

Institutional Characteristics Survey Frequently Asked Questions

- QUESTION: **What is the purpose of the Institutional Characteristics survey?**
ANSWER: The Institutional Characteristics survey is used to collect data on institution names, addresses, and telephone numbers; types of programs offered; levels of awards offered; institutional control and affiliation; accreditation; calendar system; tuition and required fees; and room and board charges, for postsecondary education institutions in the United States and outlying territories. Most of this information is used to define our universe and to help in sampling. Institutional Characteristics also collects pricing data from institutions with full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students in order to provide consumer information for those planning to attend college.
- QUESTION: **What institutions are included in IPEDS?**
ANSWER: IPEDS data are collected from all institutions whose primary purpose is the provision of postsecondary education and which are open to the public.
- QUESTION: **My institution has a system office. Does the system office need to complete an Institutional Characteristics survey?**
ANSWER: Any system or central office that employs 15 or more full-time staff (and therefore must report IPEDS Fall Staff data) OR has its own budget (and therefore must report IPEDS Finance data) must also complete the Institutional Characteristics survey. Central and system offices are asked to complete Parts A and B only. The administrative office **must** indicate all types and levels of instruction and programs offered at all of the institutions in its system. This will ensure that each institution in the system is represented.
- QUESTION: **If my institution offers an award level but currently does not have any students enrolled at that level how should I report?**
ANSWER: You should indicate all levels of awards that your institution is authorized to grant. If there are no students currently enrolled at a particular level, you should complete the remainder of the IC survey as if you expect to have these students. For example, in the tuition questions, enter the amount that you would charge a student if enrolled at that level.

QUESTION: **Can I change my prior year Institutional Characteristics data?**
ANSWER: NO. This is the only IPEDS survey that cannot be changed for the prior year. The pricing information that is included on College Opportunities On-Line may be updated/corrected during the current year's collection (since we include three years of data in this area). However, beginning in 2003-04 you are able to make changes to the prior year data for any other IPEDS survey.

QUESTION: **Can I change my Institutional Characteristics data during the winter or spring surveys if I made a mistake in the fall?**
ANSWER: YES, BUT you may only change your responses to certain questions. Call the Help Desk at 877-225-2568, and they will allow you to change your data IF it impacts your responses to other surveys. For example, if you indicated that you have fewer than 15 full-time employees (thus no Fall Staff survey is generated), you may correct your answer if you need to complete this survey.

QUESTION: **Can I include another institutions' data on my Institutional Characteristics report?**
ANSWER: No, all institutions must report separately. Separate reporting screens have been included for reporting data for total branch campuses.

QUESTION: **What are accrediting agencies?**
ANSWER: These are agencies that establish operating standards for educational or professional institutions and programs, determine the extent to which the standards are met, and publicly announce their findings. The agencies included in IPEDS are those that the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education has deemed to be reliable authorities as to the quality of education or training provided by the institutions of higher education and the higher education programs they accredit.

QUESTION: **What if my accrediting agency is not on the list?**
ANSWER: If your agency is not listed, that means it is not one of the agencies recognized by the Secretary. Accrediting agencies desiring to be recognized by the Secretary of Education must apply for recognition and must demonstrate their compliance with the Criteria for Secretarial Recognition (34 CFR Part 602).

QUESTION: **What is an open admission policy?**
ANSWER: This is a policy by which virtually all secondary school graduates or students with GED equivalency diplomas are admitted without regard to academic record, test scores, or other qualifications.

QUESTION: **When reporting admitted students, do I include early admits?**

ANSWER: Yes, include all students who were offered admission to your institution. This would include **early decision** students who were notified of an admission decision prior to the regular notification date and who agreed to accept; **early action** students who were notified of an admission decision prior to the regular notification date with no commitment to accept; and the admitted students who began studies during the summer prior to the fall reporting period.

QUESTION: **What students are included in the count for full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduates?**

ANSWER: Include students attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level, including students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term. Also include students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school). This number should match the Fall Enrollment reported in the spring or winter collection cycle. This is also the cohort for the Graduation Rates survey that you will report in the spring collection.

QUESTION: **Our students take both the SAT and ACT. Which scores should we report?**

ANSWER: You should provide both scores, if test scores are required for admission for your enrolled students (first-time, degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students).

QUESTION: **If a student submits two sets of scores on a single test, how should we be reporting these?**

ANSWER: You should report this information according to how you use the data. For example, if a student submits two sets of scores and you consider the highest scores from either submission, then use the combination of scores (e.g., verbal from one submission, math from the other).

