

Washington (Community and Technical Colleges)
Lorretta Seppanen

History

1. When was the student unit-record (SUR) system established?
The State Board Data Warehouse was established in 1994. An earlier version of unit records for the system has existed since 1972.
2. By whom?
Washington Community and Technical Colleges.
3. For what purpose (e.g., resource allocation/funding formula, IPEDS, tracking student retention/ graduation, tracking students across institutions)?
For the purpose of policy management (research, analysis, state/federal reporting requirements, and resource allocation).

Coverage

1. What institutions are included in your SUR system?
All public community and technical colleges in the state.
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?
Enrollment and personal data are collected quarterly.
Financial aid data is collected monthly.
Asset data is collected annually.
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, everything is collected. We collect transcript level data on all courses (non-credit and credit) and keep it in the same database.

Data Management and Manipulation

1. Who has authority over changing data elements and definitions?
The state board has the authority, but it is a very collegial process. Each unit (registrars, financial aid, and personnel) meets quarterly to discuss issues.
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 it is not. The key link is a made up ID number – however, we do collect the SSN and use it for some of our links with outside agencies.
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, sort of. The institutions have access to their own data. The data is collected and cleaned and then sent back to the institution.
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?
Yes we have a policy and we have state laws that govern the process.
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?
Yes, we have linked with the UI Wage Record since 1989 and also with the public four-year institutions and just recently the National Clearinghouse. We also are working with K-12 to begin linking with them.
7. Have you cooperated with other state higher education agencies to share data? If so, please explain.
Yes, we link consistently with Oregon and quite often with Idaho and Alaska. In all of these cases we are linking with their 4 year public system and their community college system. We have a standard matching agreement and share data annually.

Reporting and Use of Data

1. What kinds of statistics and reports are generated regularly using SUR data?
We have an academic year report (annual) and an enrollment and staffing report (annual).
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 this, but we began with our system prior to IPEDS determining their method, so we came up with a methodology that took student progress into account – we use the Student Progress Indicator. Basically this is a way in which to calculate graduation and retention statistics by taking a cohort of students and tracking them over 7 quarters.
3. What kinds of research projects have recently been undertaken by the state or system using SUR data resources?
We do lots of research! We have been working on research around dislocated workers; low income workers; and how students transition from K-12 to college.
4. What are the biggest challenges you face with respect to using SUR data resources for analysis and reporting?
Because we have had a SUR database system for a long time and it was designed for policy work, we have quite a bit of data to work with – however the biggest challenge is perhaps with narrowing our data sets. We tend to look at large aggregate data, and this is important but increasingly we have been asked to look at just 18 year olds or just those who receive welfare and we have certain challenges to doing this minute type of data analysis.

Overview

1. Have there been any significant developments in regards to your SUR system since 2002?
I think the two most important events in the last several years are 1) an attempt to link our data with the K-12 system and 2) a project with Columbia University. We are just completing our first data link and with the K-12 system beginning to collect more transcript level data this linkage will prove important. We also are working on a project with Columbia University to determine if we are serving, under-serving, or over-serving certain populations. We are working with census data addresses, the project has come up with 140 units based on census address and we are using this as the base in which to determine how well we are serving certain groups.
2. Is there anything that you would like to add that we have not addressed?
I think we covered it.