

**Study of Pell Grant Recipients Who Transfer Among  
Eligible Institutions**

**Request for OMB Clearance**

**Supporting Statement A**

**Revised August 19, 2008**

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## Section A. Justification.

This is a request for clearance for an exploratory survey of Pell Grant recipients who transferred from one institution to another as well as for a transcript review component to validate survey responses. The survey results will be used to: (1) inform the development of more in-depth studies, which may utilize more comprehensive methodology, and (2) help the Department prepare informational materials to educate aid recipients about the transfer process.

Informational materials might include the following:

- Identifying recipients who transfer based on information that Federal Student Aid receives on Pell Grant disbursements, and sending recipients an e-mail with information about the transfer process and general questions to ask their receiving institution regarding credit transfer.
- Producing materials for students about issues to consider when planning to transfer between institutions—similar to the Department’s *Federal Aid First* brochure—that might include questions to ask students’ sending and receiving institutions.

Given the limited scope of this survey, informational materials will **not** include prevalence estimates based on collected data. In addition, the results of the survey will not be used for Departmental policy purposes or be used to promulgate regulations related to transfer of credit.

The survey is a telephone/web survey of 200 past Pell Grant recipients who attended one institution in 2004-05, and transferred to another in 2005-06. The primary data collection mode will be through computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI), but the sample members will first be notified of the survey by mail and also given the option of responding over the web.

The survey is a cooperative effort involving the Office of the Under Secretary within the U.S. Department of Education (ED), the Office of Postsecondary Education (OPE), and the Office of Vocational and Adult Education (OVAE). Westat will conduct the data collection and prepare the final report. To facilitate completion of the survey over a short time period, we plan to include a \$10 check as a financial incentive; we will include the check as part of the original mailing based on evidence that prepaid incentives are more effective than incentives paid after the survey is completed. Also, for those students who send transcripts to us, we will pay an additional \$10 in recognition of the saved costs relating to the transcript portion of this study.

### **A.1. Circumstances Making Collection of Information Necessary.**

The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education found anecdotal, but frequently mentioned, evidence that transfer students experience barriers due to the denial of credits that they earned at their previous institution. Such barriers both increase the cost of education and delay the entry of the students into the workforce. ED's primary need now is for an exploratory study to determine what barriers exist and the extent to which they are a problem. Later, ED may consider a more comprehensive and scientific survey or other study to generalize the results to all Pell grant recipient or federal student financial aid recipients who transfer.

### **A.2. Purposes and Uses of Information.**

The new study will have the following purposes:

- The study will examine the enrollment and financial aid experiences of Pell Grant recipients who transferred from one institution to another.
- Given the percentage of students who begin their postsecondary education career at community colleges, this study will focus specifically on students who start at a community college and take one of four transfer pathways out. These pathways include transferring to 2-year public, 2-year private, 4-year public, or 4-year private institutions.
- At a minimum, the study will examine and include the following factors:
  1. The general types of courses (academic or technical) that were accepted and courses that were not accepted by the receiving institution;
  2. The costs to students associated with transferring between institutions and with the denial of credit transfers; and
  3. The extent to which any repeated/extra courses are perceived to have similar or little of the same content, and the grades earned in repeated/extra courses at both sending and receiving institutions.

### **A.3. Appropriate Use of Information Technology.**

This survey will be conducted by telephone using CATI. The potential respondent will also be given the opportunity to complete the survey using the web as an alternative to telephone interviewing. Both technologies allow the use of computerized skip patterns so that only the appropriate questions are presented to the respondent, computerized edits are performed to check the quality of the data as it is entered, and data are recorded electronically without a separate step of data entry. Both data collection forms will be developed simultaneously using a software package designed for such purposes.

An electronic database will be used to track all sampled cases in order to determine where and if further followup is required.

Computer edits will be performed to verify the completeness of the questionnaire and consistency of the data that are collected. For example, computer edits include whether a subset of responses add to the total, whether skip patterns have been followed correctly, whether values fall outside of the range that is typically found for such schools, and whether some responses might be logically inconsistent.

