

# Memorandum

**Date:** June 14, 2016

**To:** Shelly Martinez, 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 GSS Coordinator Survey for the Survey of Graduate Students and Postdoctorates in Science and Engineering (GSS)

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The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) requests approval of the GSS Coordinator Survey to examine the current data reporting practices, the availability of additional administrative data, and the current versus potential burden involved with changes considered for the survey. This project will be conducted under the 2014-16 GSS clearance (OMB Control Number 3145-0062).

## Background

The GSS is an annual survey that is designed to collect data on graduate students, postdoctoral appointees (postdocs), and other doctorate-level non-faculty researchers (NFRs) at the academic institutions that offer graduate degree programs in the sciences, engineering, and health fields in the United States.

The NCSES is currently considering a redesign of the GSS survey to improve data utility and to find ways to potentially reduce response burden. Among the changes being considered:

- Collection of graduate enrollment and financial support data for the master's and doctoral students separately.
- The use of Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) codes as a disciplinary field, instead of GSS codes.
- Expanding institutional use of data file transfers for data submission instead of manual entry in a GSS web survey instrument.

Together, these changes would potentially increase the usefulness of the GSS data to researchers and analysts, while mitigating reporting burden for the institutions.

## **Purpose**

The purpose of the GSS Coordinator Study is to assess the current GSS institution reporting practices, availability of more detailed institutional data, and to identify the feasibility of data file transfers that would potentially reduce the burden on institutional respondents. The survey will provide information about potential impact of the survey changes on the GSS institutions.

## **Proposed Methodology**

In the majority of GSS institutions, a single School Coordinator is responsible for submitting all requested data. In some institutions, responsibility is bifurcated to Student Coordinators, who report data on graduate student enrollment and financial support and Postdoc Coordinators, who report data on postdocs and NFRs.

The GSS Coordinator Survey invitation email will be sent to 880 individuals who hold a coordinator role: School Coordinators (715), Student Coordinators (85), and Postdoc Coordinators (80). We propose to contact all past responding GSS institutions rather than a sample because we want to determine the capability of institutional reporting and data availability from as many institutions as possible. Prior study efforts in 2010 used a similar methodology and received a 65 percent response rate.

Results of the survey questions will be analyzed to determine or better understand:

- major data reporting challenges facing institutional coordinators;
- awareness and use of the GSS data upload feature;
- institutional resources and data systems available to coordinators to obtain and report GSS data;
- impact associated with separate reporting of master's and doctorate student enrollment and financial support data;
- suggestions for improving the survey reporting process; and
- ways in which institutions use the GSS data.

### *GSS Coordinator Survey Questions*

The proposed questions are included as Attachment 1.

### *Contacts with Coordinators*

Coordinators will be sent an email from the NSF GSS Project Officer inviting them to respond to the GSS Coordinator Survey via web. The email is provided in Attachment 2. Coordinators will be given four weeks to complete the survey during summer months, which are less busy time for the institution staff. A reminder email will be sent one week after the invitation, followed by telephone reminders to web inactive respondents, and a final email three days prior to the due date. Some follow-up with responding coordinators

may be necessary to obtain clarification regarding specific survey responses. This follow-up time is accounted for in the response burden section below.

## Survey Schedule

The tentative schedule for the GSS Coordinator Survey is as follows:

| <b>Proposed Date</b> | <b>Activity/Deliverable</b>            |
|----------------------|--|
| June 14, 2016        | OMB submission for approval            |
| June 28, 2016        | OMB clearance                          |
| July 1, 2016         | Finalize web instrument                |
| July 11, 2016        | Send invitation emails to Coordinators |
| July 18, 2016        | Begin follow-up, answer questions      |
| August 8, 2016       | End data collection                    |
| September 2, 2016    | Preliminary report delivered to NSF    |
| September 19, 2016   | Final report delivered to NSF          |

## Response Burden

Approximately 210 burden hours is requested for this survey. The 2014-16 GSS clearance includes 360 hours for future methodological testing. The GSS Coordinator Survey is estimated to take about 20 minutes to complete. The response time estimate is based on a pretest of the survey completed by 9 GSS coordinators. We expect a survey response rate of 65 percent, which is based on the Record Keeping Study conducted in 2010 with GSS coordinators. With an expected 65 percent response rate from approximately 880 coordinators, the estimated burden will be 191 hours ( $572 \times 0.33$  hours), and we are requesting 19 additional hours for follow-up contacts, if needed.

## Contact Person

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Attachment 1: GSS Coordinator Survey Questions

Attachment 2: GSS Coordinator Survey Contact Materials