

IPEDS IC and SFA Concepts, Terms, and Definitions that May Cause Confusion: Enrollment Level and Attendance Status Tutorial Script 2024-25 Data Collection

Description: To clarify enrollment level, attendance status, and other relevant concepts, terms, and definitions sometimes used synonymously in the education community that may have different meanings for Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) reporting purposes.

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 concepts, terms, and definitions that may cause confusion when reporting data to IPEDS.

The purpose of this tutorial is to review enrollment concepts and definitions used within the Student Financial Aid (SFA) survey component, and between survey components where other data are collected and used to calculate IPEDS variables subject to misinterpretation by IPEDS data reporters.

After completing this tutorial, participants will be able to identify, define, and apply terms and concepts that describe postsecondary enrollment level and attendance status commonly misunderstood by IPEDS data reporters. This will help NCES minimize IPEDS reporting errors and increase the consistency, comparability, reliability, and validity of IPEDS data.

Institutions use student enrollment level and attendance status for a variety of reasons. Both enrollment level and attendance status are used to determine tuition and fee amounts; academic progress; financial aid eligibility, and IPEDS outcome measure and graduation rate cohorts just to name a few. In IPEDS, enrollment level typically refers to a student's degree/certificate program classification—that is, undergraduate or graduate. Whereas, attendance status is used to designate the number of credit or clock hours the student is enrolled in at a specific point in time. Some institutions use the same attendance status classifications (i.e., full-time, three-quarter time, half-time, and less-than-half-time student) for all purposes to make it easier for students, parents, and the campus community to understand and discuss consumer information, policies, and procedures. On the other hand, other institutions opt to use different definitions for one or more of these purposes.

Some institutions use the terms enrollment level or enrollment status instead of attendance status to designate credit and clock hour course loads. Sometimes this creates confusion for IPEDS data reporters.

Institutions have the discretion to define enrollment status for institutional tuition and fee payment, grade level, and academic progress standards. However, Title IV regulations provide minimum enrollment status standards for financial aid awards. The minimum requirements vary by financial aid

programs. These definitions may differ from the definition of full-time student and part-time student used for IPEDS reporting. This may create additional confusion for IPEDS data reporters.

Is the student enrolled full time, part time, or less-than-full time?

For many institutions, enrollment level, enrollment status, or attendance status classifications, whichever terms are used, are the same for determining financial aid eligibility and academic progress, but different for determining tuition and fee payments for full-time students. The attendance status classifications used for undergraduate students are typically different from the classifications used for graduate students too. So, enrollment status may be confusing for IPEDS data reporters—especially when students, parents, and the education community unknowingly use related terminology interchangeably when the definitions are different.

Full-time student attendance status is prone to reporting errors because the definition of full-time student for IPEDS reporting and determining student financial aid eligibility may be different from the definition of full-time student used for tuition and fee payment at some institutions. Additionally, part-time and less-than-full-time student enrollment statuses are prone to reporting errors because the definition of part-time student for IPEDS reporting is equivalent to the concept of less-than-full-time for Title IV student financial aid programs.

For tuition and fee payment at a predominantly term-based school, some institutions define full-time students as twelve or more credits while others might define it as ten or more credits.

Note: Some institutions may also apply a surcharge if a student enrolls in more than fifteen credits.

The IPEDS Glossary defines a *full-time student* as:

Undergraduate: A student enrolled for 12 or more semester credits, or 12 or more quarter credits, or 24 or more clock hours a week each term.

Graduate: A student enrolled for 9 or more semester credits, or 9 or more quarter credits, or a student involved in thesis or dissertation preparation that is considered full-time by the institution.

Doctor's degree - Professional practice: Full-time - as defined by the institution.

This definition is the same as the definition used to determine Title IV financial aid eligibility. Whereas, the IPEDS Glossary defines a *part-time student* as:

Undergraduate: A student enrolled for either less than 12 semester or quarter credits, or less than 24 clock hours a week each term.

Graduate: A student enrolled for less than 9 semester or quarter credits.

Part-time student has a slightly different definition than half-time student, which is a commonly used term on many campuses. This may create some confusion for IPEDS data reporters.

For IPEDS, if the student's attendance status does not meet the full-time definition threshold, then they are part-time.

The definition of part-time student for Title IV financial aid program purposes is:

- For part-time undergraduates: In general, a student enrolled in one-half the academic course load of a full-time undergraduate student; and
- For part-time graduates: In general, a student enrolled in one-half the academic course load of full-time graduate student.

On the other hand, a student enrolled in a Title IV eligible degree/certificate program who is not taking a full-time course load is a less-than-full-time student for Title IV reporting purposes. These students may be taking three-quarters, one-half, or less-than-one-half of a full-time course load as defined by the institution. Therefore, the definition of part-time student for IPEDS reporting is synonymous to the concept of less-than-half-time used for financial aid purposes even though the terminology used is not an exact match.

The important thing to remember when discussing attendance status is part-time student has different meanings. So, it is important to read the instructions carefully when reporting data to different entities and ask for clarification when needed.

This concludes our tutorial on *Concepts, Terms, and Definitions that Cause Confusion When Reporting Data to the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System: Enrollment Level and Attendance Status*. During this presentation, we identified, defined, and demonstrated the application of terms, definitions, and concepts frequently subject to misinterpretation by IPEDS data reporters. Specifically, we discussed how enrollment level and attendance status are used to determine degree/certificate program classifications and student course load.

Please contact the financial aid office on your campus if you have questions about how these concepts, terms, and definitions impact SFA program flexibilities at your institution. If you have questions about reporting your institution's data to IPEDS or the IPEDS Data Collection System, contact the IPEDS Data Collection Help Desk at (877) 225-2568 or send an email to Help Desk staff at ipedshelp@rti.org. For assistance using IPEDS data tools, contact the IPEDS Data Use Help Desk at (866) 558-0658 or ipedstools@rti.org.