

# Memorandum

United States Department of Education  
Institute of Education Sciences  
National Center for Education Statistics

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TO: Edie McArthur  
Assistant to the Commissioner

September 25, 2006

FROM: James Griffith  
Postsecondary Studies Division, NCES

SUBJECT: 2007-08 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:08), OMB  
Clearance for Early Contacting of Postsecondary Institutions

NCES is submitting this “cognitive work” package to request OMB clearance for early contacting of postsecondary institutions for the field test component of the 2008 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:08).

The attached sections of the OMB package outline the procedures for selecting, contacting, and securing information from institutions and students included in the NPSAS:08 field test and full scale studies. It is our intent to request OMB clearance for the NPSAS:08 contract in three phases. These phases and the reasons for this staged process are detailed in the remainder of this memorandum.

The NPSAS:08 contract was awarded with a number of design options, including the option either to design and implement a study that would produce nationally-representative results, consistent with all previous rounds of NPSAS, or to enhance the study design to provide for representative results for all 50 states, DC and Puerto Rico, as well as nationally. The decision to exercise the latter, state-representative, option would require new legislative authorization as well as appropriation of funding to cover the additional costs associated with collecting data from much larger institution and student samples. Unfortunately, reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) has been significantly delayed by congressional debate, and federal budget constraints severely exacerbated by the devastation of Hurricane Katrina and the war in Iraq. These factors have delayed decisions regarding NPSAS:08 study design options, eventually requiring NCES to decide not to exercise the state-representative design option but rather to proceed with the design and conduct of a nationally-representative NPSAS:08 as mandated under current HEA legislation.

Because of these design uncertainties and associated schedule delays, NCES was not able to submit the entire NPSAS:08 clearance package to OMB earlier to allow meeting the scheduling requirements for timely completion of NPSAS:08 field test and full scale study activities and products. To resolve these scheduling issues, we propose to request clearance from OMB to conduct the NPSAS:08 study in 3 phases:

- Phase 1 – the current “cognitive work” clearance request – is for early contacting of 300 institutions selected for the field test, beginning as soon as possible.
- Phase 2 will request clearance for field test institutional and student data collection as well as early contacting of full scale sample institutions. Concurrent with the Phase 1 request, NCES is submitting a separate memorandum and accompanying OMB clearance materials, and requesting clearance for Phase 2 activities within a 120 days or by January 25, 2007.
- Phase 3 will request clearance for full-scale survey implementation, including student sample selection and institutional and student data collection. This clearance package will reflect results of the field test and will be accompanied by a memorandum highlighting changes in the Phase 2 package and field test instruments and procedures resulting from field test findings and recommendations of the study Technical Review Panel. This full scale clearance request will be submitted in late September 2008 requesting receipt of clearance by mid-January 2008.

The cognitive work clearance requested herein is needed in order to obtain a high participation rate among the 300 institutions selected for the NPSAS:08 field test by providing advance notification to these institutions that they have been selected for the study and by letting them know that a list of enrolled students will be requested once we have full clearance from OMB (i.e., Phase 2 approval).

Experience in conducting previous cycles of NPSAS and the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF) has indicated that early contact and advance notification with sampled institutions is invaluable to obtaining adequate participation by institutional respondents. Because institutional contacting is the first stage of the study, upon which all other stages are dependent, obtaining the cooperation of as many institutions as possible is critical. The consent and cooperation of an institution’s chief administrator is essential, helping to encourage the timely completion of the institutional tasks.

By contacting institutions early, we allow them the time to consult the necessary review committees at their institutions (e.g., IRBs) before enrollment lists are needed. Additionally, the advance notification allows institutions time to plan for the staffing and resources required for timely completion of the upcoming study activities. Our initial contact with institutions involves asking that they assign a coordinator for the study and we ask them for descriptive information about their institution (e.g., term structures, etc.), and establish a schedule for obtaining enrollment lists. We provide the coordinator with information about the study, and contact information if they need assistance in determining whether and how their institution will participate in the study. More detail about the planned procedures for early institutional contacting (to be implemented in both the field test and full-scale studies) is provided in part 3-a of Section B of the attached supporting statement.

We look forward to receiving a cognitive work clearance (Phase 1 approval) from OMB in the near future. If there are any questions about what we are requesting or the information contained in the attached OMB package, I can be reached at 202-502-7387.

