



April 22, 2024

Kun Mullan, PRA Coordinator  
Strategic Collections and Clearance Governance and Strategy Division  
Office of Chief Data Officer, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Ave. SW  
Washington, DC 20202

RE: Docket No.: ED-2024-SCC-0030

Dear Coordinator Mullan,

On behalf of the institutional research and institutional effectiveness (IR/IE) community, I write in response to the Department of Education’s request for comment on the implementation challenges related to the reporting requirements of the Financial Value Transparency and Gainful Employment (FVT/GE) regulations.

Our comments are primarily focused on three of the five issues identified by the Department of Education (Department) in the Federal Register notice requesting public comment.

- *Is the estimate of burden accurate?*
- *How might the Department enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected?*
- *How might the Department minimize the burden of this collection on the respondents, including through the use of information technology?*

AIR supports the Department’s efforts to enhance the availability of information for students, families, and policymakers, and to provide institutions with better data to evaluate and improve their programs. Expanding the use of data to support decision making for the benefit of students and institutions is at the heart of AIR’s purpose and mission. AIR and our community have partnered with the Department’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) for over two decades to provide education and training for the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) to increase the quality of the data submitted and expand the use of IPEDS data within higher education and the wider public sphere.

Further, the Department’s recent announcement delaying the FVT/GE reporting requirements until October 1 is a positive first step in addressing the enormous implementation challenges. However, based on feedback from our members, it is apparent that institutional staff need additional time to understand the regulation and to

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create internal systems to collect and report timely, accurate, and reliable data. And, while the Department has begun publishing policy and operational guidance, it is insufficient to successfully implement this regulation.

Our comments represent over 325 responses from the IR/IE community collected through a recent survey administered by AIR on the FVT/GE regulation, as well as the approximately 700 comments and questions submitted by participants during two AIR co-sponsored webinars on the reporting requirements of the FVT/GE regulations. Consistent with our mission and our long-standing work with NCES, we offer our comments to strengthen the quality and useability of data to be published under the FVT/GE regulation while maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of the data reporting process by institutions.

### **Is the estimate of burden accurate?**

AIR believes the Department significantly underestimates the cost and challenge of implementation, which is exacerbated by the short timeframe, imprecise definitions of data elements, and lack of official guidance on reporting protocols and processes. Consequently, institutional staff (including IR/IE professionals) must devote substantial resources to understanding regulations and their implications; identifying staff in other departments responsible for collecting, collating, and reporting the various data elements; developing internal systems to collect and submit data; verifying and cleaning collected data; and implementing a workflow across the institution to ensure these steps bring the institution into compliance with the regulation.

Respondents to the AIR survey believed the reporting required by the regulation places the most burden on the institutional research and financial aid offices. The reporting will also require significant collaboration from other departments including information technology, business office/bursar, registrar, and enrollment management – with active support from senior leaders. Nearly 40 percent of the survey respondents indicated that 5 to 10 staff across departments would be involved with FVT/GE reporting. Most indicated their institution is not in a position to hire additional staff (temporary or permanent), thus the burden would largely fall on current staff. The reallocation of staff to FVT/GE reporting was viewed as particularly difficult given financial aid offices are overwhelmed with complications resulting from the FAFSA-related delays and the fall is an especially busy time for institutional research offices – whose responsibilities include official reporting on fall enrollment counts and the submission of IPEDS data by mid-October. FVT/GE reporting is a complex undertaking with a substantial investment of financial and human resources, and many AIR members believe it will take time away from serving the very students the regulation is intended to support.

### **How might the Department enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected?**

The quality and utility of the information collected could be improved by delaying the implementation for at least a year and using that time to provide more precise definitions for each data element, detailed data reporting templates, and establishing a “help desk” and a dedicated site for resource materials. Over 90 percent of the AIR members responding to our survey indicated that they need additional information from the Department in the following six areas to accurately report the data elements required by FVT/GE regulation.

- Clear definitions of metrics
- Student cohort definitions
- Time periods of data being requested

- Format of data to be uploaded
- Templates for data uploads

AIR recognizes the intent for collecting and publishing this data is to provide clarity and transparency to students and their families on outcomes and future earnings for various programs. However, in the absence of precise data definitions and protocols, insufficient time to implement technical requirements and to develop accurate collection and reporting processes, data quality will suffer, limiting the utility of data to students, families, and institutions.

