

LIBRARY ISSUES

BRIEFINGS FOR FACULTY AND ADMINISTRATORS

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Changes Coming to Collection of Federal Library Data

By William Miller

New requirements are coming for the reporting of library statistics to the United States federal government. Is your institutional research staff prepared? Beginning with this year's (2014) Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) collection process, reporting that was formerly optional and collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) will now become a mandatory part of IPEDS, with stiff penalties for institutions that do not report. In most institutions, this information has historically been collected and reported by librarians. Now, however, institutional research staff will have the ultimate reporting responsibility. Librarians will need to continue collecting these data, but they will need to coordinate with those ultimately responsible for IPEDS submission to be sure the information is collected and reported in a timely and accurate way.

Background

For those unfamiliar with the process, the acronyms of agencies and programs appears to be a bewildering alphabet soup—IPEDS, HEGIS, NCES, ALS, AL, ACRL, and ARL—but librarians who have been reporting their annual figures will be familiar with all of these. Of course, any senior academic administrator will already know about IPEDS which is an annual, federally mandated system for reporting institutional characteristics such as enrollment and financial data.

The federal collection of library information was a part of IPEDS from 1988 to 1998, but then became a separate collection process conducted by the Census Bureau's NCES, on an every-other-year basis. This collection instrument, run as part of the Higher

Education General Information Survey (HEGIS), was called the Academic Library Survey (ALS), and most academic libraries participated in it. Because library information has not been a part of IPEDS for so long, however, institutional officers working with IPEDS are now unfamiliar with the library reporting and will need to work with librarians to assure proper submission.

During the period 1998-2013, the NCES ALS collection effort was actually voluntary, and the agency struggled to achieve the 85 percent response rate it felt was necessary for validity. Indeed, in all likelihood, the fact that it was able to achieve the desired level of participation was probably attributable to the era when this data was mandatory as a part of IPEDS, and people's assumption that it was still mandatory. However, library information (in a modified form) is now once again a mandatory submission requirement within IPEDS.

Because the ALS was conducted only every other year from 1998 to 2013, and it took quite a while to publish the results, the data as finally collected and disseminated were badly out of date, and many libraries wished for more current information for comparative purposes, such as for salaries and expenditures for library materials at peer institutions. As a result, in 1998 the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) began its own annual collection of library statistics, a process which continues to this day, using the already existing, long-standing instrument of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL), a group consisting of the nation's largest research libraries. ARL membership is limited, but the ACRL annual compilation is open to all academic libraries, from the smallest community colleges to the largest research institutions. The ACRL *Academic*

Library Trends and Statistics publication is designed to come out quickly after the collection period every year, and it is now available both in print and as an electronic database which contains historical as well as current data. Participation is not mandatory but useful and highly desirable.

Key Changes you Need to Know

Beginning with the 2014-15 collection period, the federal library data collection process is being moved back into IPEDS, with several important consequences.

First, as a part of IPEDS, it will now be mandatory for all institutions desiring eligibility for federal student aid, which means virtually all institutions.

Second, there will be hard deadlines, and a \$25,000 penalty for late submission. Therefore, every institution participating in IPEDS will want to be sure that the person in charge of the submissions process (the IPEDS "Keyholder") is in touch with the library people who previously have been submitting the data to NCES/ALS. The 15 percent of institutions which had not been submitting data to the NCES effort will now want to be especially sure that someone within the library is on top of the mandatory IPEDS sections, and will be able to gather the data in a timely way.

Institutional Keyholders may want library staff to enter the information into IPEDS, but library staff will no longer be the final submitters, as they have been heretofore; only the institution's official Keyholder will be able to "lock" the survey, indicating that it is complete and is being formally submitted.

Now that the IPEDS collection of library information will be annual, some who have been participating in the annual ACRL/ARL survey may decide that such participation is no longer necessary. However, academic libraries will want to continue participating in the annual ACRL/ARL data collection process. Although the IPEDS Academic Library instrument (AL) is indeed annual, IPEDS is dropping a number of long-standing series of questions, such as those regarding salary information, and changing the nature of others, such as calculation of staffing levels. In part,

the changes are occurring because the information which NCES was collecting, and which ACRL/ARL continues to collect, does not fit the IPEDS framework or rubrics. Institutions wishing to track these lost data points will want to continue participating also in the annual data compilations of the ACRL, which is based on the annual Association of Research Libraries (ARL) instrument, which will hereafter be referred to as ACRL/ARL.

Participating in IPEDS: The Sequence of Events

Address and e-mail information for the library director and other library staff who may have submitted library data to the NCES Higher Education General Information Survey in recent years have been entered into an IPEDS database, and these people were recently sent a password which became operational on August 6, 2014. By October 15, the library person (or institutional Keyholder) will have to enter the IPEDS system and answer a question about the library budget in the Institutional Characteristics (IC) Header. What they enter will determine if the institution has to participate in the actual IPEDS survey itself, starting in early December, and if so, how extensively.

