



# Enrollment

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## HISTORY AND LEGISLATION

IPEDS enrollment data are some of the oldest in the collection. Data from the **Fall Enrollment (EF)** survey component were first collected as part of the Higher Education General Information Survey and later moved to IPEDS in 1986–87. The **12-month Enrollment (E12)** survey component opened as a separate component in 2007–08.

Enrollment data have been expanded to provide more comprehensive information on specific groups of students enrolled in postsecondary education. The following legislative acts influenced the IPEDS collection and distribution of enrollment by specific groups:

- National Education Statistics Act (1994)
- Student Right-to-Know and Campus Security Act (1990)
- Education Sciences Reform Act (2002)
- Higher Education Act, as amended (1998, 2008)

For more information on the history and origins of IPEDS enrollment metrics, read <https://go.usa.gov/x5bHd>.

## Introduction

Postsecondary institutions submit data to IPEDS through 12 interrelated survey components, two of which collect data on enrollment—the **Fall Enrollment (EF)** and **12-month Enrollment (E12)** components. Enrollment data are used by a number of decision makers, including:

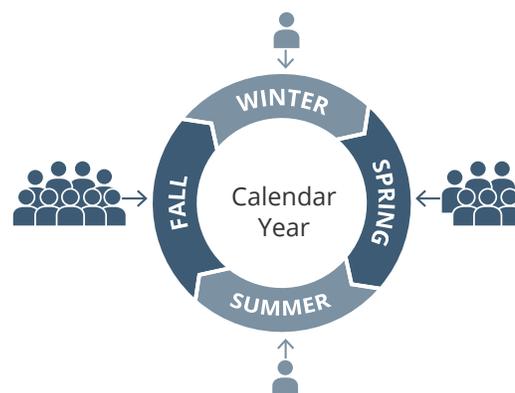
- Policymakers to evaluate legislation and programs;
- States to determine funding allocations;
- Higher education associations to drive organizational missions and priorities;
- Institutions to benchmark against peers;
- Consumers (e.g., students and parents) to make college decisions; and
- The media to assess the education landscape.

## IPEDS Enrollment Counts

**IPEDS data are collected at the institution level, not the student level.**

Both the EF and E12 survey components collect the number of students enrolled in postsecondary credit courses, regardless of whether the student is seeking a degree/certificate or the course is Title IV-eligible.

Institutions enroll students at different times of the year depending on the calendar system they follow. The graphic below illustrates the differences in enrollment at academic calendar year and program calendar year institutions.



**Academic** calendar year institutions enroll students on a traditional academic year schedule



**Program** calendar year institutions enroll students on a continuous basis or at specific times depending on program length

## What are the key differences in the enrollment counts?

This table summarizes some key differences in the enrollment counts collected in each survey component.

Fall Enrollment (EF)		12-month Enrollment (E12)
Captures number of students enrolled in credit courses in the fall	 Reporting period	Captures number of students enrolled in credit courses during a 12-month period
Described as the “snapshot” count because students are captured as of a specific census date	 Count type	Described as the “unduplicated” count because students are counted once by the institution in a 12-month period <sup>1</sup>
EF student enrollment counts are collected by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of student (undergraduate, graduate)</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Race/ethnicity</li> <li>• Age group</li> <li>• Attendance status (full- or part-time)</li> <li>• First-time status of undergraduate students</li> <li>• Degree/certificate-seeking status of undergraduate students</li> </ul>	 Student breakouts	E12 student enrollment counts are collected by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Level of student (undergraduate, graduate)</li> <li>• Gender</li> <li>• Race/ethnicity</li> </ul>

## Which enrollment count should I use?

The enrollment count you use depends on the level of detail you want for analysis and the students you wish to include. This table highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the two enrollment counts.

Fall Enrollment (EF)		12-month Enrollment (E12)
Contains more student breakouts Contains more historical data (dating back to 1986)	 STRENGTHS	Includes students enrolled at any time during the year
Excludes students who were not enrolled in the fall	 WEAKNESSES	Contains fewer student breakouts

<sup>1</sup> While students are “unduplicated” at the institution level, those that enroll in more than one institution during the 12-month period will be counted more than once at other aggregate levels (e.g., state, national).

# What other metrics do the enrollment surveys provide?

## Fall Enrollment (EF)

EF collects more than just a count of students enrolled for credit in the fall. It provides a broader picture of the student enrollment process, including:

- Residency data indicating how many first-time students are in-state;
- Retention rates tracking students still enrolled from the prior fall;
- Student-to-faculty ratio showing the number of full-time equivalent (FTE)<sup>2</sup> students per instructional staff; and
- Enrollment in distance education.