Additional support for institutional staff reporting the data is also needed for data integrity and quality. Many members of the AIR community recommended that the Department model the information and guidance provided by NCES for the IPEDS data collection for the FVT/GE reporting, including glossaries, data dictionaries, information on data quality checks, and a mechanism for answering questions.

More specific questions, concerns, and points of confusion offered by AIR members for the Department include the following.

- Most licensing exams are administered by third parties that may or may not share data on individuals who have taken exams or passed exams. In addition, licensing requirements vary across states and most institutions do not have the infrastructure and staffing to annually monitor licensing laws in every U.S. state.
- Double-majors are a concern for quality reporting – will a student’s debt show up twice in two programs, but their income is just a single metric?
- The metric for student enrollment should be defined further so that students are not double counted if the information is aggregated. Also, “headcount” is not relevant if the program includes a large population of part-time students.
- Local grants/scholarships are not included and should be added given the rise of local “promise” programs as an important factor in college attendance and financial support. These grant funds would not be captured by the other grant/scholarship metrics listed and thus the Department would not have a complete financial aid picture for each student.
- How will specific students be exempted from the reporting population? Other than death, the normal exemptions such as military service, church mission, peace corps, etc. are missing.
- Additional clarity is needed on what information the Department will provide and what institutions will provide to determine exclusions. If a student graduates and then enrolls in a higher credential program, for example, where will that information come from? Also, students change institutions, both as transfer students within a level and when they pursue additional degrees. How will that be handled? Particularly concerning is how undergraduate transfers in and out of an institution will be handled.
- Collect completers data for the same years for all institutions. The transitional versus standard reporting options make for unequal comparisons in a dataset that already lends itself to scrutiny on quality given the different student groups used for income and debt.

**How might the Department minimize the burden of this collection on the respondents, including through the use of information technology?**

Beyond providing precise definitions of data elements, releasing detailed templates and instructions for data submissions, and strengthening the support for questions from institutions, the following are additional suggestions from the IR/IE community for minimizing the reporting burden and increasing data quality.

- Delay the reporting deadline for at least one year and shift the deadline away from early October so that it does not coincide with IPEDS deadline, or the reporting requirements associated with the beginning of the fall term. Many AIR members recommended releasing the final definitions and templates at least 6-9 months before the established deadline in a comprehensive package.
- Align the definitions of the data elements and the reporting cohorts with existing definitions – i.e., IPEDS or the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) – to leverage existing systems, programming, and reporting structures. For example, this type of alignment was not done for Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund (HEERF) and that reporting, according to AIR members, required institutional staff to create new data sets and reprogram structures for reporting.
- Consider if similar data from other sources that are already collected could provide the information needed without starting an entirely new data collection – i.e., data from IPEDS, NPSAS, the College Scorecard, or the National Student Clearinghouse.
- Additional guidance and consideration are needed on what data can be shared between financial aid offices and the institutional research offices. More specifically, under the Higher Education Act, FAFSA data can only be used for “applying for, awarding, and administering aid.” Over the past few years, some financial aid offices became more restrictive in their interpretation of the “administration” clause and began limiting the information shared with institutional research offices. With FAFSA simplification, the income data are coming directly from the IRS and are classified as “tax information.” These restrictions and variations in interpretation add another complication for how FVT/GE data can be compiled, shared, and reported. Over 70 percent of AIR members responding to our survey expressed at least “moderate” concern about how to navigate what data can be shared among institutional departments.
- Related to the previous bullet, the Department recently announced that institutions will report FVT/GE data through the National Student Loan Data System (NSLDS). However, only financial aid offices have access to NSLDS and institutional research offices are unable to access this system. The Department can ease the burden of the FVT/GE data collection by allowing institutional research offices, at a minimum, access to the portion of the NSLDS pertaining to FVT/GE data.

I appreciate your consideration of AIR’s comments on behalf of IR/IE professionals in response to the FVT/GE regulations. AIR is willing and ready to continue to serve as a resource to the Department and as a link to the substantial expertise that exists within the IR/IE community.

Sincerely,



Christine M Keller, PhD  
Executive Director & CEO