Under the old NCES/ALS system, libraries reporting less than \$10,000 in annual expenditures were exempt from the survey; this helped to improve the response rate, because schools on the periphery of academia ((like cosmetology or massage schools) really had no libraries and it was pointless to ask them to report, which they were unlikely to do anyway. However, in the new IPEDS eligibility criterion, all libraries with total expenditures of more than zero must complete Section 1 (Collections and Circulation) starting on December 10, 2014, when the IPEDS Academic Libraries (AL) collection period begins. If expenditures exceed \$100,000, the institution will also be required to complete Section 2 (Expenditures). Sections 1 and 2 must be completed by April 8, 2015.

IPEDS Academic Library Questions

Section 1—Collections and Circulation. All libraries with budgets

greater than \$10,000 must answer the questions in Section 1, which focuses on the physical and electronic holdings of the library.

The new IPEDS does not ask the question "how many serials titles does the library have/subscribe to?" It does ask if the library's collection is entirely electronic [presumably almost none are, as yet].

The other collection-related questions in Section 1 of the new IPEDS survey are in two categories: "physical" and "digital/electronic," and separate numbers are required for each. Although the number of serials titles subscribed to is gone, the number of books [not volumes] held is still there, for both physical and electronic, a growing category rapidly overtaking the physical collections in many libraries. Multi-media items, similarly, are reported both for physical and electronic items. Databases are reported only in a digital/electronic category, for obvious reasons. "Circulation," the final question in Section 1, is also reported as two numbers, either physical or digital/electronic. There is no differentiation between different kinds of circulations such as for reserve items.

Section 2—Expenditures. Libraries which report budgets greater than \$100,000, which will be almost all libraries, will have to complete this much larger, catch-all, grab-bag collection of questions about staffing, expenditures, and services.

Total salaries and wages are reported as a single dollar amount, with no differentiation of part-time, student, or temporary salaries broken out. Fringe benefits are reported, if paid by the library's budget.

As collection costs become increasingly difficult to measure because materials are subscribed to rather than purchased, perhaps as part of a database, or jointly owned in some other way, the most salient metric for academic libraries has become the total dollar amount expended on materials, without regard to how many specific items this money buys.

IPEDS will now report these dollar amounts in several categories: one-time purchases of books, serial backfiles, and other materials; ongoing commitments

to subscriptions; and other materials/service cost, which could include subscription costs for databases. Also reported separately are preservation services, and “all other operations and maintenance expenditures,” which could include everything from OCLC cataloging to service charges to vendors. All of the above is then compiled into one figure, “total expenditures.”

“Interlibrary Services,” another category in Section 2, reports the number of items loaned to other libraries, and the number of items received. These questions would have been more appropriately placed in Section 1, as part of “Circulation.” Also listed under “Interlibrary Services,” oddly, is the question “does your library support virtual reference services?” The assumption is that almost every library would respond “yes,” and that this question will be dropped in future years.

A final question in Section 2 asks for the number of branch and independent libraries, excluding the main or central library. This is a simple number.

Differences between Former NCES ALS and New IPEDS AL

The make-up of the new IPEDS Academic Library questions was decided several years ago by an IPEDS Technical Review Panel (TRP #35), a group of 42 people convened in Washington in August of 2011 to examine the contents of the NCES/ALS, and decide which questions would remain in the new IPEDS AL, which dropped altogether, and which modified. The result is an instrument that is much shorter, and varies considerably from what librarians have been used to in recent years. Many in the library world will consider the new questions a disappointment, in terms of what has been lost (though much that is no longer in the IPEDS AL is still accessible by participating also in the ACRL/ARL instrument).

Dollar Thresholds. As mentioned above, the dollar thresholds for participating in IPEDS differ considerably from those for NCES/ALS, as does the mandatory nature of the new survey. The ALS was administered every other year, while the IPEDS is annual. This will be a clear

gain for libraries seeking consistent, up-to-date comparative information, insofar as IPEDS collects such information. In terms of timing, the ALS was gathered from November through February, whereas the IPEDS IC section is gathered from early August until October, and the bulk of the library information will be collected during the Spring iteration of IPEDS, from early December through early April.

Staffing Levels. There are important differences in what questions are now going to be asked in IPEDS, compared to what had been included in the ALS. Staffing levels, which formerly was reported in the ALS, will not be reported in the *library* section of IPEDS, but rather in the *Human Resources* section of IPEDS, as a part of reporting on all institutional staffing; moreover, the information will not be reported by library staff but rather by whomever is reporting on institutional staffing. In addition, whereas ALS reported library staff in terms of librarians, other staff, and student assistants, all in terms of FTE, IPEDS uses the Bureau of Labor Statistics Standard Occupational Classification (SOC), and will report only three categories of staff in libraries: Librarians; Library technicians; and Archivists, Curators, and Museum Technicians. Student staff will presumably be one category for the whole institution.

