

MEMORANDUM

Date: April 13, 2017

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

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

Via: Suzanne Plimpton, Clearance Officer
National Science Foundation

Subject: Notification of data collection under generic clearance (3145-0174)

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform you that the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) within the National Science Foundation (NSF) plans to conduct qualitative research in the form of focus groups and one-on-one interviews for the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) under the generic clearance of survey improvement projects (OMB #3145-0174).

NCSES is considering expanding the content of the SED to include information on the Graduate School Experiences (GSE) of doctorate recipients. The qualitative research described in this memorandum is part of a more expansive plan that includes a quantitative component. The objectives of the qualitative portion of the research are to collect data from current users and potential users of SED data to assess the value of adding GSE items to the SED. The results of the qualitative research will inform the design of the quantitative component, a Web survey of SED graduate school deans, which will be addressed in a separate generic clearance request. The results of the Web survey will help determine whether the SED should collect graduate school experience information in the future.

Background

The SED has been conducted annually since academic year 1958. The survey collects data on the number and characteristics of all individuals receiving research doctoral degrees from all accredited U.S. institutions. The results of this annual survey are used to assess characteristics and trends in doctorate education and degrees.

In previous research, the SED contractor (NORC at the University of Chicago) examined the use of exit surveys at SED institutions. This examination focused on determining whether selected institutions conducted an exit survey for doctorate recipients, and the content of those surveys. NORC selected a sample of 50 SED institutions stratifying by number of doctorates granted, Carnegie classification, public-private sector, and minority-serving status (Historically Black Colleges and Universities, Hispanic-Serving Institutions). A Web search of the 50 selected

institutions suggests that at least two out of every five SED institutions currently conduct an exit survey, either at the institution or department level that collects GSE information on doctorate recipients. A review of approximately 20 of the existing surveys and related materials describing the use of GSE information indicated that institutions vary in the depth in which GSE topics are explored. However, nearly all the surveys examined were alike in measuring, in one form or another, the perceptions of doctorate recipients on the overall quality of or their satisfaction with their graduate program or graduate school experience. Many SED institutions that are part of the Association of American Universities Data Exchange (AAUDE) conduct a GSE survey. A special focus of the research is whether AAUDE institutions would respond favorably to the inclusion of GSE items in the SED.

NSF intends to conduct the GSE qualitative research between May and October of 2017.

Purpose

The primary objective of this qualitative research is to collect information on the interest level among SED institutions of adding GSE items to the SED and the issues surrounding such an addition. Findings from this qualitative research will guide the development of topics to be covered in a Web survey of all SED graduate school deans (which will be covered by a separate generic clearance request). Results from the Web survey will ultimately be used to help guide decision-making as to whether a GSE component should be added to the SED.

GSE topic areas of potential interest that will be explored in the qualitative research include the following:

- Communication of Important Information
- Program/Campus Climate
- Professional Development Experiences
- Curriculum and Instruction
- Skill Development
- Faculty and Staff
- Scholarly Products and Presentations
- Financial Support/Aid
- Student Support Services
- Factors Hindering or Facilitating Academic Progress
- Campus Life and Activities
- Program and University Facilities
- Overall Satisfaction

Research Plan

General approach. The research team will conduct focus groups and one-on-one interviews. The research team anticipates completing six focus groups with six to eight participants in each group. The findings from the focus group discussions will guide the topics to be discussed in the next phase of the research, 30 one-on-one interviews. The focus groups and one-on-one

interviews will be held with graduate school deans, heads of graduate departments, researchers/data users, and representatives of scholarship foundations and programs. Individuals sampled for a focus group who are not available during the scheduled focus group session may be invited to participate in a one-on-one interview.

Focus group and one-on-one interview logistics. Focus groups and one-on-one interviews will be conducted via Web using GoToMeeting. The online format will allow for the participation of individuals across the country. In advance of the focus group or one-on-one interview, participants will be queried as to whether they have the capability to participate in a video conference from their own computer. Webcams will be provided to participants who need one. To prevent technical difficulties, a research team member will review meeting logistics with each participant to solve any technological issues in advance of the scheduled meeting time.

