

Chapter 1

Introduction, Background, and Purpose

This document describes the methodological procedures and results for the 2000 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:2000). NPSAS:2000 is a comprehensive study of financial aid among postsecondary education students in the United States and Puerto Rico, and provides current information on how families pay for postsecondary education. The study was conducted for the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) of the U.S. Department of Education (ED), as authorized by Title IV, Section 401 of the *National Education Statistics Act of 1994* (P.L. 103-382). NPSAS:2000 was conducted under contract by Research Triangle Institute (RTI), assisted by MPR Associates, Inc., and the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators (NASFAA).

This introductory chapter describes briefly the background, purposes, schedule, and products of the NPSAS:2000 full-scale study. The study design, sampling and data collection procedures are described in Chapter 2. The third chapter describes the overall outcomes for the several stages and sources of data collection. Chapter 4 examines the effectiveness of the procedures and methodologies employed in the study, and data quality issues. Chapter 5 describes the details of data editing, processing, and file development operations. Chapter 6 summarizes the NPSAS:2000, weighting and variance estimation activities.

Materials used during NPSAS:2000 data collection are provided as appendices to the report. These include: a list of the experts comprising the NPSAS:2000 technical review panel (appendix A); materials sent to institutions and students, as well as endorsements obtained from professional organizations and associations in support of the study (appendices B and C); contents of training materials (appendix D); and facsimiles of the study's data collection instruments (appendices E and F). Additional appendices provide supporting documentation regarding details of the complex sampling design developed for the study (appendix G), supplemental tables and design effects (appendices H and I), analysis variables (appendix J), and imputations (appendix K).

1.1. Background and Purpose of NPSAS

NPSAS is a comprehensive nationwide study designed to determine how students and their families pay for postsecondary education, and to describe some demographic and other characteristics of the students enrolled in postsecondary education. The study is based on a nationally representative sample of students in postsecondary education institutions, including undergraduate, graduate, and first-professional students. Students attending all types and levels of institutions are represented, including public and private for-profit and not-for-profit

institutions, and less-than-2-year institutions to 4-year colleges and universities. The NPSAS studies are designed to address the policy questions resulting from the rapid growth of financial aid programs and the succession of changes in financial aid program policies since 1986. The first NPSAS study was conducted in 1986-87; subsequent studies have been carried out during the 1989-90, 1992-93, and 1995-96 school years (i.e., NPSAS:90, NPSAS:93, and NPSAS:96). This methodology report relates to the latest study in this series, NPSAS:2000, for which data were collected from sample students enrolled between July 1999 and June 2000.

In addition to collecting information on financial aid in the United States, since 1990 NPSAS has been used to form the base-year sample for a postsecondary longitudinal survey supported by NCES. Specifically, alternate NPSAS data collections provide the base year sample for either the Beginning Postsecondary Students (BPS) longitudinal study or the Baccalaureate and Beyond (B&B) longitudinal study. NPSAS:2000 serves as the base-year survey for a sample of baccalaureate students who will be surveyed again in 2001.

A main objective of the NPSAS study is to produce reliable national estimates of characteristics related to financial aid for postsecondary students. The data are part of NCES' comprehensive information on student financial aid and other characteristics of those enrolled in postsecondary education. The study focuses on three general questions with important policy implications for financial aid programs:

- How do students and their families finance postsecondary education?
- How does the process of financial aid work, in terms of both who applies for and who receives aid?
- What are the effects of financial aid on students and their families and on postsecondary institutions?

1.2. Methodological Issues

As described in Chapter 2, the NPSAS survey design is both large and complex. Data are collected from a very large and diverse set of students. A major methodological concern underlying NPSAS is selecting data sources that provide some assurance of comparability for each element. Of the potential sources for NPSAS data—government data files, institutional records, and students—none alone can provide a complete and accurate summary of postsecondary education financing.