### **A.4. Efforts to Identify Duplication.**

Most previous studies of student transfers have involved the analysis of articulation agreements at higher education institutions. This study represents the first attempt to explore the number of students who might be affected, and the ways in which they are affected by restrictions on accepting transfer credits from other postsecondary institutions. The data thus will be new data. Further, some data will be obtained from the respondents' FAFSA applications, avoiding the need to collect the data on the questionnaire, and more specific data may be collected through the transcript analysis.

### **A.5. Methods Used to Minimize Burden on Small Entities.**

Not applicable. Pell Grant recipients will be contacted directly through information supplied on their FAFSA without involving small businesses or other small entities.

### **A.6. Frequency of Data Collection.**

This is a one-time data collection, which will be supplemented by a transcript analysis. ED later may sponsor a more comprehensive study to ascertain the extent of the problems identified through this exploratory study.

This study is intended to help students to complete postsecondary degrees. A failure to help students with problems in transferring courses could lead to lower student degree completion rates, increased costs for students in terms of education expenses and delayed entry into the workforce, and increased costs of Federal support if students' postsecondary education is unnecessarily extended.

#### **A.7. Special Circumstances of Data Collection.**

Not applicable. The full data collection period allows more than 30 days for data collection, though the sample members will be encouraged to complete the survey more quickly. No other special circumstances apply.

#### **A.8. Consultants Outside the Agency.**

Due to the compressed schedule for survey development, no outside consultants were used.

#### **A.9. Provision of Payments or Gifts to Respondents.**

Respondents will be paid an incentive of \$10 to complete the survey and sign the transcript permission form. Without the use of an incentive, we may not be able to obtain the goal of 200 completed surveys and 400 transcripts.

In addition, students often are able to download unofficial copies of their transcripts at no cost. We will pay students \$10 to send copies of their transcripts (by email or fax to a toll-free number), in compensation for their own time and costs (e.g., for their download time on the Internet), and in recognition of the reduced data collection costs for collecting transcripts. Students who only give permission for Westat to collect the transcripts will not receive the second incentive since there will be no reduction in data collection costs for such students.

#### **A.10. Assurance of Confidentiality.**

Westat and ED will treat the data as confidential, based on the *Privacy Act of 1974* and as amended under the *U.S.A. Patriot Act of 2001*.

All survey respondents will be informed that this is a voluntary survey in a survey cover letter. The cover letter will also state that **their responses will be protected under the Privacy Act and will not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as provided by law.**

All Westat staff members working on the project and having access to the data (including monitoring of interviews) are required to sign a Westat Pledge of Confidentiality (see Appendix D).

#### **A.11. Sensitive Questions.**

Not applicable. No questions on the survey are sensitive.

#### **A.12. Estimates of Hour Burden for Information Collection.**

On average, respondents will need approximately 0.25 hours (15 minutes) to respond to the survey. Thus, assuming a response rate of 75 percent, the overall burden for the survey is computed to be:

$$200 \text{ respondents @ } 15 \text{ minutes/respondent} = 50 \text{ hours}$$

Given the dates of postsecondary attendance used for drawing the statistical sample, the respondents will include both current students and people who recently entered the workforce. Assuming an average salary rate of \$15.00 per hour, the cost to respondents for the overall burden would be:

$$50 \text{ hours @ } \$15.00/\text{hour} = \$750.$$

The incentive of \$10 per respondent (\$2000 for 200 respondents) will exceed this cost, so there will be no net cost to the respondents. There are no other costs to respondents.

In addition, we estimate that, on average, institutions will require 100 hours (15 minutes per transcript) to respond to 400 queries for transcripts. (Without knowing what percentage of students will choose to directly send transcripts, we instead provide the maximum institutional burden.) Institutions will be compensated for their time at their standard reimbursement rate for transcripts.

**A.13. Estimates of Costs.**

This survey does not require any record keeping by respondents, so there are no record-keeping costs associated with this collection. Respondents will be asked to sign forms granting Westat permission to request two transcripts each from their respective sending and receiving institutions.