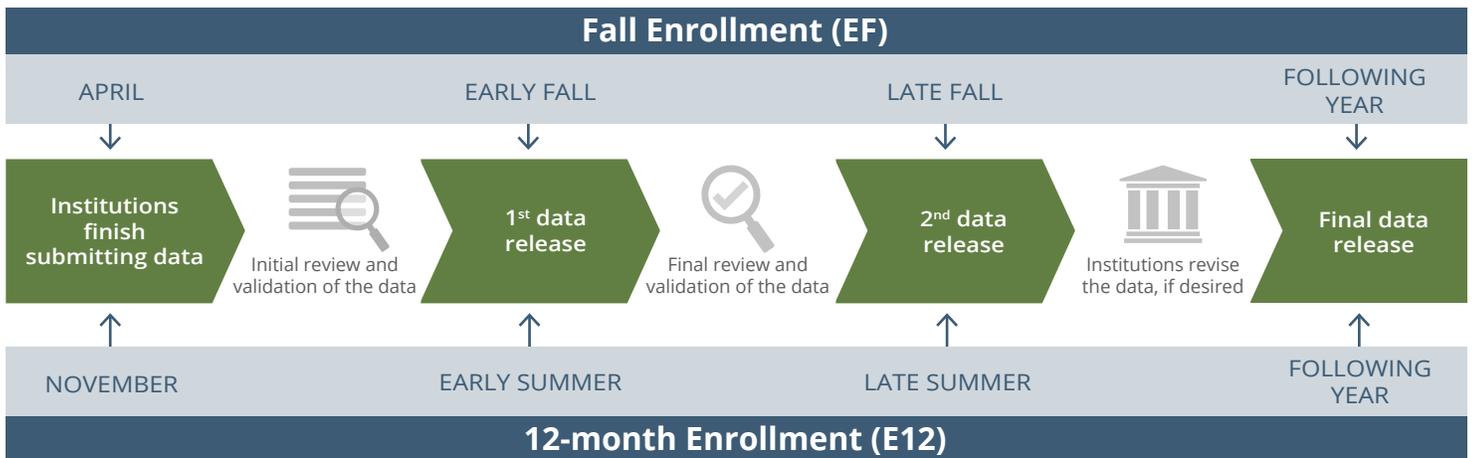
## 12-month Enrollment (E12)

E12 provides a more complete picture of the annual enrollment at an institution. In addition to enrollment, it collects:

- Instructional activity, or the total number of hours students are engaged in instruction, for the 12-month period; and
- 12-month full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment,<sup>2</sup> which provides a meaningful combination of full- and part-time students across institutions that operate on different calendar systems.<sup>3</sup>

# What is the data release process?

Data are released several months after the survey component closes and after they have been cleaned. For more detail about the data cleaning process, visit <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds> and search “data release”.



NOTE: Times are approximate.

<sup>2</sup> The EF FTE calculation differs from the E12 FTE calculation. Compare the IPEDS glossary definitions for “FTE using fall student headcounts” and “FTE using instructional activity” at <https://surveys.nces.ed.gov/ipeds/visGlossary.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> IPEDS draws on the E12 FTE to create derived variables (e.g., costs per FTE, revenues per FTE).



## Key Terms

<b>Academic year</b>	The period of time generally extending from September to June; usually equated to 2 semesters or trimesters, 3 quarters, or the period covered by a 4-1-4 calendar system.
<b>Calendar system</b>	The method by which an institution structures most of its courses for the academic year.
<b>Continuous basis</b>	A calendar system classification that is used by institutions that allow students to enroll/start classes at any time during the year. For example, a cosmetology school or a word processing school might allow students to enroll and begin studies at various times, with no requirement that classes begin on a certain date.
<b>Credit course</b>	A course that, if successfully completed, can be applied toward the number of courses required for achieving a postsecondary degree, diploma, certificate, or other formal award, irrespective of the activity's unit of measurement.
<b>Distance education</b>	Education that uses one or more technologies to deliver instruction to students who are separated from the instructor and to support regular and substantive interaction between the students and the instructor synchronously or asynchronously.
<b>FTE of students</b>	The full-time equivalent (FTE) of students is a single value providing a meaningful combination of full-time and part-time students. IPEDS data products currently have two calculations of FTE students, one using fall student headcounts and the other using 12-month instructional activity.
<b>Official fall reporting date</b>	The date (in the fall) on which an institution must report fall enrollment data to either the state, its board of trustees or governing board, or some other external governing body.
<b>Race/ethnicity</b>	Categories developed in 1997 by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) that are used to describe groups to which individuals belong, identify with, or belong in the eyes of the community. The categories do not denote scientific definitions of anthropological origins. The designations are used to categorize U.S. citizens, resident aliens, and other eligible non-citizens.
<b>Title IV institution</b>	An institution that has a written agreement with the Secretary of Education that allows the institution to participate in any of the Title IV federal student financial assistance programs (other than the State Student Incentive Grant (SSIG) and the National Early Intervention Scholarship and Partnership (NEISP) programs).
<b>Unduplicated count</b>	The sum of students enrolled for credit, with each student counted only once during the reporting period, regardless of when the student enrolled.



Visit the **IPEDS Use the Data** page at <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/Home/UseTheData> for more information.

## Contacts



For help using or retrieving data:  
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For survey component specific questions:  
**IPEDS Staff**  
<https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/Home/InsideStaff>