National Center for Education Statistics

*Volume I*

*Supporting Statement*

*2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16) Graduate Student Cognitive Testing*

*OMB# 1850-0803 v.107*

*Attachments:*

Attachment I – Respondent Recruitment Procedures and Materials

Attachment II – Consent Form

Attachment III – Screener

Attachment IV – Introduction Script, Interview Questions, and Debriefing

Attachment V – Interview Probes

*July 2, 2014*

## Submittal-Related Information

The following material is being submitted under the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) generic clearance agreement (OMB# 1850-0803), which provides NCES the capability to test and improve data collection methodology, question/response wording, and delivery methods of its surveys and assessment instruments via cognitive interviews.

We request such approval to conduct cognitive testing in preparation for the 2015-16 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:16) field test data collection (OMB# 1850-0666). The anticipated timeframe for data collection under the generic clearance is August through September of 2014. Described in this submission are recruiting, screening, and qualitative testing procedures for questionnaire items planned for potential inclusion in the NPSAS:16 field test data collection, which begins in March 2015.

This research will focus entirely on graduate students, reflecting both the increasing importance of a graduate degree and increasing rates of graduate borrowing. A recent technical review panel (TRP) held in June 2014 revealed some discrepancies and gaps between past survey questions and the unique issues facing graduate students today. The cognitive interviews for which clearance is requested are meant not only to implement the feedback from the TRP, but also to understand graduate student perspectives on a variety of issues. The information garnered from the cognitive interviews will then be used to create and refine the questions that will be administered to graduate students in the NPSAS:16 survey. Final wording will be submitted to OMB for review in October 2014 as part of the forms clearance package for the field test student survey.

## Background

The NPSAS:16 data collection is to be conducted by the NCES’ Sample Survey Division. NPSAS:16 is a nationally representative study of how students and their families finance education beyond high school. This submission is in support of the ninth cycle in the series that will be conducted from March to October 2015 to capture information pertaining to the 2015–16 academic year. NPSAS:16 also will serve as the base year data collection for the Baccalaureate and Beyond Longitudinal Study (B&B), a study of college graduates one year (B&B:16/17), four years (B&B:16/20), and possibly ten years (B&B:16/26) following completion of the bachelor’s degree.

The results from the cognitive testing for which clearance is requested will help to refine the NPSAS:16 field test question format and wording of those questions administered to graduate students. Any new and revised questions will be submitted under a separate field test clearance package, along with the rest of the student interview, in October 2014. In addition, the cognitive testing will enable the instrumentation team to:

* Evaluate the importance/relevance of topics discussed at the June 2014 graduate TRP and consider any new topics of relevance raised by respondents;
* Evaluate the extent to which terms in questions are comprehended;
* Update and add terminology, as relevant, for graduate students;
* Examine the thought processes used to arrive at question answers;
* Determine appropriate response categories to questions;
* Identify sources of burden and respondent stress.

## Design and Context

**Cognitive Testing.** The purpose of this qualitative research is to recruit and perform cognitive interviews with graduate student respondents currently enrolled and no longer enrolled (but enrolled recently) in various graduate programs. Shugoll Research (hereafter referred to as Shugoll) will take responsibility for recruiting all respondents, providing the research facilities, conducting the interviews, compiling video and audio recordings of the interviews, and reporting the results. Shugoll’s staff has extensive experience in various types of cognitive testing methodologies, and is well-equipped both in resources and expertise to perform the task at hand.

The questions to be administered will address graduate student experiences and include items regarding their enrollment, financial aid, financial literacy, and employment, among others. These are all areas that have been included in some capacity in past NPSAS surveys, but they have generally focused more so on undergraduate students. The interview design is semi-structured, meaning Shugoll research staff will have some flexibility to probe certain topics and areas of interest pre-determined with the help of RTI International and NCES. The question list, attached to this document, is meant to serve as a guide for each interview, not necessarily a script. This type of design is appropriate for our purpose, which again is to help the instrumentation team develop and revise NPSAS:16 survey questions administered to graduate students.

Throughout the interview, respondents will be asked to “think aloud” as they come up with their responses to each question, and will be prompted to explain the mental steps they took to arrive at the answer. This will help in identifying why students answer in certain ways and will help to refine the wording of future questions to improve comprehension.

