

**California (State Universities – CSU)  
Philip Garcia**

**History**

1. When was the student unit record (SUR) system established?  
Sometime in the 1970s.
2. By whom?  
The California State University (CSU) system, Chancellor's office.
3. For what purpose (e.g., resource allocation/funding formula, IPEDS, tracking student retention/ graduation, tracking students across institutions)?  
Regular term reports, IPEDS, tracking student retention/graduation, state budget requests and accountability.

**Coverage**

1. What institutions are included in your SUR system?  
23 campuses – all CSU sites.
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?  
None.
3. Are there plans to expand the system's coverage in terms of institutions? Please explain.  
No, only if we add another CSU campus.
4. When are data of which type collected (e.g. term/quarter/semester census date, annual, end of term, etc.)? Other reporting cycles?  
Census data – Every campus sends us data 2 weeks (for trimester and quarter campuses) and 3 weeks (for semester campuses) after term the starts. We have a mixed system, so we receive data quite often.
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 count pre-collegiate courses (these are courses that count for student status, but not for graduation). In essence, these are remedial courses. This is in the same database.

## Data Management and Manipulation

1. Who has authority over changing data elements and definitions?  
My office makes the change based on discussions with the Chancellor of the system. We also attempt to get buy in from all campus presidents. However, if the change is mandated from the Federal government or from the State government – we pretty much just do it and let people know what is happening. If the change comes from the Board, then we do try and get the buy in.
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?  
Yes, it is the major part of the link (which includes other items like campus number, etc.). We have no plan to discontinue the use of SSN.
3. Can campuses access datasets themselves? If yes, who has access and how is this managed?  
Well, not really. Each campus sends us the data and if they want aggregate data or help with a report we do that from our end and send it back to the campus.
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?  
Security is handled by the CSU corporate information and technology services. FERPA issues are handled by academic affairs (academic research and student academic support coordinators), with legal advice provided by the office of general counsel. We maintain a firewall and encryption – we make a good effort in maintaining confidentiality. This is a constant battle.
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 new FERPA issues lately.
6. Do you link SUR data within your state to other databases?  
No, not really. We do have several M.U. (memorandum of understanding) with both the University of California (UC) system and the Community College (CC) system. The High School (HS) system is working on putting together an electronic transcript for each student with a new unique identifier – but this is not finished yet. I anticipate having a MU with the HS when they are ready. We have also talked about linking with employment records, but the security would have to be similar and it currently is not.
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?  
We have quite a bit of reports generated regularly using SUR data – please see our web site at: <http://www.asd.calstate.edu/>
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 use IPEDS graduation rate methods. However, we go way beyond reporting just for IPEDS, we generate quite a bit of information for both the state as a whole and for individual institutions (see web site).
3. What kinds of research projects have recently been undertaken by the state or system using SUR data resources?  
Mostly we do projections (action research or policy research).
4. What are the biggest challenges you face with respect to using SUR data resources for analysis and reporting?
  - a. People think that we are big brother – particularly politicians and their staff. We do not keep individual record data, just aggregate data. We are constantly asked questions that we can not and should not answer. People want to know about an individual's student record (e.g., tell me about Marianne Boeke's grades, advisor, classes, etc.) and we do not have that.
  - b. Collecting data is becoming burdensome for the campuses – we have 85 elements for 400,000 people.
  - c. Data integrity – as we ask for more data (and data is not original, it flows from the individual campuses) we need to think about the quality of our data.

## Overview

1. Have there been any significant developments in regards to your SUR system since 2002?  
Not really, we have a staff of eight that focus just on this issue – the amount of data we collect and the number of reports required is becoming difficult to keep up with. I think it would be very hard for other states to do this level of reporting without a significant budget and staff. Furthermore, we need to educate our politicians and public about the realities of collecting data – this is aggregate data, not individual. People have a misconception about what we really know and about what we can report.