

POLICY ON DATA REPORTING PROCEDURES

Objective

To establish a process to be followed when institutions report program completions in the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) surveys or the Alabama student unit record database files that do not match, either by CIP code or degree award level, the academic programs listed in the Commission-approved academic program inventory.

Definitions

Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP): A standard taxonomy for classifying academic programs based on six-digit numeric codes and degree award levels. The CIP taxonomy facilitates a comparison of information not only among institutions in the State, but also nationwide. Changes in definitions or codes in the CIP taxonomy can be made only by NCES.

Commission's Web Site: www.ache.state.al.us

Institution of Higher Education (IHE): Any public university or two-year college in the state of Alabama.

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS): System of surveys designed by NCES to collect data from all providers of postsecondary education. One of those surveys gathers completions data from each institution using a standard program classification taxonomy called CIP. The Alabama Commission on Higher Education is designated by statute as the coordinating agency for all data collection requirements of the federal government that require state level coordination and relate to postsecondary (university and two-year) education.

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES): Federal agency charged by Congress to report on the condition of postsecondary education in the United States. NCES describes the postsecondary education enterprise and follows changes in its size, participants, and other characteristics. To coordinate the collection and reporting of IPEDS data, NCES works with state-level higher education agencies, such as the Commission on Higher Education, because states are generally more alert to and able to guard against inconsistencies in the reported data.

Why Does the Commission Need this Policy?

The only way to link completions in IPEDS surveys or the student database to Commission-approved programs is to use the same CIP codes, program titles, and awards recognized by the Commission in its approval of staff recommendations or acceptance as information items.

1. ***To Provide Accurate Records for New Program Approval:*** State law requires that the Commission review and approve all new academic programs in institutions of higher education and that no state funds be expended by any IHE on any new program that has not been approved by the Commission. The Commission has clearly defined procedures, criteria, and definitions for new program approvals, all of which are on file with the Administrative Procedures Office of the Legislative Reference Service, in accordance with Alabama statute. The procedures apply to universities and to two-year colleges. As a part of the procedures, each new program proposal includes three types of program identifiers – 1) a six-digit CIP code, 2) program title, and 3) degree award. As part of the review of the proposal, the staff evaluates these program identifiers and includes them, with any modifications deemed necessary, in the staff recommendation. Upon approval by the Commission, the new program is entered into the Commission’s academic program inventory under this CIP code, program title, and degree award. The academic program inventory is on the Commission’s web site, and any new programs approved by the Commission are added to the inventory immediately following the meeting in which the approval was given. ***The only way to link future completions to a Commission-approved program is by using the CIP code, program title, and degree award approved by the Commission.***
2. ***To Provide Accurate Records for Approval and Receipt by Information Item of Extensions/Alterations to Existing Programs:*** State law also mandates that the Commission define extensions and alterations to academic programs that do not require Commission approval for all IHE. Over the years, the Commission has adopted and revised operational definitions that define those extensions and alterations to existing programs that require Commission approval and those that can be accepted by information item. All definitions and procedures also are on file with the Administrative Procedures Office of the Legislative Reference Service, in accordance with Alabama statute. These procedures clearly outline the process and criteria for approving program mergers and consolidations and for proposing changes in CIP Codes, program titles, and awards. The procedures apply to universities and to two-year colleges. Again, each proposal for an extension or alternation to an existing program includes three types of program identifiers – 1) a six-digit CIP code, 2) program title, and 3) degree award. As in the case of new programs review, the staff evaluates these program identifiers and includes them, with any modifications deemed necessary, in the staff recommendation or information item for each proposed extension or alteration. Upon approval or receipt by information item by the Commission, the extension or alteration is entered into the Commission’s academic program inventory under the CIP code, program title, and degree award included in the proposed extension or alteration. The academic program inventory is on the Commission’s web site, and any changes in CIP code, program title, or degree approved by the Commission or received by information item are made immediately following the meeting where the change occurred. ***The only way to link future completions to a Commission-***

approved extension/alteration or an extension/alteration accepted by information item is by using the CIP code, program title, and degree award included in the proposal.

