA nonfilers have, on average, higher incomes than FAFSA filers, missing income information was imputed for the administrative-only student respondents using donors from the student survey. Due to the high degree of missingness in federal benefits (e.g., FEDBEN) and tax-related variables

(e.g., PFEDTAX) for the non-survey respondents, these variables are only available for survey respondents.

Perkins Loans. The Perkins Loan program was discontinued in September 2017, and disbursements ceased after June 30, 2018. The variable for academic year Perkins Loans (PERKAMT) is not included in NPSAS:20 and is not incorporated in other financial aid variables that included Perkins Loans in previous administrations of NPSAS (e.g., FEDNEED). Due to these changes, the variables SUBLOAN and T4LNAMT1 are not included in NPSAS:20 because, without PERKAMT, they are identical to STAFSUB and STAFFAMT, respectively. Other variables that previously included PERKAMT are still comparable to previous administrations of NPSAS because they represent the same construct (e.g., federal need-based aid), despite excluding PERKAMT.

State-level analyses. Although NPSAS:20 was designed to provide state-representative estimates for undergraduates overall, in the public 2-year sector, and in the public 4-year sector, not all states and sectors had sufficient response to be state-representative. Analysts wishing to make state-representative estimates for all undergraduates within a state should utilize the state representation indicator (STATERP) in conjunction with the state identifier (INSTSTAT) to determine whether a state is representative of all undergraduates. Analysts wishing to make state-representative estimates of the public 2-year or public 4-year sector should use the sector representation indicator (STSECTORREP) in conjunction with the state identifier (INSTSTAT) and a three-category sector identifier (SECTOR3) to identify state-sector pairs that are suitable for state-level analyses. No states have representative samples for individual sectors other than public 2-year and public 4-year institutions. (To use an alternative definition that treats public 4-year non-doctorate-granting, primarily subbaccalaureate institutions [SECTOR11=3] as 2-year institutions, use SECTOR3A in place of SECTOR3, STATERP2 in place of STATERP, and STSECTORREP2 in place of STSECTORREP.)

FAFSA concordance. Certain student characteristics that are relevant for federal aid can change between the date a student files their FAFSA and the end of the 2019-20 academic year. When values differ across data sources for these student characteristics, many NPSAS variables prioritize responses on the FAFSA in order to be consistent with student's dependency status (DEPEND), which is used in the determination of federal financial aid awards. For instance, MILTYPE2 can be used to analyze military type in conjunction with dependency status and federal financial aid. (In contrast, the alternative version MILTYPE gives priority to data from the Veterans Benefits Administration [VBA].)

Hybrid variables. Hybrid variables have just one version – the standard version – and are derived for all respondents. These variables (e.g., ENR01) are derived using both administrative data sources and the student survey. The derivation of these variables for survey respondents thus differs slightly from the derivation for non-survey respondents, as it includes an additional source of data. However, the resulting variables are comparable to one another and to prior administrations of NPSAS and thus do not have an administrative-collection version for non-survey respondents. These variables are considered “hybrid” because they combine the standard approach to derivation with the administrative collection approach to derivation, resulting in a single derived variable that applies to all respondents.

Other Historical NPSAS Considerations

Puerto Rico. All administrations except NPSAS:87 and NPSAS:12 sampled institutions in Puerto Rico. There are approximately 90 institutions in Puerto Rico, enrolling about 1 percent each of

undergraduate and graduate students nationally. In NPSAS:20, institutions in Puerto Rico accounted for 5 percent of Hispanic undergraduate students and 9 percent of Hispanic graduate students nationally. Analysts who wish to compare other NPSAS administrations to NPSAS:87 or NPSAS:12 may filter on COMPTO87 to exclude Puerto Rico.

Title IV eligibility. Starting with NPSAS:2000, samples were limited to institutions participating in federal Title IV student aid programs. In the earlier surveys (NPSAS:87, NPSAS:90, NPSAS:93, and NPSAS:96), about 1 percent of undergraduate students, mainly concentrated in private for-profit, less-than-2-year institutions, attended institutions that were not eligible for Title IV aid. Analysts wishing to exclude students from institutions that were not eligible for Title IV aid may filter on T4ELIG in these earlier administrations.

Community colleges. Over the past two decades, community colleges in many states began conferring bachelor's degrees in selected fields. In the IPEDS data used to determine control and level of institution in NPSAS, the community colleges that award bachelor's degrees are categorized as public 4-year, non-doctorate-granting institutions. Beginning with NPSAS:16, this group of institutions has been subdivided into two categories: (1) those that conferred mainly subbaccalaureate awards (certificates and associate's degrees) and (2) those that conferred mainly bachelor's degrees. This differs from NPSAS administrations prior to NPSAS:16 in which these institutions were classified together to reflect the highest level of award offered. The variable SECTOR11 makes this distinction among public 4-year institutions.

Enrollment period. Starting with NPSAS:90, all NPSAS samples have been based on 12-month enrollment, which is higher than fall enrollment commonly reported by IPEDS because those who enroll only in spring, summer, or winter terms are included in the 12-month total. This is particularly true at private for-profit, less-than-4-year institutions, where a substantial proportion of students may enroll throughout the year and not necessarily during the fall. The NPSAS:87 sample was based on fall 1986 enrollment. Analysts wishing to compare NPSAS:87 results with those from subsequent administrations can filter on COMPTO87 in the later NPSAS administrations.

Federal loans older than 10 years. In NPSAS administrations before 2016, federal student loans older than 10 years as of the beginning of the study were excluded from cumulative borrowing and outstanding loan amount variables. Starting in NPSAS:16, this was changed so that loans older than 10 years were included in these variables (e.g., FEDCUM1, STFCUM1). As a result, cumulative borrowing estimates in NPSAS:20, especially for older student subpopulations, may differ from estimates for NPSAS administrations before 2016, with prior studies underestimating these amounts.

Federal Veterans' education benefits. Beginning with NPSAS:16, an administrative data match to VBA databases was conducted to obtain information on sampled students' receipt of federal Veterans' education benefits (VETBEN) and their military service. The VBA data was the sole source for federal Veterans' education benefits amounts, and they include payments for tuition and fees, books and supplies, work-study, housing, and other education expenses. Estimates of federal Veterans' education benefits in NPSAS cycles before 2016 were derived from self-reported amounts, amounts reported by the recipient's NPSAS institution, and stochastic imputation and were significantly lower on average than amounts in NPSAS:16 and later. These earlier values may not include all the benefits included in the VBA data, particularly housing benefits, which were not explicitly requested from students or their institutions.