

National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Postsecondary Education Sample Studies

The National Center for Education Statistics currently administers one cross-sectional postsecondary sample study – the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS) – and two longitudinal spin-offs – the Beginning Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study (BPS) and Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B). These studies, which include student-level data for nationally representative samples of postsecondary students, are designed to answer research and policy questions about college students' enrollment, progression, financing, and post-college outcomes. However, they do not typically allow for institution- or state-level analysis (some cycles of NPSAS have included state representative samples).

National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS)

NPSAS examines how students and their families pay for postsecondary education. The federal government, institutions, and researchers use NPSAS' nationally representative samples of undergraduate and graduate students to analyze student financial aid and inform public policy on such programs as the Pell Grant and Stafford Loans. Drawing from multiple sources, including institutional records, government databases, and student interviews, the data set includes detailed information on participation in student financial aid programs, student demographics, family background, education and work experiences, and student expectations. NCES first administered the survey in 1986-87 and again on seven subsequent occasions, with the latest NPSAS, 2011-12, including more than 128,120 aided and non-aided students across all sectors and institution types. NPSAS data provide the base-year sample for the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) and the Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B) longitudinal studies.

Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS)

BPS follows cohorts of first-time students for six years after initially enrolling in postsecondary education. The study collects data on student persistence in, and completion of, postsecondary education programs, their transition to employment, demographic characteristics, and changes over time in their goals, marital status, income, and debt, among other indicators. BPS tracks students' paths through postsecondary

education and helps answer policy questions, such as why students leave school, how financial aid influences persistence and completion, and what percentages of students complete various degree programs. In its latest iteration, BPS:04/09 includes nearly 16,700 students who completed surveys at the end of their first academic year (2003-04) and again three (2005-06) and six (2008-09) years after college entry. Prior cohorts include BPS:90/94 (approximately 8,000 students) and BPS:96/2001 (approximately 12,000 students).

Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B)

Through student interviews, B&B examines students' education and work experiences after they complete a bachelor's degree, with a special emphasis on new K-12 teachers. Following several cohorts of students over time, B&B includes data on bachelor's degree recipients' workforce participation, income, debt repayment, and entry into and persistence through graduate school programs, among other indicators. B&B also gathers extensive information on bachelor's degree recipients' undergraduate experiences, demographic backgrounds, expectations regarding graduate study and work, and participation in community service. Sample size and follow-up frequency for the study has varied since its inception in 1993, with the latest cohort (B&B:08) including approximately 19,000 bachelor's recipients and two follow-up surveys in 2009 and 2012. NCES intends to complete a ten-year follow-up with the B&B:08 cohort in 2018.

Using NCES Sample Study Data

NCES provides public access to data for all of its postsecondary sample studies through [PowerStats](#), a web-based data tool. PowerStats users can work with most survey variables to generate tables with descriptive statistics and run simple linear and logistic regressions. Users wishing to work with de-identified student record-level data are required to obtain a restricted-use license from NCES and must adhere to a strict data confidentiality agreement and data security protocols. Restricted-use data allow researchers to import the full data set into statistical software programs (SAS, SPSS, STATA) for more complex and multilevel modeling and analysis.