

## IPEDS Module 02: Getting Started with the IPEDS Data

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This module describes the options for using the IPEDS data, with respect to viewing institutional data, generating reports, and downloading data files. This module also describes the processes for accessing IPEDS data, describes the structure of IPEDS data files, and explains how to choose variables for analysis. Information presented in this module will be helpful in understanding some of the more detailed information presented in subsequent modules. For this reason, users who are planning to proceed through the IPEDS modules and use the IPEDS data are strongly encouraged to complete this module first.

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IPEDS data can be accessed directly from the IPEDS website by clicking on the IPEDS website link and then on the **Use the Data** tab, as shown here. Before describing the options for using the data available on the website, it is necessary to define two important concepts related to IPEDS data: collection year versus data year.

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When downloading IPEDS data it is important to understand the difference between Collection Year and Data Year. Collection Year is the year in which the data are collected by NCES during the fall, winter, and spring data collections. The Data Year is the year the data actually represent, which may be prior to the collection year. For example, 12-month enrollment that was collected in the fall during 2014-15 is for the prior 12-month period of July 1, 2013 through June 30, 2014. So the Collection Year is 2014 and the Data Year is 2013-14.

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There are a number of different options in IPEDS to help you use the data for your analyses.

The Look Up An Institution function is used for looking up one institution at a time. It allows you to print summary profiles and look at the data reported for a single institution in a given year.

The Compare Institutions option allows you to download as many institutions as you need, and up to 250 variables, into one file where all the data are merged together. This function yields one variable per column and one institution per row.

The Statistical Tables function allows you to aggregate statistics for groups of institutions, as well as to create something similar to a table.

The Survey Data Files option allows you to download all of the data or a custom subset of the data. Each component has multiple files and you will often need to be able to

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merge the files together. The IPEDS UnitID is the variable that is common across files and can be used for merging. You should always download the Institutional Characteristics Header file because it includes basic directory information, such as institution name, sector, and state, which most researchers will want to have on their final files. Each download includes a Read File that allows you to import it into SPSS, SAS, or STATA.

Finally, the Data Feedback Report option allows you to create reports using selected variables and formats to describe an institution or to compare it to its peers.

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There are a number of helpful features available to help access IPEDS data. For example, the **Save session** feature allows you to save an entire session, including all of the institutions and variables you have selected. Keep in mind that the session is only good for 30 days, so if you do not get back to it within that time, you will lose it. Additionally, internet errors may occasionally result in the loss of a session.

You can also download and save a list of variables or a group of institutions onto your computer so that you can easily upload them back into the IPEDS system. When you attempt to upload your saved list back into IPEDS, you will be asked to either login or become a **Power User** by providing an email address and password. Once you have become an IPEDS Power User, you will login using your email and password.

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There are different options for creating a group of institutions to be used for analysis. When you first select the institutions to be included in the data file for your analysis, you can construct your own group of institutions or have the system generate a group for you.

To have the system generate a group for you, select the **By Groups** link from the Select Institutions toolbar, as shown. Several methods are available for creating a system-generated Institution Group, including EZ Group, Automatic Group, and Saved Group. The EZ Group method allows you to quickly create an Institution Group based on one or more frequently used criteria. For additional information on these options, you can access an IPEDS data manual by clicking on the link shown.

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When you click on the **EZ Group** option under the **By Groups** link, a screen will appear that lists common variables used to define institution groups.

To select the variables of interest for your analysis, you can click on the appropriate checkboxes in the first two rows. You can also select variables related to special characteristics by clicking on the special characteristic of interest for your analysis, and then clicking on the appropriate checkboxes for the associated variables of interest that appear in a box to the right.

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The example on the screen illustrates two selections: **Historically Black College or University** under the **Special Missions** grouping, and **Private Not-For-Profit, 4-Year Or Above**, associated with **Sector** under the **Special characteristics** grouping.

The counter at the top of the screen shows that there are 49 institutions that match all of these characteristics.

The variables selected for the analysis appear in the **Criteria Summary** at the bottom of the screen.