A total of 30 students and former students from various types of graduate programs will be invited to participate. This will include an equal distribution of students from master’s, research doctoral (e.g., PhD, EdD, etc.) and professional practice doctoral (e.g., medicine, law, etc.) degree programs. A distribution of the expected number of recruits and respondents by type can be found in Table 1, below. Additionally, Shugoll will recruit a robust sample of students attending public, private non-profit, and private for-profit institutions, ensuring that at least 5 students are enrolled in programs provided by for-profit institutions.

**Table 1: Recruitment and Respondent Numbers by Degree Type**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Degree Type** | **Recruited** | **Respondents** |
| Master’s | 20 | 10 |
| Research Doctoral | 20 | 10 |
| Professional Practice Doctoral | 20 | 10 |
| **Total** | **60** | **30** |

To meet these intended numbers, Shugoll will identify and recruit 60 students. Recruits will be identified using Shugoll’s own database of potential research respondents in the Washington, DC metro area. The database includes information on key demographic criteria including college/university, gender, age, and race/ethnicity. To supplement the database, Shugoll may also reach out to professors and administrators at institutions in the Washington, DC area with whom they have developed relationships. Referrals, advertisements in student newspapers and online forums, and social media postings may also be used to recruit student respondents.

Trained staff from Shugoll will administer a recruitment screener to interested students, which will include questions that ensure respondents qualify for the research. All interviews will be conducted in-person at Shugoll’s research facilities in Bethesda, Maryland and/or Alexandria, Virginia. Each interview will last a maximum of 90 minutes, and all participants will be offered an incentive for their participation. Audio and video recordings of each interview will be available to NCES for review.

Attachment I of this submition presents the materials that will be used for recruitment of interview participants; Attachment II contains the Consent Form; Attachment III presents the screening questions that will be used to determine eligibility for cognitive testing; Attachment IV provides the introductory script, interview questions, and debriefing procedures; and Attachment V provides the probes that will be used to elicit additional information and thought processes from respondents on the interview questions

Immediately following the conclusion of each interview, methodologists will review the interview recordings and notes, and highlight potential themes that may have arisen. Following each interview, the digital audio recording will be archived for qualitative analysis. Shugoll will organize their observations and summarize the common themes, insights, and ideas emerging from each of the interviews into a report that will be submitted to NPSAS:16 project staff at NCES and RTI.

## Assurance of Confidentiality

Cognitive interview participants will be informed that their participation is voluntary and their responses may be used only to help inform the survey design and may not be disclosed, or used, in identifiable form for any other purpose except as required by law (Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002, 20 U.S.C. § 9573) (Attachment II). Participants will be assigned a unique student identifier (ID) which will be created solely for file management and used to keep all materials together. The participant ID will not be linked to student’s name in any way. Participants will sign an informed consent form and the signed consent forms will be kept separately from interview files and notes, in a locked cabinet in a secure room for the duration of the study, and will be destroyed after the final report is submitted.

## Schedule for NPSAS:16 Cognitive Testing Activities

## Shugoll will begin recruiting for the cognitive testing upon receiving OMB clearance. This testing is scheduled to take place from August through early September of 2014.

## Estimate of Respondent Burden

Up to 30 individual cognitive interviews are planned, depending on participant availability. Interview sessions are expected each to take a maximum of 90 minutes.

**Table 3. Estimated Respondent Burden**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Number of Respondents** | **Number of Responses** | **Hours per respondent** | **Maximum Total Burden Hours** |
| Recruitment | 60 | 60 | .0667 hr | 4 |
| Cognitive Interview | 30 | 30 | 1.5 | 45 |
| **Total** | **60** | **90** | **-** | **49** |

## Estimate of Costs for Recruiting and Paying Respondents

In order to encourage participation by graduate students in this study, and to thank them for their time and effort to travel to the interview facility and partake in the interview, each respondent will be offered $40 for their participation.

## Estimate of Cost Burden

Participants must bear direct costs associated with travel by car or Metro to Shugoll’s facility from their home or school.

## Cost to Federal Government

The estimated cost of the cognitive interviews for the NPSAS:16 field test is $83,858. Table 4 provides further detail for the cost estimate.

**Table 4. Estimated costs of NPSAS:16 field test qualitative evaluation**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Cost Type** | **Budget** |
| **Direct labor** | $41,512 |
| **Total labor** | **$41,512** |
| **Other direct costs** |  |
| Computer expenses and materials | $2,456 |
| Respondent recruiting, audio recording, video streaming | $39,890 |
| **Total ODCs** | **$42,346** |
|  |  |
| **Total costs** | **$83,858** |