

Institutional Characteristics (IC) Cost of Attendance Tutorial Script 2023-24 Data Collection Cycle

On behalf of the Institute of Education Sciences', IES, National Center for Education Statistics, NCES, and the Association for Institutional Research, AIR, welcome to this tutorial on the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System Institutional Characteristics Survey, also called IPEDS IC. The purpose of this tutorial is to explain how to report Cost of Attendance data to IPEDS.

After completing this tutorial, you will be able to:

- Identify institutions required to report cost of attendance data to IPEDS;
- List the survey components where cost of attendance data are collected;
- Discuss how the cost of attendance data collected are used; and
- Describe the cost of attendance components reported to IPEDS.

Cost of Attendance or COA data are only reported by institutions that enroll first-time, full-time degree and certificate-seeking undergraduate students.

Data are collected in two survey components. The Institutional Characteristics Survey collects current year cost of attendance data, while the Student Financial Aid Survey allows institutions to revise 3 prior years of cost of attendance data. In addition, cost of attendance is used with data collected in the Student Financial Aid Survey for the calculation of average net price. Therefore, it is important the data reported are the same in both the Institutional Characteristics and Student Financial Aid surveys to correctly calculate average net price.

The cost of attendance for a student is an estimate of the student's total educational expenses for the period of enrollment. The components included in the cost of attendance are determined by the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended and are may be subject to regulation by the U.S. Department of Education beginning with the 2023-24 financial aid application cycle.

Cost of attendance components for IPEDS reporting purposes include four elements:

1. Tuition and fees;
2. Books and supplies;
3. Food and housings (formerly room and board); and
4. Other expenses.

First, published tuition and fees—the amount of tuition and required fees most frequently charged to students—are reported for each of three applicable residency statuses: in-district, in-state, and out- of state students. Tuition and fees may include costs for the rental or purchase of equipment (including equipment for instruction by

telecommunications); materials; and/or supplies if required of all students at the institution or in a program. These values represent what a typical student would be charged and may not be the same for all students at an institution.

The second cost of attendance component is books and supplies. It includes the average cost of books, course materials, supplies, and equipment for a typical student but excludes unusual costs for special groups of students (e.g., engineering or art majors), unless they constitute the majority of students at an institution. It may also include a reasonable amount, as determined by an institution, for the documented rental or purchase of a personal computer the student will use for study for the enrollment period.

Third, food and housing are reported separately, as applicable, for students who live on-campus, off-campus without family, and off-campus with family.

- For students living on campus, the allowance is the standard amount normally assessed most residents.
- For students without dependents living at home with their parents, this will be an allowance your financial aid office typically determines.
- For those living off-campus but not with their parents, the allowance must be based on reasonable expenses for the student's room and board.

If your institution offers food and housing, but not both, you must include both the known value and an estimate for the unknown value. Inclusion of both food cost and housing cost is necessary to generate a total cost of attendance, which is subsequently needed for Net Price calculations. For example, if your institution offers meals but no housing, in the "on-campus food and housing" field you would need to enter a total that includes the cost of the meal plan plus an estimate of housing (such as a housing cost similar to off-campus housing). Refer to your institution's cost of attendance budgets from your financial aid office to determine estimated room or board costs.

Finally, other expenses should include any expenses beyond those already mentioned that your institution's student financial aid office uses to determine the student's budget. This includes transportation and miscellaneous expenses, and other allowances mentioned in the Federal Student Aid Handbook.

The data used for reporting cost of attendance should come from your Office of Student Financial Aid as they use this number in their awarding process each year. It is important to note cost of attendance components and amounts may vary for NCAA athletes, correspondence students, incarcerated students, and students enrolled less than half time. To report cost of attendance for the institution as a whole, the student financial aid office will need to use an appropriate method. Different methods might include:

- A weighted average;
- A non-weighted average;
- A median;
- Actual student costs; or
- A combination of the above.

In addition, institutions may arrive at these values through different processes, such as periodic surveys of the student population and local housing costs, or an annual survey of students. Regardless of the methods used, it is important they are applicable to your institution and stay consistent year to year. Changing methods each year could result in significant fluctuations in average net price calculations.

It is also important to note academic and program reporters submit cost of attendance differently. Academic reporters report tuition; fees; books and supplies; food and housing; and other expenses for an entire academic year, which is typically nine months. However, program reporters report tuition and fees combined for the largest program; books and supplies for the largest program; and food and housing and other expenses for a single month.

Finally, it is extremely important to report these data correctly, as they will appear in a number of highly visible federal consumer information tools, including College Navigator, the College Affordability and Transparency Lists, and the College Scorecard. In addition, while IPEDS allows prior year revisions, at this time the timing for the release of the College Affordability and Transparency Lists, as required by law, does not allow time for the revisions to be included. Revisions will appear on the College Navigator website and the Data Center, but will not be included in the College Affordability and Transparency Lists.

This concludes this tutorial on Institutional Characteristics – Cost of Attendance. This tutorial:

- Identified institutions required to report cost of attendance data to IPEDS;
- Described survey components where cost of attendance data are collected;
- Explained how cost of attendance data collected are used; and
- Discussed some other important cost of attendance concepts such as cost of attendance components.

For more information on the cost of attendance at your institution, please contact your institution's financial aid office. If you have questions about reporting your institution's data to IPEDS, the IPEDS Data Collection System, or IPEDS Data Tools contact the IPEDS Help Desk.
