

Memorandum

Date: February 14, 2017

To: Margo Schwab, Desk Officer
Office of Management and Budget

From: John R. Gawalt, Director
National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics
National Science Foundation

Via: Suzanne Plimpton, Reports Clearance Officer
National Science Foundation

Subject: Request for Approval of the Pilot Follow-up Survey for the Survey of Graduate Students and Postdoctorates in Science and Engineering (GSS)

The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) requests approval of the GSS Pilot Follow-up Survey to obtain feedback from the Pilot institution coordinators on their experiences and burdens involved with the changes implemented in the 2016 GSS Pilot Survey, which is scheduled to end in March 2017.

In October 2016, NCSES requested and received OMB approval to conduct the GSS Pilot Survey as part of the 2016 GSS data collection under the NCSES generic clearance (OMB Control Number 3145-0174). This project is a follow-up to the GSS Pilot Survey.

Results of the 2016 GSS Pilot Survey will be used to determine the feasibility of a broader roll-out of the changes in the 2017 GSS. The feedback from the Pilot Follow-up Survey will be used to improve the data collection support provided to the GSS institution coordinators—including instructional and training materials, Frequently Asked Questions, and Help Desk support—as the GSS redesign proceeds.

Background

The GSS is an annual census survey of academic institutions that offer graduate degree programs in sciences, engineering, and health fields in the United States. Institutions are asked to report the total number of graduate students, postdoctoral appointees (postdocs), and doctorate-level nonfaculty researchers (NFRs) by demographic and other characteristics such as source of financial support.

The NCSES is currently determining the feasibility of a GSS redesign to improve data utility and to potentially reduce institutional response burden.

In July and August 2016, NCSES conducted the GSS Coordinator Survey to assess the institutional reporting practices, availability of detailed institutional data, and the awareness of GSS data file transfer features that could potentially reduce the burden on institutional respondents. Results from this survey served as the basis for the 2016 GSS Pilot Survey, which is currently being conducted with a random sample of 80 institution coordinators in parallel with the traditional 2016 GSS data collection.

The 2016 GSS Pilot survey will provide the data on the following:

- Separate reporting of enrollment and financial support data for master’s and doctoral students
- Collecting data based on the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes as a disciplinary field, instead of GSS codes
- Expanding the institutional use of file transfers for data submission instead of manual entry of data in a GSS Web instrument

Proposed Methodology

The GSS Pilot Follow-up Survey will be conducted with all Pilot institution coordinators that complete the Pilot Survey. The survey results will be analyzed to determine the relative effort associated with the alternate data collection method tested in the Pilot Survey compared to previous iterations of GSS data collection.

The GSS Pilot Follow-up Survey will be made available through the GSS Web instrument once the 2016 GSS data are submitted by the coordinator. Upon clicking the “Submit to NSF” button on the GSS Web instrument, coordinators will be taken to the Pilot Follow-up Survey questions (see Attachment 1).

A small number of Pilot institution coordinators, who may have already submitted their final GSS data prior to commencement of the Pilot Follow-up Survey, will be contacted with an email invitation to participate in the Follow-up Survey. One reminder email will be sent one week prior to the Follow-up Survey deadline to the coordinators who have not responded to the survey. Survey invitation and reminder email are included in Attachment 2.

Survey Schedule

The tentative schedule for the GSS Pilot Follow-up Survey is as follows:

Proposed Date	Activity/Deliverable
February 14, 2017	OMB submission for approval
February 28, 2017	OMB clearance
March 1, 2017	Update GSS Web Instrument with Pilot Follow-up Survey questions
March 2, 2017	Launch Survey/Send email invitations
April 17, 2017	Email reminder to nonrespondents
April 21, 2017	Survey due date
May 31, 2017	Final report

Response Burden

A total of 13 burden hours are estimated for the GSS Pilot Follow-up Survey. The survey is estimated to take about ten minutes to complete per coordinator with a response rate of 90%. This estimated survey response rate is based on high historical participation rates (over 99%) in the past GSS data collection, an 80.5% response rate to the GSS Coordinator Survey conducted last year, the short length of the Follow-up Survey, and the high level of cooperation with the Pilot survey.

However, we are using a 100% response rate estimate for the Pilot Follow-up Survey to ensure sufficient coverage of approved burden hours. Therefore, the total burden of 13 hours are calculated based on 80 Pilot institution coordinators at 0.167 hours (10 minutes) per coordinator.

Contact Person

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Attachment 1: GSS Pilot Follow-up Survey Questions

Attachment 2: GSS Pilot Follow-up Survey Contact Materials