The discussion guide for the qualitative research is in Attachment 1. As the qualitative work progresses, this guide will be updated to incorporate new findings. The focus groups and one-on-one interviews will be recorded if respondent consent is granted. Video-recording will be the preferred method if participants give their consent. In the event that participants express reluctance to be video-recorded, audio-recording will be offered instead. A copy of the consent form will be sent to respondents in advance for their review. Prior to the beginning of each focus group or one-on-one interview, respondents will be asked to provide verbal consent for participating in the research. The informed consent documents are presented in Attachment 2.

Recruitment. There are several characteristics of respondents and their doctoral institutions that are of specific interest in the sample recruitment for this study. For both the focus groups and one-on-one interviews, the following individuals at SED doctoral institutions and other organizations will be identified for recruitment. Selected participants will be users and potential users of SED data who also understand the nature and uses of GSE survey results or of other graduate student data available at their institution or organization.

- Graduate School Deans at AAUDE member institutions
- Graduate School Deans at non-AAUDE institutions that conduct a GSE survey
- Graduate School Deans at non-AAUDE institutions that do not conduct a GSE survey
- Heads of graduate school departments
- Other researchers/data users
- Scholarship foundations and programs

One focus group with between six and eight participants each will be held with each of the groups listed above. The 30 one-on-one interviews will also be conducted with individuals representing each of these groups.

Participants will be recruited via several sources. Graduate school deans will be identified using the list of deans that is maintained by the SED. The list includes approximately 550 deans. Deans will be considered eligible to participate if they still hold the position of dean at an SED institution. The deans will be selected to cover a range of institutional characteristics: both AAUDE and non-AAUDE institutions, institutions that do and do not conduct a GSE survey, institutions of varying size and location, and public as well as private institutions.

The SED does not maintain a list of heads of graduate departments, and such a list is not likely to be available from another source. However, a question in the SED asks respondents to name the department that supervised their doctoral studies. We will use the data from the 2015 SED to compile responses to this question. The list will be de-duplicated so that each department is listed only once and then departments will be selected from the list to represent the same range of institutional characteristics that will be used to guide the selection of deans (as noted at the end of the previous paragraph). A Web search will be conducted to identify the heads of the selected graduate departments.

Data users will be personnel at SED institutions or other agencies or organizations that use SED data. The SED maintains a database of requesters of the data. The list includes those who have requested a custom data tabulation, an institution data set, a baccalaureate origins table or a master's origins tables. As with the selection of deans and graduate department heads, the institutional data users selected will represent a range of doctoral institutions. Typically, the list of data users also includes non-institutional requesters, such as newspapers and foundations. The types of requesters will be reviewed to assure that institutional users or other users with specific interest in research on graduate education will be included in the data users group. When data users make a request for data, they specify the name of the individual who will receive the data. That individual will be the person contacted regarding participation in the study.

Foundations and programs that are eligible to participate in the research will include those that fund graduate school scholarships or that conduct research in graduate education. In compiling a list of foundations, we will consult several sources, including the list of data users as well as recommendations offered by NCSES and NORC. We will also ask representatives at foundations we have identified to recommend other foundations that should be contacted about this research.

Contacting Potential Respondents. All potential respondents will be contacted via email (Attachments 3 and 4). Within a few days of sending the email, staff will attempt to reach potential participants via telephone to further describe the research, answer any questions potential participants may have, and encourage their participation (Attachment 5). During the phone contact, individuals will be presented with information about the study and will then be asked to participate in a brief screening interview to confirm the potential participant's eligibility for the study (Attachment 6). Recruitment staff will determine whether the potential participant is available during the time frame in which the focus groups are to be conducted. Those who are not available may be invited to participate in a one-on-one interview to be scheduled for a later date. The screener represents all potential questions that the research team anticipates asking during the screening process. However, as the research progresses, the screener may be revised to focus only on the characteristics that remain of interest for recruiting.

Interested participants who sign up for a focus group or one-on-one interview will receive a packet via U.S. Postal Service (see Attachments 7 through 9). The packet will contain a cover letter reminding them of their focus group or one-on-one interview day and time, materials to be discussed during the session, and instructions for joining the online meeting. Although informed consent will be obtained at the beginning of each focus group or one-on-one interview, a copy of the consent form will be included with the packet to allow participants to review it in advance.

