

IPEDS Cost Survey Component Concepts, Terms, and Definitions Tutorial Script 2024-25 Data Collection

On behalf of the Institute of Education Sciences' (IES) National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Association for Institutional Research (AIR), welcome to this tutorial on concepts, terms, and definitions for the Cost survey component.

This tutorial focuses on clarifying these concepts for IPEDS reporting purposes. Please contact the financial aid office if you have questions about how these terms are used at your institution.

The IPEDS Glossary defines *Tuition and fees (published charges)* as:

The amount of tuition and required fees covering a full academic year most frequently charged to students. These values represent what a typical student would be charged and may not be the same for all students at an institution. If tuition is charged on a per-credit-hour basis, the average full-time credit hour load for an entire academic year is used to estimate average tuition. Required fees include all fixed sum charges that are required of such a large proportion of all students that the student who does not pay the charges is an exception.

In summary, *Tuition and fees (published charges)* represent:

- What a typical student pays for the academic year;
- Per credit cost or average annualized program cost; and
- Fees charged to most students based on program level.

While *tuition and fees (published charges)* is clearly defined for IPEDS reporting purposes, this term is sometimes used interchangeably with the tuition and fees *cost of attendance component* used to compute *total cost of attendance*. *Cost of attendance* is the amount of tuition and fees, food and housing, books and supplies, and other expenses used to determine a student's eligibility for financial aid. Since tuition and fees (published charges) represent the costs most frequently charged to students for the academic year for IPEDS reporting purposes, they may be the same as, or different from, the actual or average tuition and fees used by the financial aid office.

The IPEDS Glossary defines:

Cost of attendance as the amount of tuition and fees, food and housing; books, course materials, supplies, and equipment; and other expenses that a full-time, first-time degree/certificate-seeking student can expect to pay to go to college for an academic year. Costs reported to IPEDS by the

institution are those amounts used by the financial aid office to determine a student's financial need for the academic year, which is typically nine months;

and

Total cost of attendance as the sum of the cost of attendance components used to compute the average net price for first-time, full-time degree or certificate seeking students for IPEDS reporting purposes. This amount is typically based on a nine-month period for institutions using a traditional academic calendar. Program reporters provide one month of costs that are annualized in the system for IPEDS reporting purposes.

In IPEDS, the total cost of attendance issued to compute the *average net price* for first-time, full-time degree or certificate seeking students. For program reporters, the tuition and fees component is for the institution's largest program based on enrollment.

The IPEDS Glossary definition of Average *net price* reads:

The Higher Education Act, as amended (2008), defines institutional net price as "the average yearly price actually charged to first-time, full-time undergraduate students receiving student aid at an institution of higher education after deducting such aid." In IPEDS, average institutional net price is generated by subtracting the average amount of federal, state/local government, or institutional grant and scholarship aid from the total cost of attendance. Total cost of attendance is the sum of published tuition and required fees (lower of in-district or in-state for applicable institutions), books and supplies, and the weighted average for food and housing and other expenses. Cost of attendance data are collected in the Institutional Characteristics (IC) component of IPEDS, and financial aid data are collected in the Student Financial Aid (SFA) component of IPEDS.

Here is the formula NCES uses to calculate *average net price*:

$$\text{Total cost of attendance} - \text{Average federal, state, local, and institutional grant and scholarship aid} = \text{Average net price}$$

Note *Total cost of attendance* has a different definition for the average net price calculation. Here it is defined as the sum of published tuition and required fees (lower of in-district or in-state for applicable institutions), books and supplies, and the weighted average for food and housing and other expenses.

After NCES calculates *average net price* for institutions, the data is posted on College Navigator to help students and parents compare average net price across postsecondary institutions. College Navigator provides the *average net price* for students beginning college who attend full time also known as first-time, full-time students.

If you have questions about reporting your institution's data to IPEDS or the IPEDS Data Collection System, contact the IPEDS Data Collection Help Desk at (877) 225-2568 or send an email to Help Desk staff at ipedshelp@rti.org. For assistance using IPEDS data tools, contact the IPEDS Data Use Help Desk at (866) 558-0658 or ipedstools@rti.org.