

September 19, 2016

Ms. Janice Kelly-Reid  
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Post Office Box 12194  
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(sent via email to: [ipedstrpcomment@rti.org](mailto:ipedstrpcomment@rti.org))

Dear Ms. Kelly-Reid,

These comments are submitted in response to the “Report and Suggestions from IPEDS Technical Review Panel #49: The Public Face of IPEDS: Web Tools and Publication.” The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS) works to make higher education more available and affordable for people of all backgrounds. Through nonpartisan research, analysis, and advocacy, we aim to improve the processes and public policies that can pave the way to successful educational outcomes for students and for society.

We appreciated the opportunity to participate in the July Technical Review Panel (TRP), and write to support suggestions for improving the timing of data releases, and to recommend providing current IPEDS Data Center users with a notice explaining the proper use and limitations of the Compare Institutions tool, as well as developing an option within the Compare Institutions tool to facilitate generating accurate multi-year, multi-variable files.

**Skip the release of First Look reports in order to facilitate earlier release of data**

We strongly support the suggestion discussed at the TRP to make IPEDS data publicly available as soon as possible after its integrity has been established. Currently, underlying data are not released until after publication of First Look reports. As the TRP report suggests, the immediate publication of tables with downloadable data would provide the same information without the delays that result from multiple required levels of NCES review prior to First Look publication. We also propose that NCES eliminate its preliminary data release in order for the provisional data to be released even sooner.

**Provide users of the Compare Institutions tool with clear instructions on how to generate accurate aggregated calculations of multi-year variables**

The Compare Institutions function within the IPEDS Data Center is a valuable resource. However, proper use of this tool requires that the user understand the limitations of aggregating variables from multiple years for a list of institutions generated from a single collection year. Users should be made aware of this limitation, and be provided instructions for generating accurate aggregated calculations across multiple years.

The list of institutions selected within the Compare Institutions function is by default drawn from a *single* data collection year selected by the user, after which the user can select *multiple* years of data for a single variable. For example, a user can use the defaults in “EZ Group” to select all institutions from the most recent data year (currently 2014-15) but will then have the option to download statistical variables (such as 12-month enrollment) for multiple data years. As a result, for any user calculating aggregates for any statistical variables spanning multiple years (e.g. total enrollment by year), the results will be skewed by the fact that the institutions included are limited to the most recent year. For example, 12-month enrollment in prior years will be inaccurate (lower than it should be) because the list of institutions (UNITIDs) does not include those schools that existed in prior years but no longer exist in the current year (2014-15). Relatedly, users calculating aggregates by some categorical variables (such as sector), may be unaware that such institutional characteristics data can vary over time, and that it is necessary to download that categorical variable for each year.

In order to prevent unintentional misuse of the available data, we recommend adding a clarification, such as a pop-up box or hover notice on the Select Institution page. Additional instruction on how to combine lists of institutions from multiple data collection years could also be provided.

**Develop option to easily generate accurate multi-year, multi-variable files within the Compare Institution tool**

To make it easier to generate a multi-year file that includes the proper universe of institutions as well as valid corresponding institutional characteristics (ICs) for each year, we encourage NCES to develop an option within the Compare Institutions tool that allows users to specify that they want a multi-year file (e.g., from 2004-05 to 2010-11) with all institutions for each year along with specified ICs for each year (e.g., name, sector, state) and specified variables (e.g., 12-month enrollment, 150% graduation rate).

Thank you for the opportunity to share our support and recommendations for timely release and proper use of these important data. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at [lahlman@ticas.org](mailto:lahlman@ticas.org) or 202-854-0232.

Sincerely,



Lindsay Ahlman  
Senior Policy Analyst  
The Institute for College Access & Success (TICAS)