

New York (SUNY)
John Porter

History

1. When was the student unit-record (SUR) system established?
The SUNY Student Data File (SDF) was initiated by the System Office of Institutional Research in 1978, but not all campuses were on the file initially. Within five years (Fall 1983), we had approximately 50 percent participation and roughly 90 percent participation within 10 years (Fall 1988). The last six or seven campuses were difficult to get on board, but we finally got 100 percent (all 64 institutions) in fall 2001. The SUNY Statutory Colleges (Cornell Statutory, Ceramics at Alfred) are not considered private institutions, although they are closely affiliated with privates (Cornell Endowed and Alfred University).
2. By whom?
System Office of Institutional Research.
3. For what purpose (e.g., resource allocation/funding formula, IPEDS, tracking student retention/ graduation, tracking students across institutions)?
The purpose of the file includes all of those mentioned above. Enrollment planning, academic planning, budget/resource allocation, internal reporting and analysis, external reporting (IPEDS and NYS Education Department), student tracking — both attrition/retention/grad rate, as well as tracking transfer students across the system or using National Student Clearinghouse data into non-SUNY institutions.

Coverage

1. What institutions are included in your SUR system?
All of the sixty one institutions in the State University of New York (SUNY): 29 campuses operated by the State of New York, 2 private colleges with contracts to provide education to the citizens of the State of New York (Cornell and Alfred University), and 30 community colleges.
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?
2 independent colleges. 30 community colleges. The community colleges do not participate in data collections leading to calculating the cost per credit hour.
3. Are there plans to expand the system's coverage in terms of institutions? Please explain.
Yes. We are completing the third year of five year project to replace all of the SUR systems. Also, we have completed an enrollment data warehouse and are in the process of implementing a degree warehouse.

4. When are data of which type collected (e.g. term/quarter/semester census date, annual, end of term, etc.)? Other reporting cycles?
The new system captures instructional activity during the entire academic year, regardless of term. The current system captures instructional information on various census dates.
5. Are there plans to collect data more frequently or on a different cycle?
See answers to #4.
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?
We capture aggregate non-credit instructional activity, registrations, total contact hours, type of instruction, on an annual basis. Non-credit instruction approved for state support, e.g., remedial instruction leading to college-level courses work, on a unit record basis.

Data Management and Manipulation

1. Who has authority over changing data elements and definitions?
Most data elements and their definitions are maintained by the office of institutional research. However, our practice is to consult with campuses before changes are implemented. A few data elements are grounded in System policy and/or legislation. These elements may not be changed without higher approval.
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?
Currently, yes. In the new system, no. The new system assigns a unique identifier to a student based on a matching algorithm that includes various data elements identifying the student. Campuses are required to store the System ID in the student's record and use the ID when reporting information concerning the student to the System.
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?
Each campus currently receives a unit record file of their students. We are discussing the possibility of making unit record data, without student identifying information, available to all campuses. Whether or not this happens depends on support issues.
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 make unit record available to third parties unless System attorneys approve the release.
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?

Not so far. We are very strict in following FERPA, which probably why these issues have not surfaced in the past.

6. Do you link SUR data within your state to other databases?
No. It is the position of System attorneys that such linking activities violate FERPA, unless required by legislation, or with the specific provisions of FERPA concerning such disclosures.
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?
Student enrollment and characteristics, retention and graduation rates mostly.
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)?
IPEDS GRS.
3. What kinds of research projects have recently been undertaken by the state or system using SUR data resources?
No response.
4. What are the biggest challenges you face with respect to using SUR data resources for analysis and reporting (e.g. data configuration/structure, lack of programming personnel time, staff resources for analysis, etc.)?
FERPA exclusions need to be updated to facilitate the dynamic nature of today's higher education students, e.g., today's students are mobile and tend to attend multiple institutions in completing their higher education goals.

Overview

1. Can you give me a quick update on events affecting the SUR database since 2002? Have there been any significant developments in regards to SUR (like use of different technology, use of web for data submission by institutions, legal issues)?
Our five year project will greatly improve the quality of SUNY's SUR information and the integration of the data within SUNY.
2. Is there anything that you would like to add that we have not addressed?
No response.