Financial aid offices maintain accurate records of certain types of financial aid at that institution, but these records are not necessarily inclusive of all support and assistance. Such records may not contain financial aid provided at other institutions attended by the student or those not recorded by a financial aid office.¹ Students and their parents are more likely than institutions to have a comprehensive picture of education financing, but may not have accurate memory or records of exact amounts and sources. They may have provided information to

¹ Two notable exceptions that are not maintained in many financial aid offices are employee benefits and graduate teaching or research assistantships.

lending agencies or aid providers (or clearinghouses), and that information may exist in student financial aid records. Consequently, the NPSAS data requirements call for a survey design that builds a comprehensive and accurate understanding of postsecondary education financing from a number of different sources. To meet this challenge, NPSAS:2000 relied on an integrated system of computer-assisted data capture instruments.

Innovative methodological solutions that were applied to NPSAS:2000 challenges were tested and refined during a substantial field test conducted during the 1998-99 school year on a separate independent sample of students and institutions. Results of the field test have been reported separately.²

1.3. Special Features of NPSAS:2000

Although the general purposes of the NPSAS studies have remained quite consistent, all NPSAS implementations except the first also have served as the base year for a longitudinal study. For NPSAS:96 and NPSAS:90, the longitudinal cohort comprised students who began their postsecondary education during the NPSAS year. NPSAS:2000 and NPSAS:93 have provided the base-year cohort for a sample of students who completed a baccalaureate degree during the NPSAS year. As in the past, the NPSAS:2000 longitudinal cohort was oversampled to support the subsequent longitudinal follow-up study.

In implementing four prior rounds of NPSAS and their associated field tests, NCES and its contractors have developed and refined a number of systems and methods to facilitate subsequent rounds. Consequently, in NPSAS:2000, most methods that both had proved successful and remained applicable to current study needs were maintained or refined. Like prior NPSAS implementations, however, the current study also attempted to take advantage of new technologies and to access newly available data sources toward improving study efficiency and/or the quality of data collected.

The most significant enhancement to NPSAS:2000 involved the student record abstraction process. For NPSAS:2000, a new computer-assisted data entry (CADE) system for use over the Internet through the World Wide Web was developed and implemented. This Web-based software (Web-CADE) had a better user interface than the NPSAS:96 system, and addressed several of the self-CADE issues raised during the previous study (insufficient computer memory, failures during diskette installation and virus scanning, lack of information regarding institutions' progress during data collection).

NPSAS:2000 continued procedures implemented in 1996 to broaden the base of postsecondary student types for whom telephone interview data could be collected. In past NPSAS implementations, no mechanism existed for contacting and collecting information by telephone from students with severe hearing impairments; however, both NPSAS:96 and

² For results of the NPSAS:2000 field test, which tested procedures and instruments before the start of the full-scale study, see U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. *National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:2000) Field Test Methodology Report*, NCES No. 2000-17, by Melissa R. Biber, Michael W. Link, John A. Riccobono, and Peter H. Siegel. Andrew G. Malizio, project officer. Washington, DC: October 2000.

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NPSAS:2000 included the use of Telephone Display for the Deaf (TDD) technology to facilitate telephone communications with such students. Also, beginning in NPSAS:96, a separate Spanish translation interview was prepared for administration to students who had insufficient English language proficiency to complete the interview in English or who needed at least some translation of terms by a bilingual interviewer.³ This accommodation was particularly useful with the students from sampled postsecondary institutions in Puerto Rico.

1.4. Overall Schedule and Products of NPSAS:2000

Table 1-1 includes a schedule of activities for the NPSAS:2000 study. As noted previously, the NPSAS:2000 full-scale study was preceded by a field test, and data collection for the full-scale study spanned the 11-month period from March 2000 to February 2001.

