Making the IPEDS Student Financial Aid Survey Data Meaningful

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National Postsecondary Education Commission

• Established in 1995 to:
  “promote the quality, comparability and utility of postsecondary data and information that support policy development at the federal, state, and institutional levels”

• NPEC commissions papers to improve IPEDS and federal surveys

• Charge for this Student Financial Aid (SFA) paper:
  • What are the strengths/limitation of SFA component?
  • What major areas or metrics should be collected?
  • How could SFA be improved?
Recommendations

1. Expand and standardize reporting fields to include part-time, transfer, returning, and graduate students

2. Streamline data collection with other federal sources

3. Expand coverage of non-federal sources of aid

4. Disaggregate aid data by student economic & demographic characteristics

5. Make net price survey more meaningful by separating from SFA
Guiding questions for this webinar:

Where do you see various audiences (a) using these data now and (b) using these data if recommendations were adopted?

What other recommendations or changes might be worthwhile?
My approach

- Data analysis
  - Variable definitions
  - Coverage over time
  - Congressional mandates

- Interviews
  - Institutional researchers
  - Financial aid administrators
  - Policy researchers

- Literature review
  - Academic research
  - Policy research
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Main findings

• Four main uses of SFA data:
  • Internal benchmarking
  • External accountability
  • Consumer information
  • Academic research

• Efficacy is hard to assess in each of these domains:
  • How does SFA change organizational strategies?
  • How is SFA data used to improve college outcomes?
  • How do students use SFA data?
  • How does SFA provide the best data for research?
Main findings

- Narrow reporting field coverage
- Inconsistent variable coverage
- Cumulative versus annual awards
- Linking IPEDS with other federal data
- Program Participation Agreement metadata
- Net price coverage
Emerging trends

• Need-based institutional need-based aid
• Graduate student debt
• Servicers and repayment plans
• Emergency grants
• Amount of aid refunded
• FAFSA filing rates and verifications
• “Promise” programs
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