3. ***To Approve AOT Degrees for Two-Year Colleges:*** In 1998, the Commission approved a proposal by the Alabama Department of Postsecondary Education that all two-year colleges be allowed to list the Associate in Occupational Technology (AOT) degree in its Commission-approved inventory. According to the recommendation approved by the Commission, an institution may offer a Primary Technical Specialty in the AOT only in fields in which it already has an existing diploma or regular certificate (>26 semester hours) listed in the Commission-approved academic program inventory. Additionally, an institution may offer a Secondary Technical Specialty for the AOT only in areas in which it has an existing degree, diploma, certificate (>26 semester hours) or short term certificate (12-25 semester hours). Further, if an institution wishes to offer the AOT in primary or secondary specialty areas in which it does not currently offer the required degree, diploma, or certification, such programs must first be approved by the Commission in accord with the regular program approval guidelines. Note: Commission policy requires that new short-term certificate programs in two-year colleges less than 26 sh in length must be submitted to and received by the Commission as information items. (Staff Recommendation Approved by the Commission, August 7, 1998.) ***To review and approve AOT awards, it is essential that all programs listed in the academic program inventory are listed under the Commission approved CIP code, program title, and degree award.***

4. ***To Verify the Accuracy of IPEDS Completions Reported Annually to NCES:*** Alabama state law also designates the commission as the coordinating agency for all data collection requirements of the federal government for all public institutions of higher education that require state level coordination. Specifically, the Commission is responsible for verifying the accuracy of completions reported by the institutions to NCES. This is an important function because the data from IPEDS completions surveys are widely reported and used at state, regional, and national levels. Further, the Commission staff has numerous requests from legislators, policy makers, researchers, institutional representatives, employers, and government officials for IPEDS completions data. ***The staff can certify the accuracy of completions data to NCES only if it matches the list of Commission-approved programs in the academic program inventory (CIP Code, Title, and Award).***

5. ***To Make Decisions on Program Continuation or Phase Out for Program Viability Purposes:*** The program viability legislation specifically mandated that the IPEDS completions surveys would be the primary source of completions data. Since decisions on continuing or terminating academic programs will be based on this data, it is imperative that it be accurate and consistent with the Commission-approved academic program inventory. ***The only accurate way to***

link IPEDS completions data to the Commission's academic program inventory is by using the same CIP Code, Title, and Award.

6. ***To Generate Reports from the Student Database:*** In 1996, the student database legislation was passed directing the Commission to create a student unit record system. With the data submitted this year, for the first time, the student database is now gathering completions data. For credibility purposes, these data should be comparable with IPEDS completions survey reporting. Further, to be included in the student database, the completions must be in programs approved by the Commission. ***The only way to link student database records to the academic program inventory and IPEDS completions data is by using the same CIP Code, Title, and Award approved by the Commission and listed in the inventory.***

Proposed Policy:

Commission approval of a new program establishes the first assignment of CIP code and award level for that program. Once the Commission approves a new program, it is listed in the academic program inventory at the CIP code and degree level approved by the Commission.

1. All reporting (i.e., inventory, IPEDS completions, student database) for academic programs will be at the CIP code, program title, and award/level originally approved by the Commission. Exceptions to this policy are as follows:
 - a) If an institution submits a request for a change in CIP code, program title, or award that is evaluated by the staff and accepted by the Commission as an information item, completions may continue to be reported to IPEDS and the student database at that original CIP code and degree level consistent with the institutional policy for allowing students in the pipeline to complete a program. However, no new students can be admitted to the program after the change in CIP code, program title, or award is reported to the Commission. Additionally, as soon as possible, future reporting will be under the revised CIP code, title, or award. Policies already have been adopted by the Commission and are on file with the Administrative Procedures Office of the Legislative Reference Service for making such a request.
 - b) If an institution submits a request for an extension or alteration of an existing program (such as merger or consolidation) that is subsequently approved by the Commission, completions may continue to be reported to IPEDS and the student database at that pre-merger or pre-consolidation CIP code and degree level consistent with the institutional policy for allowing students in the pipeline to complete a program. However, no new students can be admitted to the program after the change, extension, or

alteration is approved by the Commission. Additionally, as soon as possible, future reporting will be under the CIP code, program title, and award level of the approved change.

2. If a program is terminated/deleted by an institution from the academic program inventory and so reported to the Commission, completions may continue to be reported to IPEDS and the student database at that CIP code and degree level consistent with the institutional policy for allowing students in the pipeline to complete a terminated program. However, no new students can be admitted to the program after the termination is reported to the Commission.
3. The Commission staff will run edits of the completions reported on the IPEDS completions surveys and in the student database. All completions that do not match a CIP code and/or award level of a program in the Commission's academic program inventory and which were not terminated previously by the institution of higher education will be considered errors. The Commission staff will correct any inadvertent errors made in processing the data.
4. The staff will refer all exceptions in reporting back to the universities, or in the case of Athens State University and the two-year colleges, to the Department of Postsecondary Education, for correction. In some cases, the time frame for error resolution will be very short due to imposed deadlines.
5. Completions in question must be changed according to established deadlines by the IHE to reflect a CIP code or award in the Commission's inventory, or they will not be included in the student database and they will be removed from the IPEDS completions survey before it is certified to NCES.