

Alabama
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History

1. When was the student unit-record (SUR) system established?
1996.
2. By whom?
Alabama Legislature.
3. For what purpose (e.g., resource allocation/funding formula, IPEDS, tracking student retention/ graduation, tracking students across institutions)?
High school tracking, retention, graduation, and tuition/residency.

Coverage

1. What institutions are included in your SUR system?
2-year and 4-year public institutions.
2. Are any independent institutions included (number or percentage)? What about proprietary institutions? Are different kinds of data or different schedules for data collection used for any of these institutions?
Independent institutions have been encouraged to participate; however, none have done so.
3. Are there plans to expand the system's coverage in terms of institutions? Please explain.
We will continue to encourage Independent institutions to participate.
4. When are data of which type collected (e.g. term/quarter/semester census date, annual, end of term, etc.)? Other reporting cycles?
Enrollment data is gathered each term. Completions data is gathered once a year.
5. Are there plans to collect data more frequently or on a different cycle?
Not at this time.
6. Is non-credit enrollment or instructional activity covered (e.g. ABE, ESL, GED, other job-related continuing education activity, etc.)? If so, is this in a separate database and what data elements are captured?
No non-credit enrollment.

Data Management and Manipulation

1. Who has authority over changing data elements and definitions?
[Alabama Commission on Higher Education \(ACHE\) Executive Director in consultation with a committee of institutional representatives \(Higher Education Information Advisory Group\).](#)
2. Are SSNs used as a key link? If they are not, what is used instead? Are there immediate or long-range plans to discontinue use of the SSN as a key link?
[We use a student ID which is an encrypted SSN for those students who have a SSN. No plans at this time to discontinue use of the SSN.](#)
3. Can campuses access datasets (unit records) themselves -- access in what terms (results, unit record data after it has been cleaned, unit-record data value added). If yes, who has access and how is this managed?
[No -- the campuses may request ad-hoc summary reports.](#)
4. How do you handle privacy and FERPA issues? Do you have an explicit privacy policy and/or policies governing the use of SUR data by third parties such as institutions and researchers?
[We handle FERPA issues very carefully... We only release summary reports – we don't release any unit records.](#)
5. Have any FERPA or privacy issues come up recently in your state? If so, how have they affected your ability to use student record information?
[No FERPA or privacy issues have come up recently in our state.](#)
6. Do you link SUR data within your state to other databases?
[We link to high school graduates and 2-year public colleges. We do the matches in our office and only produce summary reports.](#)
7. Have you cooperated with other state higher education agencies to share data? If so, please explain.
[No.](#)

Reporting and Use of Data

1. What kinds of statistics and reports are generated regularly using SUR data?

Main source of information:

<http://www.ache.state.al.us/InstResearch/InstUsers.htm>

Various reports found on the web at:

www.ache.state.al.us/Abstract0405/Student%20Database/Index.htm

We also produced Institutional Student Profiles which can be found at:
www.ache.state.al.us/Profiles/Index.htm

Student Source Survey Reports which can be found at:
www.ache.state.al.us/Information/StatisticalInfo/SSSFall2004/Index.htm

2. If graduation and retention statistics are generated for institutions (or for the state or system as a whole), how are they calculated (e.g. IPEDS Graduation Rate Survey method, other methods)?
We haven't published graduation rates yet. Retention data is reported (Fall to Fall report that includes both full-time and part-time cohort).
3. What kinds of research projects have recently been undertaken by the state or system using SUR data resources?
We are working on an accountability project with the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education to provide transfer data to them that will show them how their transfer students performed at 4-year institutions. That report is in its final stages, but has not yet been released.
4. What are the biggest challenges you face with respect to using SUR data resources for analysis and reporting?
The biggest challenge is getting the data from all of the institutions by the published deadlines. We spend a tremendous amount of time holding their hands and encouraging them to submit the data. We currently have a lack of programming personnel – which wouldn't be as significant a problem if I could release my analyst from the follow-up mentioned above.

Overview

1. Have there been any significant developments in regards to your SUR system since 2002?
Last year we gave all of the institutions an executable program (visual basic) that they can run at their institutions to edit their data before it is sent to us. We accept only one submission from each institution each term. This process has cut down on our workload tremendously and the institutions also like the fact that they get immediate feedback and know where problems exist without waiting for us to receive and edit the data.