Participants who need a web camera will also be sent one. In advance of each focus group, a research team member will step through the use of GoToMeeting with participants to assure that any technical issues are resolved before the scheduled group meeting.

Schedule

Data collection activities will begin immediately after obtaining OMB clearance. Contacting, recruiting, and scheduling of respondents will proceed until all focus groups and one-on-one interviews have been completed. The focus groups will be completed within the first three months after OMB clearance is obtained. The one-on-one interviews will follow, and will be completed within the next three months.

Burden Information

The total estimated burden associated with this study is anticipated to be 202 hours. Exhibit 1 provides details about the burden estimates by study activity.

Exhibit 1: Estimated burden

Activity	Number of Respondents	Average Time (minutes)	Total Burden (minutes)
1. A total of 390 individuals will be selected from lists of deans, heads of graduate school departments, members of foundations, and data users to receive a recruitment email. Estimated 5 minutes of respondent burden per respondent.			
Recruitment email	390	5	1,950
2. Of the 390 individuals receiving the recruitment email, NORC anticipates reaching 292 by telephone to provide further information about the study and conduct screening. The estimated burden of the telephone recruitment and screening process is 10 minutes.			
Telephone recruitment and screening	292	10	2,920
3. Of the 100 who are expected to complete telephone screening, 78 are expected to be recruited to participate in a focus group or one-on-one interview. These individuals will receive a follow-up email/call to confirm their participation day/time and will receive an information packet with instructions for joining a one-on-one interview or focus group.			
Information packet and follow-up call/email	78	10	780
4. Of the 100 expected to complete telephone screening, the 22 not participating in a focus group or one-on-one interview will receive an email thanking them for their interest and informing them that focus group and one-on-one interview slots are filled.			
Thank you email	22	5	110
5. The 78 participants will receive a reminder email regarding the day and time of the focus group or one-on-one interview.			
Reminder email	78	5	390

6.	Of the 78 participants, 48 will be selected for participation in a focus group and will be contacted in advance of the focus group meeting to test and resolve any issues with the use of the online meeting software.			
	Test of online meeting logistics	48	10	480
7.	Of the 78 participants, 48 are expected to participate in a focus group (6 groups of up to 8 people). Estimated interview length is up to 75 minutes.			
	Focus group	48	75	3,600
8.	Of the 78 participants, 30 are expected to participate in an individual one-on-one interview. Estimated length of these interviews is up to 60 minutes each.			
	One-on-one interviews	30	60	1,800
Total burden				12,030 minutes (202 hours)

Confidentiality

Research participants will be informed that their participation is voluntary and their responses will be used for research purposes only. They will be asked to give verbal consent for the focus group or interview to be video-recorded (or audio-recorded if participants are reluctant to agree to video-recording) and informed that only staff directly involved in the research project will have access to the recordings. Further, participants will be advised that selected quotes may be used in papers and presentations and researchers will not identify participants by name. Participants in focus groups will be advised that their identities will be known to other participants. However, all focus group participants will be asked to respect the privacy of the other group members and not to disclose anything said within the context of the discussion.

Incentive Payments

As senior level representatives of their institutions and organizations, graduate school deans, graduate school department heads, and foundation officials will likely not expect or require an incentive to participate in the research. Data users, however, will be research staff working under the direction of key staff at institutions or foundations. Since it is customary to provide incentive payments for junior level employees, we propose to offer an incentive of \$40 to compensate data users for the time associated with participation in the study. Although data users may receive permission from their employers to participate in the research on employer time, NORC will not request that data users ask for permission to take part in the research during work hours. To avoid making employer permission a barrier to participation, NORC will attempt to schedule the data user focus group and interviews during lunch breaks or outside of work hours. (Note: Names of any senior level administrators that appear in the lists of data users used to construct the sample frame will be removed prior to selection of the data user sample. Accordingly, the data user list will only include names of potential participants who would typically receive payment for study participation, as there will be no senior level officials represented.)

Contact Information

The contact persons for questions regarding this research are:

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Attachments

- 1: Discussion Guide for Qualitative Research on GSE Module
- 2: Participant Consent Form
- 3: Recruitment Email
- 4: Frequently Asked Questions
- 5: Phone Script for Participant Recruitment
- 6: Screener
- 7: Cover Letter
- 8: Example Visuals
- 9: Discussion Topics Guide