These three categories lack definition and are very problematic. The definition of “librarian” in the SOC does not include a master’s degree in library or information science, or indeed, any degree whatsoever. Presumably, library staff will have to clarify with the institution’s person reporting staffing in the Human Resources section regarding who is a librarian, and who library technicians are. It is unclear how to categorize the increasing number of non-librarian professionals (such as computing professionals) increasingly being employed in libraries. Libraries will be left to grapple with where to assign professional staff without degrees in library science. Moreover, IPEDS will report positions only in terms of part-

time or full-time, as in done elsewhere in IPEDS, rather than by FTE, so much of the precision offered by ALS will now be lost, unless libraries are also participating in the ACRL/ARL annual *Academic Library Trends and Statistics* survey.

Library Collections. The ALS included information on individual items added during the reporting year; IPEDS will report only a total count of the collection, at the end of the most recent fiscal year (both physical and electronic).

Library Services. ALS asked about library instructional sessions (“information services to groups”); IPEDS eliminates this question. IPEDS also eliminates a number of other questions which ALS contained, such as the number of database searches conducted. The number of reference questions asked during a typical week is eliminated because IPEDS does not operate based on typical weeks and the definition of “typical week” is elusive. Questions about electronic services have been eliminated because these services have become common, and questions about information literacy have been eliminated because “IPEDS doesn’t collect information about discipline-based standards.” As mentioned above, one question, “does your library support virtual reference services?,” is still being asked, but all other questions in this area are eliminated, and this question itself will probably be omitted in future years.

Summation of Library Data Lost in New IPEDS

When we look at the transition from NCES/ALS to IPEDS/AL, it becomes obvious that much is being lost:

- No FTE count for staffing levels
- No separate expenditures for electronic and audiovisual one-time purchases
- No separate expenditures for electronic serials as serial subscriptions
- No separate expenditures for document delivery/interlibrary loan

- No separate expenditures for other kinds of information resources
- No separate expenditures for computer hardware and software
- No separate expenditures for bibliographic utilities, networks, and consortia
- No counts for books, serial backfiles, or other paper materials added during the FY
- No counts for e-books, microforms, and audiovisual materials added during the FY
- No counts for e-books, microforms, and audiovisual materials held at end of FY
- No separate counts for returnable and non-returnable materials provided or received from other libraries through interlibrary loan
- No separate count for documents received from commercial services
- No separate counts for general and reserve circulation transactions
- No count for information services to groups (number of presentations)
- No total attendance for all presentations
- No reporting of weekly public service hours
- No gate counts
- No information literacy information collected
- No counts of email, chat, instant messaging, SMS, or text messages
- No salary information beyond one aggregated number

Therefore, librarians will want an instrument that allows them to continue to do things such as determine what an appropriate level of materials expenditures might be for different kinds of resources.

ACRL Metrics: Combining ACRL/ARL, IPEDS, and NCES ALS Data

Clearly, the new state of federal data collection is resulting in some loss of data and capability for longitudinal comparison. However, by participating in the ARL/ACRL instrument and subscribing to ACRL's ACRLmetrics web-based subscription service online, one can ameliorate the situation. This online service combines current and historical data from all of these surveys, and provides a cross-walk between data elements in the different surveys. It also allows individual libraries to import their own data and conduct peer comparison and longitudinal analysis, and produce customized reports. A powerpoint presentation, payment details, invoicing, and pricing are available at <http://www.ACRLmetrics.com> The product is also available as an annual print publication, which contains the latest year of information and also a series of trends questions on topics such as changes in use of library space which many will find useful.

A listing of the questions in the ACRL/ARL instrument indicates the degree of precision which many librarians will find useful:

- Number of professional staff (FTE)
- Number of support staff (FTE)
- Number of student assistants (FTE)
- Number of presentations to groups

- Number of participants in group presentations
- Number of reference transactions
- Number of initial circulation transactions
- Number of successful full-text article requests
- Number of regular database searches
- Number of federated searches in databases
- Total items loaned (ILL)
- Total items borrowed (ILL)
- Total library expenditures
- Total library expenditures for materials
- One-time resource purchases
- Collection Support
- Salaries and wages, professional staff
- Salaries and wages, support staff
- Salaries and wages, student assistants
- Other operating expenditures
- Fringe benefits

Clearly, this is a level of detail which the new IPEDS, despite its simplicity, is simply not designed to offer. The new IPEDS instrument represents a major shift in the reporting of library information, which many will want to supplement with other surveys that more fully meet their information needs. —*miller@fau.edu*

Appendix

IPEDS maintains a Resource Page at <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/resource/alscenter.asp>. This page contains definitions and instructions, FAQs, and a comparison chart for ALS and AL variables. There is also an IPEDS help desk at 1-877-225-2568, ipedshelp@rti.org



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