

Alaska (University System)
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History

1. When was the student unit-record (SUR) system established?
1997.
2. By whom?
Statewide Institutional Research.
3. For what purpose (e.g., resource allocation/funding formula, IPEDS, tracking student retention/ graduation, tracking students across institutions)?
Internal and external reporting are compiled from the database, including IPEDS and other surveys, retention and graduation rates, fact books and ad hoc queries.

Coverage

1. What institutions are included in your SUR system?
This is a system wide structure with 3 campuses (community colleges are part of the system as they are part of the three campuses).
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?
No.
3. Are there plans to expand the system's coverage in terms of institutions? Please explain.
No.
4. When are data of which type collected (e.g. term/quarter/semester census date, annual, end of term, etc.)? Other reporting cycles?
Student data are collected approximately three weeks after classes have begun each fall and spring semester and approximately four weeks after those semesters have concluded. In addition, summer semester data is collected approximately four weeks after the summer semester has ended.
5. Are there plans to collect data more frequently or on a different cycle?
No.
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?
Yes, we collect in the same database 1) CEU or continuing education units; 2) remedial courses; and 3) ESL courses.

Data Management and Manipulation

1. Who has authority over changing data elements and definitions?
Depends on what is changing. Mostly we meet by committee (a Banner User Group) and decide what changes. If it is something that the feds want, then we can change that here in my office – the Office of Planning, Analysis & Institutional Research.
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?
No – three years ago we made a break from SSNs to a unique student ID number. These numbers are generated through our Banner System (all campuses use Banner) and the number generated stays with you throughout your educational career – even if you switch colleges. We do NOT collect SSNs from students on a compulsory basis. We do not require SSN reporting since we moved over to our new system of student ID numbers. If a student wishes to volunteer the information, we do take it. This policy may change back to a compulsory requirement due to tax purposes in the near future.
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?
Yes, every campus has a research group (IR) that has access through a series of online secure log-ins. They can access all cleaned unit record data. Because of staffing issues, we do a lot of reports for various campuses though.
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 do not carry an official FERPA statement. We do have a legal opinion from our General Counsel regarding FERPA. Basically, this policy dictates that we are not to violate FERPA. My group, UAF Planning, Analysis and Institutional Research, does carry a statement in its website at: <http://www.uaf.edu/pair/about.html>

"IR staff members carry out their work with the guidance of the Association for Institutional Researchers Code of Ethics, UAFs guidelines for research involving human subjects, and Federal FERPA policy." I should point out that whenever we are unclear, and the issue is pressed, that we do defer to our General Counsel for a legal ruling. I have done this in the past.
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.

6. Do you link SUR data within your state to other databases?
We try. We do work with the department of labor and in the past we worked with the department of education. We tried to work with K-12 and may try again. Our office works with a pre-determined schedule and puts together the match and sends out the information.
7. Have you cooperated with other state higher education agencies to share data? If so, please explain.
No. We do share summary data with Washington state higher education board and the University of Wyoming (sort of a comparison of tuition, FTEs, etc.). We do not transfer student unit record data with these agencies.

Reporting and Use of Data

1. What kinds of statistics and reports are generated regularly using SUR data?
Regular reports can be found on the Web site: <http://www.alaska.edu/oir/>. These included an annual fact book, IPEDS surveys, campus profiles, vocational education reporting with the state department of labor, opening semester reports and others.
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)?
Yes we do generate graduation and retention statistics for institutions and for the state as a whole. We use the IPEDS graduation Rate Survey method and occasionally use our own method – depending on what we need.
3. What kinds of research projects have recently been undertaken by the state or system using SUR data resources?
Research on money and how it is spent;
Projections;
Looking at distance education;
On-line performance based budget:
 - a. Tracking measures of student performance
 - b. Tracking measures of faculty performance
 - c. Researching development education
4. What are the biggest challenges you face with respect to using SUR data resources for analysis and reporting?
Our biggest challenge is our data – our rural campuses have a chronic problem with entering data late. I am not sure if it is a staffing issue or an environmental issue, but whatever the reason, the data is always late or incomplete. However, by the end of the term the data is there and complete – but this is after I want to run reports.

Overview

1. Have there been any significant developments in regards to your SUR system since 2002?

We have added a field that tracks military service or relation to military – in this way we can track the effect of closing a military base in Alaska (this issue came up a few years ago and we were caught off guard, now we can talk about this issue intelligently).

Start dates for each campus is different – we are working on this and by the fall of 2007 all start dates will be the same.

2. Is there anything that you would like to add that we have not addressed?

How important it is to understand the data and how much time our office staff takes in helping people (government, institutional, public) understand what the data really means...