

SRS Responses to OMB Questions

- 1. Please justify the GSS as an annual collection. Please provide data to support any assertions that an annual survey ultimately reduces burden or cost, or increases data quality and**
- 2. Please also justify the GSS as a universe collection. Please provide data to support any assertions that a universe survey ultimately reduces burden or cost, or increases data quality.**

The answers to questions one and two are inter-related and similar, so we are addressing them together.

The GSS data are collected to serve several purposes and a variety of users. One purpose is to produce consistent national estimates over time for the variables in the survey. For this purpose, a sample survey collected less frequently than on an annual basis might be satisfactory. However, another major purpose of the GSS is to provide similar estimates at the individual institution level. The surveyed academic institutions themselves are major users of these data. They utilize GSS data heavily for internal administrative purposes, such as planning and evaluation. Furthermore, they use the data extensively for the purpose of making peer comparisons, with similar institutions, often in conjunction with other data on all academic institutions, such as from IPEDS. The value of the GSS data to the academic institutions would be far less if the data were not collected annually and for all institutions. In addition, less than annual data would make the data less valuable for the internal administrative uses. Data only from sampled institutions would severely limit, if not eliminate, the value of the GSS as the basis for peer comparisons among institutions. If a sample of institutions were surveyed, it is unlikely that NSF would release the data at the individual institution level. If the data were less useful to the academic institutions providing the data, their willingness to participate in the survey may be undermined.

The value of the GSS to academic institutions, higher education organizations such as The Council of Graduate Schools, and policymakers interested in higher education issues is that it is a part of a larger set of surveys, all of which provide annual census data on academic institutions. SRS combines data from these annual census surveys in two ways: Academic Institutional Profiles and WebCASPAR, to provide the research and policy community important information resources about higher education.

GSS is one of three NSF annual censuses whose micro data are combined into an integrated database to produce the publication Academic Institutional Profiles. The other two surveys are: (1) the Survey of Research and Development Expenditures at Universities and Colleges and (2) the Survey of Federal Science and Engineering Support to Universities, Colleges, and Nonprofit Institutions.

These data are further integrated with institutional data from other NSF surveys, including the Survey of Earned Doctorates, and surveys conducted by the Department of Education (IPEDS) in the WebCASPAR (Computer Aided Science Policy Analysis and Research) system. WebCASPAR is heavily used by the research, S&E policy, and academic communities.

Changing the survey to a sample survey and/or reducing its frequency would decrease/eliminate GSS's contribution to these integrated databases and the value of the databases themselves for tracking trends in higher education in science, engineering, and health fields.

Collecting the GSS annually also increases the value of the data for monitoring trends, particularly the effects of dramatic changes in the larger context. Recent examples are

changes in enrollment in response to the dot-com boom and bust and September 11. Less than annual data may not capture such changes or the point of inflection of a change in direction of a trend. For the past few years, the release of the GSS fall enrollment data has been eagerly awaited to see the trends in SEH graduate enrollment in foreign visa-holders post 9/11. That enrollment did not drop immediately, i.e., in 2001, and the trends differed by several years for first-time enrollment and total enrollment. Those nuances would have been lost if the data had not been collected every year.

Experience with a change in the survey in the 1980s also suggests the difficulties in survey operations that could result from conducting the GSS less frequently than every year. Establishing and maintaining relationships with GSS respondents is an important component in obtaining high response rates. In 1983 an attempt was made to reduce response burden by sampling master's granting institutions. "When institutions which had not been included in the sample were surveyed again in 1988 for the first time in 4 years, the contractor found that reestablishing contract and obtaining results from these institutions required four or five mailings and considerable telephone time. The average cost of survey processing was higher for those institutions in the one year of recontact than the total of four years for those institutions with whom contact had not been broken." See SF-83, page 83, November 1, 1993.

3. Please explain why SRS requires respondents to use GSS codes rather than CIP codes.

The SRS does not require respondents to use GSS codes rather than CIP codes. GSS allows respondents the option of using either, but the majority of the GSS respondents have not heard of CIP codes. For institutional personnel that do use CIP codes, the survey now includes a CIP to GSS code crosswalk to make it easier for them to report their information. However, the majority of the respondents (those not familiar with the CIP codes) choose to use the less cumbersome 3-digit GSS code to report.

SRS has conducted several studies about GSS respondents' knowledge of and use of CIP codes which have shown that most GSS departmental respondents are not familiar with CIP. The first, the Response Behavior Survey, was conducted in 2006 with 2,496 department (unit) respondents at institutions nationwide. Although 95% of GSS institutions participate in IPEDS, only 7% of the GSS unit (departmental) respondents contribute to IPEDS data collection and use CIP codes.

A second study was undertaken to study the feasibility of replacing GSS codes with CIP codes. The contractor visited 8 institutions in 4 states, interviewing 29 participants both at the department and school coordinator level. The results of the site visits showed that institutional level personnel (but not necessarily GSS coordinators) were more likely to participate in IPEDS and/or have knowledge of CIP than GSS department respondents.

4. Please clarify the requested burden, as there is a discrepancy between the Summary of ICR burden" table in ROCIS and the information provided in the Supporting Statement (SS), A12.

The burden shown in A12 in the supporting statement is the correct figure. There was an error in the ROCIS filing, which will be corrected.

5. Is SRS intending to submit for OMB review the proposed 2009 "additional questions about postdocs" at this time? The submitted information collection

form called “GSS Form 812.pdf” appears to be a 2008 form and does not appear to have new content on race, ethnicity, etc.

SRS does not intend to submit the 2009 GSS additional postdocs questions at this time.

Later this year or early in 2009, SRS will conduct a series of site visits to test the feasibility of collecting the following items about postdocs at existing GSS institutions:

- Ethnicity/race
- Source of support
- Country of degree

Most of these questions should be similar to the Questions 3 and 4 on the current GSS worksheet for graduate students but modified as appropriate for asking about postdoc appointments. Country of Degree information will be a new data item; it is not obtained on the current GSS survey instrument.

Screening questions and procedures to find the most knowledgeable person about postdocs at the institution will also have to be developed and tested. Research conducted as part of the Postdoc Data Project found that the people within academic institutions that can provide the postdocs data are often not the same as the GSS respondents. SRS will have to determine how much of the information can be retrieved from the GSS respondent and the impact on the survey of having to locate other respondents before deciding to add these questions to the GSS.

Once the additional postdocs questions have been tested and identified, SRS will submit them to OMB for clearance prior to the 2009 GSS.