

About the Data

The data in these reports are obtained from the U.S. Department of Education's Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). The metrics were developed by the Delta Project on Postsecondary Education Costs, Productivity, and Accountability (Delta Cost Project).

The Delta Cost Project was originally an independent nonprofit organization supported by the Lumina Foundation for Education. It can be accessed at: <http://www.deltacostproject.org/>

The Delta Cost Project had as its purpose the development of data and policy tools to improve productivity and public accountability for performance in postsecondary education. The thinking behind the Delta Cost Project was that college costs could be contained through better use of data to inform strategic decision making.

The Delta Cost Project had three basic questions regarding the financing of higher education:

1. Where does the money come from?
2. Where does the money go?
3. What does the money buy?

To answer these questions the Delta Cost Project developed several aggregate measures relying on data obtained from IPEDS. IPEDS data is in the public domain and is reported by the institutions themselves. IPEDS consists of nine annual interrelated surveys of higher education institutions. Survey topics include finances, 12-month enrollments, and completions. All postsecondary institutions that participate in federal financial aid programs are required to complete these surveys. Nationwide this is over 7,000 institutions, including public and private universities and colleges, community colleges, for-profit institutions, and non-degree granting schools such as business and beauty colleges. In Washington state about 125 institutions report annually. IPEDS can be accessed at: <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>

The IPEDS finance surveys are based on each institution's annual general purpose financial statement. These financial statements, along with the IPEDS finance survey, can follow different accounting procedures. Private institutions follow FASB (Financial Accounting Standards Board) standards and most public institutions follow GASB (Governmental Accounting Standards Board) standards. These respective standards have also changed over time. These variations required the Delta Cost Project to define and adjust the reported financial statements to allow for comparability between private and public institutions and over time. The ERDC followed the Delta Cost Project definitions and adjustments.

The Delta Cost Project developed measures looking at:

Revenue: Total operating revenue per FTE student and the sources of this revenue such as tuition, state appropriations, private gifts and investment returns, as well as other dedicated revenue sources like federal grants and contracts and auxiliary enterprises.

Expenditures: Operating budget spending per FTE student organized into broad categories such as education-related expenditures consisting of spending on instruction, student services and a prorated share of spending on academic support, institutional support, and operations and maintenance, as well as spending on research and public services, scholarships and fellowships, and auxiliary enterprises.

Subsidies: Comparing tuition revenue and education-related expenditures to parse the "student share of cost" and the "average subsidy."

Outcomes and Spending: Measuring performance by (1) comparing degrees earned and total completions to the number of students enrolled, and (2) comparing education-related expenditures to degrees earned and total completions.

All financial data are reported per full-time equivalent (FTE) student and can be shown in current or inflation-adjusted dollars using either the IPD-PCE (Implicit Price Deflator for Personal Consumption Expenditures, Bureau of Economic Analysis) or the HECA (Higher Education Cost Adjustment Index, State Higher Education Executive Officers Association).