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Another option is to select institutions that are part of an automatic group, defined by NCES. This option automatically compiles a group of peer institutions for your selected comparison institution based on a set of predefined criteria, such as: control and level of institution, degree-granting status, Title IV status, Carnegie Classification, and, geographic region.

To use this option, you must select a comparison institution for your data file, because the group is created based on the comparison institution selected. The group of peer institutions is automatically added to your My Institutions list for the data file.

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Similar to the **Automatic Group** option, the **Saved Group** option allows you to load a saved institution group for a selected comparison institution, defined by the institution itself.

The **Saved Group** option is not available for all institutions. If a Saved Group is not available for the specified Comparison Institution, an error will occur, and you will be prompted to select another means of creating your Institution Group.

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You can also use the **By Variables** method to construct an institution group based on one or more shared characteristics, such as size, geographic location, control of institution, or Carnegie Classification.

You can select up to 20 variables to use as criteria for creating your institution group.

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Several methods are available for selecting institutions by variables. Browse/Search Variables is the default method of selecting variables for your data file. This option allows you to browse a list of IPEDS variables and search for variables by name or keyword. As you select IPEDS variables they are stored in your **My Variables** list for easy access. Once you have selected or uploaded variables during your current session, you can choose from the existing variables in your **My Variables** list. You can also derive new, custom variables from the existing IPEDS survey variables through addition, subtraction, or division. Finally, you can upload a previously saved list of

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variables. To use this option, you must have a Power User account, as described previously.

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IPEDS data files are downloaded from the IPEDS website in two different structures. Single-record files contain one row of data for each institution and one variable in each column. Data downloaded using the **Compare Institutions** function are always presented in single-record files.

The other type of file is the multiple-record file. Multiple-record files contain one variable per column, but the institution is listed more than once, using two or more rows. For example, when downloading full survey data files or custom data files, data by race/ethnicity and gender in the Fall Enrollment and Completions components will be presented as multiple-record files. This is illustrated on the next screen.

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In row two, you see that there were 101 Bachelor's degrees in Speech Communication and Rhetoric at the University of Alabama at Birmingham; in row three you see that there were nine master's degrees in that area of study at that same institution.

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Another important consideration is how you choose variables. There might be two or three steps depending on what type of variable you select, and within those steps there may be multiple selections to make. The basic steps are to first, choose the year you are interested in analyzing. The next step is only applicable to some variables and it involves specifying a qualifying variable or variables. This will be illustrated on the next screen. Finally, you choose the variables of interest from a list of available variables.

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Here is an example showing what to do for each of the three steps. First, select the year or years you are interested in analyzing. Then, select the qualifying variable or variables by clicking on the link and then selecting from the list. Notice that the list of student levels is hierarchical, so if you select from multiple levels make sure not to duplicate any totals in your files. Finally, select the variables of interest from the list.

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When using the **Compare Institutions** option, if you select too many options, you will very quickly get beyond the 250 variable limit, so you do need to be selective. In this example, if you selected all the years, all of the options under **Level of Student** and then all of the available variables, you would end up with a massive file.

When analyzing Completions data using the **Compare Institutions** option, it is also very easy to go beyond 250 variables. This is because there are three sets of Qualifying Variables under Step 2 that you need to select for: First or Second Major, CIP Code, and Award Level. Because of how easy it is to select over 250 variables in Completions,

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it is often best to use the full or custom survey data files when analyzing Completions data.

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If you have any questions or concerns when downloading data from the IPEDS website, you can contact the IPEDS **Use the Data Help Desk** at the phone number or email address shown.

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This module has provided you with an overview of the options for using IPEDS data, with respect to viewing institutional data, generating reports, and downloading data files. It has introduced you to processes for accessing IPEDS data, described the structure of IPEDS data files, and explained how to choose variables for analysis.

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In addition, it has provided links for the IPEDS home page, accessing IPEDS data on the IPEDS website, and the IPEDS data manual. Contact information for the IPEDS **Use the Data Help Desk** was also provided.

You may now proceed to the next module in the series or exit the module.