

**Attention: Information No Longer Current
(Alert archived November 2011)**

Alert #1

Subject: The Common Data Set

Prepared: September 1997

Summary - The **Common Data Set** (CDS) initiative is a collaborative effort between four major college guide publishers and the educational community to develop a standard set of questions and data definitions for use in surveys that gather information for college guidebooks, rankings and other resources for prospective students. The purpose is to improve the quality and consistency of information, while easing the burden on colleges that receive many survey requests each year.

Four publishers have provided the leadership for this initiative. The College Board, Peterson's, U.S. News and Wintergreen/Orchard House have cooperated in the development of the Common Data Set and will ask the same core questions about commonly requested information.

"Prior to the Common Data Set, each survey asked for similar data in different forms, and this lack of standardization often led students and parents to make inaccurate comparisons," said College Board President Donald M. Stewart. "College presidents have welcomed this initiative as a long-overdue effort to provide parents and students with accurate statistics about their colleges and universities."

The four charter publishers are committed to asking for basic information using the standardized Common Data Set. Each publisher will continue to ask some questions unique to their own surveys, but the number of unique questions will be substantially reduced.

Current Status

The first Common Data Set was issued in fall 1996 and partially implemented in the 1996-97 survey season. After another year's collaboration among publishers, college and university officials, high school counselors and professional associations, the second phase of the Common Data Set was issued in August 1997 with new data elements and with some enhancements to the earlier version.

The expanded 1997-98 Common Data Set includes sections on Institutional Characteristics, Enrollment, Persistence and Graduation Rates, Freshman Admission Requirements and Academic Profile, Transfer Admission Requirements, Academic Offerings, Library Collections, Student Life, Annual Expenses and Financial Aid.

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Here is a summary of changes from the original Common Data Set:

Enrollment: This section now asks for non-degree as well as degree-seeking enrollment. Also, the section was revised into a grid format similar to the IPEDS enrollment survey which is used as the data source.

Ethnic data should be reported for all students (degree-seeking and non-degree-seeking).

Entrance exam policy: a new question has been added to allow colleges to indicate whether SAT, ACT, or SAT II tests are required for placement or counseling.

Annual expenses: the terminology used for requesting full-time tuition has been revised to be consistent with that used in IPEDS.

Additions: the following sections are new: General information, Persistence and graduation, Transfer policies and procedures, Financial aid, Library collections.

Renumbering: A revised permanent numbering system has been adopted; publishers will reference the new numbers in their surveys.

The Common Data Set is an ongoing project led by the four charter CDS publishers. An advisory group of national education associations works with the publishers to plan for expansion of the data set. Draft versions of new sections are widely circulated to institutions and association groups for comment. Interested persons may subscribe to a listserv managed by The College Board (see below) that provides a forum for discussion and circulates notices about new CDS sections and deadlines for comment. New sections covering faculty and class size issues have been requested for future development.

The annual schedule calls for the latest Common Data Set questionnaire and definitions to be available by August each year for institutions to use in organizing their data and for publishers to use in preparing their surveys. All publishers or organizations collecting information about colleges and universities are encouraged to reference and use the standard CDS definitions and questions.

Implications for Institutions

Institutions may find the Common Data Set useful in a number of ways. It serves as an initial organizer to collect a great deal of the commonly requested information and becomes a key resource for responding to surveys. Use of the Common Data Set means more time and effort

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can be spent ensuring the accuracy of essential elements and assures more consistency in responding to different requests.

Some colleges and universities have adopted the Common Data Set as the core for a standard survey response for their institution. Instead of completing individual surveys, they simply return a copy of the CDS to each requester, or to those requesters for which they have insufficient time to give a longer response. Several colleges and universities have posted their CDS information on Web sites and direct questioners there. In building a standard survey response, an institution might start with the Common Data Set, then add supplemental information as needed to convey other characteristics of relevance to prospective students.

Timelines for the year ahead

August 1997: The 1997-98 CDS questionnaire and definitions were issued. Copies were mailed to all Admission Directors and Financial Aid Offices. Copies are also available from publisher Web sites (see below).

Fall 1997: Charter publishers will meet to plan the 1998-99 CDS.

Winter 1998: An advisory group of representatives from national education organizations will be consulted and help develop new sections.

May 1998: A draft of new CDS sections will be circulated for comment.

June 1998: Deadline for comment on new sections.

July 1998: Charter publishers will finalize the 1998-99 CDS.

August 1998: The 1998-99 CDS questionnaire and definitions will be posted and can be downloaded from Web.

Resources

CDS Web sites:

www.collegeboard.org/gp/html/commondataset.html

www.petersons.com/research/he/cds/

www4.usnews.com/usnews/edu/misc/cocds.htm

www.wgoh.com/cds.html

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Note: Each site provides a copy of the 1997-98 Common Data Set questionnaire and definitions that can be printed in hard copy. The U.S. News site also offers a downloadable Word for Windows version of the CDS document. Peterson's offers to send the Word version as an e-mail attachment if you send an e-mail request to kimh@petersons.com.

CDS listserv:

To subscribe, go to College Board's Web site: <http://www.collegeboard.org>. Select "Starting Points" then "Admission Staff" or "Financial Aid Staff." Scroll down to the button for "CDS listserv." When you are asked for your e-mail address, enter it and you will be on the listserv. (Click just once to enter.) If you have problems, send e-mail to: [cgs@collegeboard.org](mailto:cds@collegeboard.org). To communicate with the listserv, send e-mail to: cgs@cblnyo.cblast.org.

Examples of college and university CDS standard response Web sites:

University of California, Irvine: [/www.oasim.uci.edu/~oas/cds](http://www.oasim.uci.edu/~oas/cds)

University of Akron: www.uakron.edu/src/cds/index.htm

Montana State University: <http://www.montana.edu/~arcj/facts/cds>

Auburn University: www.panda.auburn.edu/unifiedsurvey/cdsa.html

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