This tutorial discusses the reporting of distance education data to IPEDS.

Data on distance education provides researchers and policy makers with more accurate information regarding the educational opportunities in American higher education; allows institutions to compare their distance education activities to those of their peers; and provides valuable consumer information on College Navigator to students and parents. Distance education data are reported in three IPEDS survey components: Institutional Characteristics, Fall Enrollment, and Completions.

Three definitions will be helpful to review before reporting distance education data. Distance education for IPEDS reporting purposes includes active interaction between students and the instructor and is defined as, “Education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously.”

This includes, but is not limited to, the following examples:
- Internet;
- Satellite or wireless communication; and
- Audio and video conferencing.

A distance education course is defined as “a course in which the instructional content is delivered exclusively via distance education.” A distance education program is defined as “a program for which all the required coursework for program completion is able to be completed via distance education courses.”

Now, we will discuss what data are reported in the three IPEDS survey components. In the Institutional Characteristics component, report if your institution offers distance education opportunities and at what student levels: undergraduate and/or graduate.

In the Fall Enrollment component, report all students in terms of the following categories:
- Enrolled exclusively in distance education courses;
- Enrolled in some, but not all, distance education courses; and
- Not enrolled in any distance education courses.

For students enrolled exclusively in distance education, you must also report student location relative to the institution, including if the student is:
- In the same state or jurisdiction as your institution;
- Within the U.S., but in a different state or jurisdiction than your institution;
- Within the U.S., but state or jurisdiction unknown; or
- Outside the U.S.
In the Completions survey component, you must report whether a program is offered as a distance education program for each CIP code and award level reported. Specifically, if a program at a particular award level is offered to be completed exclusively via distance education, respond ‘Yes’ to the distance education question at the bottom of the CIP Data screen; otherwise, respond ‘No.’

Also, if more than one program is reported under a CIP code by award level, respond 'YES' to the distance education question if ANY of the programs are offered as a distance education program. Additionally, respond ‘Yes’ to the distance education question if it is an option for students to complete exclusively through distance education by CIP code & Award level, but no students did. And lastly, if the program has a traditional offering and a distance education option, completions should be reported regardless of whether or not the program was completed through distance education.

For example, an executive MBA program may require students to come to campus a few weekends a year for instruction. This would not be considered a distance education program by IPEDS because students are still required to come to campus for instruction, even if it is only once or twice during the program.

For more information on the material presented in this tutorial, please contact the IPEDS Help Desk.