**A.14. Estimates of Annual Government Cost.**

Westat will conduct the survey at a cost of the government of \$361,324. The entire survey, including the preparation of a report, will be completed in a single year (i.e., 2008). The transcript work will not be completed until 2009.

**A.15. Reasons for Changes in Response Burden and Costs.**

Not applicable. This is a one-time data collection.

## A.16. Time Schedule.

The following schedule has been set for the survey.

Table 1: Schedule of major project activities

| Task   | Date              |
|--|-------------------|
| Kick-off Meeting                             | May 7, 2008       |
| Minutes from kick-off meeting                | May 14, 2008      |
| Draft Analysis Plan                          | May 14, 2008      |
| Final Analysis Plan                          | May 21, 2008      |
| Draft Student Survey Instrument              | May 14, 2008      |
| Final Student Survey Instrument              | May 21, 2008      |
| Draft Sampling Plan                          | May 21, 2008      |
| Final Sampling Plan                          | May 28, 2008      |
| OMB Package to ED                            | July 3, 2008      |
| OMB Package Approved                         | August 20, 2008   |
| Student Surveys Begin                        | September 2, 2008 |
| Survey data collection ended (200 completed) | October 17, 2008  |
| Draft Analysis File                          | October 27, 2008  |
| Begin collection of transcripts              | November 3, 2008  |
| Final Analysis File                          | November 10, 2008 |
| Draft Executive Summary                      | November 6, 2008  |
| Draft Survey Report                          | November 20, 2008 |
| Final Survey Report and Executive Summary    | December 15, 2008 |
| Complete transcript collection               | December 30, 2008 |
| Draft transcript analysis file               | February 27, 2009 |
| Draft report on transcript study             | March 31, 2009    |
| Final report on transcript study             | April 30, 2009    |

Westat will prepare two written reports summarizing the results, with the first report providing the survey results and the second providing the results of the transcript study. The data primarily will be used to develop further research and to develop informational materials to educate students about the transfer process. As was mentioned earlier, the results of the survey will not be used for Departmental policy purposes or be used to promulgate regulations related to transfer of credit. There are no plans to publish an official report, but we expect that the data will be released (e.g., by placing the Executive Summary on a web page).

To analyze the data, in addition to looking at the overall findings, we will look at whether specific categories of students were less successful in transferring courses than others. Following are some specific categories of interest that we plan to use as standard classification categories.

- **Gender.** Course-taking patterns often vary by gender, which may lead to different success rates in transferring courses.
- **Institution characteristics.** It seems likely that certain categories of institutions are much more restrictive than others in accepting transfer credits. These might include differences by size, sector (public/private), and institution type (e.g., using categories based on the Carnegie level, such as doctorate granting, master's degrees, baccalaureate, two-year, and specialized). We will explore each of those and choose those with the most descriptive power. Knowing these types may help ED to better tailor informational materials that will aid students in transferring.
- **Course-taking.** Questionnaire item 5 provides limited information on students' course-taking patterns. For example, students might be classified according to whether they attempt to transfer academic courses only, Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses only, or both. (The transcript study should help verify and hopefully attain more specific information about these courses.) The usefulness of this distinction will depend on the actual number of students in each category. Alternatively, we may use questionnaire item 13: students who changed their education/career plans might be the most likely to have transfer credits denied, and students who followed through on their previous plans might be the least. Also, it may not be necessary to categorize students based on CTE status; it may be sufficient to examine the overall results for these questions.
- **Race/ethnicity.** Historically, there have been racial differences in which institutions students choose to attend, which courses of study students select, and in approaches to financing education.

The transcript report will examine the accuracy of the students' reports on their transfers by comparing their responses with data from the transcripts. The results will be used to determine the need/value of adding a transcript component when examining transfer of credit issues.

#### **A.17. Approval to not Display Expiration Date for OMB Approval**

We will display the expiration date on the web version and on the cover letter to introduce subjects to the survey. Since this is a telephone survey, most subjects will not see a copy of the questionnaire. However, since they will see the cover letter, this section is not applicable.

**A.18. Exceptions to Certification for Paperwork Reduction Act Submissions**

Not applicable. There are no exceptions to the certification statement.