Table 1-1.—Start and end dates for major NPSAS:2000 activities

Activity	Start date ¹	End date ²
Select institutional sample	10/28/99	01/02/99
Make mail and phone contact with chief administrator	11/24/99	12/15/00
Make mail and phone contact with institutional coordinator	01/05/00	12/04/00
Obtain lists for student sampling	02/17/00	12/13/00
Select student samples	02/17/00	12/13/00
Request/obtain 1999–2000 data from the Central Processing System (CPS)	02/18/00	12/20/00
Preload CPS data into CADE records	03/20/00	02/01/01
Implement CADE record abstraction	03/23/00	02/16/01
Preload CADE into computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) records	05/19/00	02/16/01
Implement CATI	05/22/00	02/28/01
Request/obtain 2000–2001 CPS data	01/12/01	01/12/01
Request/obtain 1999–2000 Pell Grant data	01/05/00	01/22/01

¹This is the date on which the activity was initiated for the first applicable school and/or its associated students.

²This is the date on which the activity was completed for the last applicable school and/or its associated students.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Postsecondary Student Aid Study, 1999–2000 (NPSAS:2000).

³ It was expected that Spanish would be the primary language for the largest non-English speaking segment of the sampled population. English/Spanish bilingual interviewers were used in NPSAS:2000 as in previous NPSAS studies to interview Spanish-speaking sample members with limited English proficiency. Cost considerations precluded similar accommodations for other foreign languages.

The following products/reports based on NPSAS:2000 will be available in 2002:

Undergraduate Financing of Postsecondary Education, 1999–2000

This report will focus solely on undergraduate students enrolled during the 1999–2000 school year. It will examine how undergraduate students financed their education. The report will have a section that explores undergraduate borrowing, including information from the National Student Loan Data System on cumulative borrowing. Other tables in the report will summarize total price of attendance, the distribution of financial aid among students by type of institution, and the net price of attendance. This report will contain a special section presenting the distribution of aid among students at different types of institutions with a focus on student borrowing. Supplemental tables for students who borrow at the Stafford loan limit will also be included.

Student Financing of Graduate and Professional Education, 1999–2000

This report will describe the characteristics of graduate and first-professional students enrolled during 1999–2000, including age, race, gender, income, community service, veteran status, and more. Also, the report will describe those graduate and first-professional students who received financial aid, including grants, loans, and work-study from federal, state, institution, or other sources, by selected student characteristics. The report will include a section on graduate research and teaching assistantships.

Profile of Undergraduates at U.S. Postsecondary Institutions, 1999–2000

The profile will describe the characteristics of undergraduates enrolled during 1999–2000, including age, race, gender, income, financial aid receipt, community service, veteran status, and student employment. It will include a special section highlighting the diversity of the undergraduate population, focusing on demographic composition, race/ethnicity, immigration status, and undergraduates with dependents.

NPSAS:2000 Undergraduate and Graduate/First-Professional Data Analysis Systems

The Data Analysis System (DAS) is a Windows-based software application that provides public access to NCES survey data. Two DASs have been created from the NPSAS:2000 data: an undergraduate DAS and a graduate/first-professional DAS. With the DAS, users can generate tables of percentages, means, or correlation coefficients simply by choosing the DAS variables (based on survey questionnaire items) that they would like to appear in a table and indicating what function should be used.

Contact Aurora D'Amico, or visit the website (<http://nces.ed.gov/das/>) to download a NPSAS:2000 DAS application or one of the NPSAS:2000 reports.

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NPSAS:2000 Restricted use data files

The survey data files used to create variables in the Data Analysis Systems, and the associated electronic codebooks and file documentation, are available to researchers who have obtained a restricted data license from NCES. Information on obtaining a restricted data license may be found in the NCES *Restricted Use Data Procedures Manual*⁴, available from Cynthia Barton.

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Information on the NCES Statistical Standards Program, including Restricted Use Data Licenses Procedures, is available from the NCES website: <http://nces.ed.gov/statprog>.

⁴U.S. Department of Education. National Center for Education Statistics. *NCES Restricted-Use Data Procedures Manual*. Washington, DC: October 1999.