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Comments Received :

I'm a Collection Assessment Librarian with a large, regional, state-supported institution, and I'm writing in opposition of the plan to eliminate the Academic Libraries Survey component of the IPEDS. This letter of support will address the questions that are being used for the assessment.

(1) Is this collection necessary to the proper functions of the Department? From the Education Department's website, the "ED's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access." Research has demonstrated the clear association of metrics of library service, quality, and usage with improved student outcomes. This connection is more substantial among those with less than equal access to higher education. But this connection is hard to measure at the individual institutional level. Data from the full breadth of academic institutions are needed to understand this connection better and to identify what makes the connection stronger for some institutions or groups of students. Thus, it appears clear that this data should be necessary to the functions of the Education Department. Indeed, I think it is under-utilized as a source of information. More effort could be made to encourage researchers and administrators to include ALS component in analyses involving IPEDS data.

(2) Will this information be processed and used in a timely manner? The ALS component is shorter than most other parts of the IPED survey, and its items are less complex than more recent additions, particularly those on post-graduation outcomes. While I cannot speak for the work that the Department undertakes to process the survey items, I would be interested to know which are more complicated to process. However, the data has been used by library researchers and practitioner-researchers. I found at least 13 published reports of research conducted using the ALS component just in the last 15 years. This does not account for the unpublished uses in library management and planning. We have used the data to compare key metrics of our services and employment against our peers, both current and aspirational.

(3) Is the estimate of burden accurate? The estimate of about 8 hours for completion of the survey may be about right, as an average or median. But it should be recognized that the metrics requested for the survey should be a routine part of most academic libraries' management processes, and utilizing the ALS standard would make it easier to generate this data.

(4) How might the Department enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected? All surveys involve a great deal of compromise of these aspects of question development. With data being collected by such a wide range of libraries which use a variety of data management tools, it is hard to standardize the metrics to please all the librarians all the time. For improving quality and clarity, I believe it is important to avoid changes in definitions, making them as format-agnostic as possible. For improving utility, more training in the use of the data tool could be useful.

 (5) How might the Department minimize the burden of this collection on the respondents, including through the use of information technology? I think it could be very helpful to include library systems vendors to develop functions.

I hope that by addressing the questions directly, this letter provides more evidence.