Student Charges

QUESTION: **If most of my students are enrolled on the standard academic term but I also have students enrolled by program, how do I respond to the tuition questions?**

ANSWER: You should report the calendar system that reflects most of the programs offered and that best characterizes your institution. If you select standard academic terms, then you will be asked to report your tuition and fees based on a full academic year. If you select the 'by program' option, you will be required to report tuition and fees by program and program length. The calendar system that you select will determine not only how you report tuition and fees information but also how you determine your cohort when reporting Graduation Rates data in the spring. The Student Right-to-Know

(SRK) regulations state that if your institution offers a predominant number of programs based on standard academic terms (semesters, trimesters, or quarters), you are to use a fall cohort (and you will report tuition and fees for a full academic year). If most of your programs operate on a program-by-program or continuous enrollment basis then SRK requires that you use a full-year cohort (and you are asked to report tuition and fees by program).

QUESTION: **My institution offers occupational programs and students are admitted twice a year. How do I respond to the tuition questions?**

ANSWER: Tuition questions are based on how you answered the calendar system question. Although you admit students twice a year (sounds similar to a semester system), you should probably report by program. Be sure to indicate your calendar system as “by program” and then you can report tuition based on your largest programs. Reporting by program will give your students the opportunity to see what it will cost to complete a full program of study and the length of time it would take.

QUESTION: **When determining the dormitory capacity, should we include off campus housing reserved for graduate and/or married students?**

ANSWER: Yes, if the institution is providing the housing and the students pay “rent” or “board” to the institution.

QUESTION: **Our institution offers several meal plans. Which plan should I report?**

ANSWER: You should report the meal plan that offers the maximum number of meals per week.

QUESTION: **For academic year tuition reporters, what is the difference between the undergraduate tuition and fees charges in Part D question 7, and the tuition and fees charges in Part D question 13?**

ANSWER: The tuition and fees reported in question 7 are the typical amounts charged to **all** full-time undergraduate students; the tuition and fees in question 13 represent a combined amount, charged to **full-time, first-time** undergraduate students. The data in question 13 should be provided by your financial aid office as these are the amounts used to determine financial need.

QUESTION: **How do I calculate or determine “average tuition”?**

ANSWER: If your institution charges tuition on a per-credit-hour basis, then you should estimate average tuition based on the average full-time credit hour load for an entire academic year. If you have different

charges for different programs at the undergraduate or graduate levels, calculate the “average” tuition using the amount that a typical student would expect to pay. **BE SURE TO REPORT TUITION FOR THE ENTIRE ACADEMIC YEAR!**

QUESTION: **If my institution offers first-professional programs that are not on the list how do I report their tuition and fees information?**

ANSWER: Although many institutions may consider some programs to be first-professional because they seem to fit in the definition, the Department currently recognizes only the following programs: chiropractic; dentistry; law; medicine; optometry; osteopathic; pharmacy; podiatry; veterinary medicine; naturopathic medicine; and divinity/ministry, rabbinical and Talmudic studies, and ordination (other). If your program does not appear on this list, please report it as a non-first-professional program, at the appropriate level.

Price of Attendance

QUESTION: **How do I know what amounts to report for room and board and other expenses for institutionally-controlled housing both on and off campus?**

ANSWER: Report the room and board amounts used by your financial aid office for determining eligibility for student financial assistance. The other expenses are the amount of money estimated by the financial aid office needed by a student to cover expenses such as laundry, transportation, entertainment, and furnishings. (**Do not** include the tuition and required fees with other expenses.)

QUESTION: **How do I know what amounts to report for room and board and other expenses for off campus?**

ANSWER: You should enter the amount for a typical full-time student living off campus with family or not with family used by the financial aid office to determine the eligibility of a student to receive financial assistance.

QUESTION: **Do I have to report off campus living expenses?**

ANSWER: Yes, all institutions must report off campus living expenses with and not with family. Those institutions that require all of their full-time, first-time students to live on campus should enter zero and provide an explanation.

QUESTION: **What are “other expenses”?**

ANSWER: This is the amount of money, estimated by the financial aid office, that is needed by a student to cover expenses such as laundry, transportation, entertainment, and furnishings. (For the purpose of

the IC survey, room and board and tuition and fees are not included.)

QUESTION:

What data are included on the IPEDS College Opportunities On-Line (COOL) website?

ANSWER:

The Institutional Characteristics information that is made available on IPEDS COOL is tuition and required fees, room and board charges, books and supplies, other expenses and the institution's mission statement.