Introduction

The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, directed the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to collect information about Title IV higher education institutions and the students they serve. Title IV institutions participate in any of the Title IV federal student financial aid programs administered by the office of Federal Student Aid (FSA). Through several postsecondary surveys, NCES collects information about where and how the aid is distributed and whether it had an impact on student outcomes. This brochure describes the NCES postsecondary surveys. Longitudinal surveys that track student progress from secondary to postsecondary education (e.g., the Education Longitudinal Study or the High School Longitudinal Study) are not covered in this document.

NCES Postsecondary Surveys

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey name</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Data sources</th>
<th>Level of analysis</th>
<th>Frequency of survey</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IPEDS Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System</td>
<td>Collects comprehensive data on the performances and characteristics of Title IV institutions</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Education, institutions</td>
<td>Institution</td>
<td>Yearly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NPSAS National Postsecondary Student Aid Study</td>
<td>Examines the characteristics of postsecondary students and how they and their families pay for college</td>
<td>U.S. Department of Education, institution student records, interviews, external sources</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Every 2–4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BPS Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study</td>
<td>Tracks the persistence, transfer, and attainment of first-time students</td>
<td>NPSAS, transcripts, interviews, external sources</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Every 8 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B&amp;B Baccalaureates and Beyond Longitudinal Study</td>
<td>Tracks the education, attainment, labor market outcomes, and post-college life of bachelor’s recipients</td>
<td>NPSAS, transcripts, interviews, external sources</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>Every 8 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How Do the Surveys Differ?

**IPEDS** gathers information from thousands of Title IV institutions and hundreds of non-Title IV institutions. It differs from the other postsecondary surveys because data collection is mandatory at the institution level. **NPSAS, BPS, and B&B** are collectively referred to as the sample surveys because only a portion of students at selected Title IV institutions are statistically chosen to be surveyed. The sample surveys’ data are used to generate a nationally representative portrait of students enrolled in postsecondary education and track their experiences and outcomes. BPS and B&B are longitudinal survey spinoffs of NPSAS that track groups of the same students over time.

**Surveys target different respondents**

IPEDS surveys institutions, while the sample surveys collect data on students.

**IPEDS** surveys approximately 7,500 institutions.

**NPSAS** identifies Title IV institutions to survey from IPEDS.

**NPSAS** samples approximately 120,000 students from Title IV institutions*.

**B& B** targets a subset of the NPSAS group—approximately 16,000 bachelor’s degree recipients.

**BPS** targets a subset of the NPSAS group—approximately 15,000 students who entered college for the first time.

* The nationally representative sample of NPSAS contains undergraduate and graduate, aided and non-aided, and full- and part-time students.

**Survey data serve different purposes**

**IPEDS** data are used by government entities, policymakers, researchers, consumers, and anyone interested in the characteristics of institutions that receive Title IV funds. The data are used by policymakers to evaluate policy changes, by researchers to assess the postsecondary education landscape, and by students and parents to make college decisions.

**NPSAS, BPS, and B&B** data are used by policymakers, analysts and researchers to determine if federal student aid programs like Pell Grants and federal student loans are reaching the targeted populations. The data are used to assess how these programs are serving the intended purposes (e.g., by providing opportunity and access to postsecondary students). They can also provide key insights into the postsecondary experiences and outcomes of first-time students and bachelor’s degree recipients and allow researchers to explore other issues in higher education.
Surveys collect different data

The following highlights key information collected via each of the surveys but does not cover all collected items.

**IPEDS** collects information about the *institution*.

**Institutional Characteristics**
- Institution type and contacts
- Program/degrees offered
- Tuition & fee, room and board charges
- Acceptance rates
- Financial, human, library resources

**Student Enrollment**
- Student levels, full-time and first-time statuses
- Demographics

**Financial Aid and College Financing**
- Financial aid awarded
- Number and percent of students awarded aid

**Student Outcomes**
- Retention
- Graduation rates
- Transfers
- Degrees/certificates awarded

**NPSAS** collects information about *students* to allow for analysis of how postsecondary education is funded.

**Student Characteristics**
- Demographics
- Family background
- Education experiences
- Work history
- GPA

**Student Enrollment**
- Student levels, full-time and first-time statuses
- Field of study
- Highest degree expected

**Financial Aid and College Financing**
- Cost of attendance
- Student budgets
- Expected family contributions
- Financial aid received
- Other financial sources

**BPS** surveys first-time *students* three times to track progress over 6 years and identify factors related to persistence.

**Student Characteristics**
- Demographics and health
- Academic preparation

**Financial Aid and College Financing**
- Debt incurred by completers

**Student Outcomes**
- Persistence
- Transfers
- Degrees/certificates earned

**B&B** collects information on *students’* education, work experiences, and life after completion of the bachelor’s degree.

**Student Characteristics**
- Education experiences
- Enrollment history

**Financial Aid and College Financing**
- Costs incurred and resulting debt
- Sources of financial aid

**Student Outcomes**
- Degrees/certificate earned

**Career and Employment**
- Employment history and job search activities

Data users wishing to combine estimates from the sample surveys with IPEDS should be aware of the differences between the unit of analysis and other details for the collections. Contact NCES for further guidance.

IPEDS Data Use Help Desk  
1-866-558-0658  
ipedstools@rti.org

Sample Surveys Data Use Help Desk  
NCES.Info@rti.org
What Tools Are Available?

**IPEDS** provides several user-friendly tools through its website: [https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds](https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds).

**College Navigator** (found under the Find Your College portal) is a consumer information tool that provides comprehensive profiles of IPEDS schools.

**College Map** (found under the Find Your College portal) identifies colleges using geographic constraints as well as characteristics.

**Data Trends** (found under the Use the Data portal) shows how metrics have changed over time and allow for trend analysis by selected school characteristics.

All IPEDS data are publicly available. For a more detailed description of the tools or to access full survey data, visit the IPEDS Use the Data or Find Your College portals from the homepage.

**NPSAS, BPS, and B&B** provide three user-friendly and publicly available tools within the DataLab website: [https://nces.ed.gov/datalab](https://nces.ed.gov/datalab).

**QuickStats** is a tool designed for beginners and provides tables and simple graphs.

**PowerStats** allows users to perform powerful analytics with linear and logistic regression over thousands of variables.

**TrendStats** produces average, median, and percentage tables over time.

Advanced data users wishing to download full student-level data files for analysis will need to apply for a restricted use data license (see link under “Additional Resources” below).

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**Additional Resources**

IPEDS homepage: [https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds](https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds)

NPSAS homepage: [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/npsas/](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/npsas/)

BPS homepage: [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/bps/](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/bps/)

B&B homepage: [https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/b&b/](https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/b&b/)

NCES data user video tutorials: [https://nces.ed.gov/training/datauser/](https://nces.ed.gov/training/datauser/)

NCES restricted use data information: [https://nces.ed.gov/statprog/rudman/](https://nces.ed.gov/statprog/rudman/)