

HEDS Statement of Understandings: 2020-2021 Operative Statement

The Statement of Understandings (SOU) is a core document for HEDS. The SOU is meant to capture the reasons and rules for how we share data, knowledge, and expertise. Sharing is in our name—the Higher Education Data SHARING Consortium—and our mission identifies sharing as the way we work to advance liberal arts education, inclusive excellence, and student success. The SOU has two components: (1) a Principles & Values Statement, which documents the reasons we share data, knowledge, and expertise in the consortium, and (2) this document, the Operative Statement, which outlines rules of the road for sharing. Together these two documents describe the *why* and *how* of sharing in HEDS.

In the tables on the following pages, we describe how you can share and disseminate information you get from the consortium. In terms of “data, knowledge, and expertise,” this document focuses mostly on data from surveys and institutional data exchanges. However, we have also included rules for sharing information from HEDS events.

For your convenience we’ve created links between the following sources of data and information with the rules for sharing for those sources of information:

- [HEDS Non-Climate Surveys: HEDS Alumni Surveys; HEDS New Student Survey; HEDS Research Practices Survey; HEDS Returning Student Survey; HEDS Senior Survey](#)
- [HEDS Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey](#)
- [HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Surveys](#)
- [HEDS Data Exchanges](#)
- [Baccalaureate Origins of PhDs](#)
- [HEDS Listserv](#)
- [HEDS Webinars and HEDS Annual Conference](#)
- [Overall summary HEDS reports on survey or institutional data](#)

We will update this document as we add new types of sharing to the consortium’s products and services.

We’ve used the following design principles to develop these operative guidelines:

1. We want to promote the use of HEDS data to help institutions implement their missions, and data, including the ways that we make sense of data, are rarely useful if they aren’t shared. More often than not, sharing data means contextualizing data with comparisons to data from other institutions.
2. We also want to promote the easy exchange of knowledge and expertise within and across member institutions. Once again, it’s hard to learn something from knowledgeable colleagues unless they feel free to share their knowledge, both within and across institutions. But describing the application of knowledge and expertise also requires contextualization, which can mean sharing additional information about our institutions.
3. We want to promote sharing data, knowledge, and expertise, but we also need to value the rights of member institutions, and individuals at member institutions, to control how information that may identify their data or practices are shared at or across other HEDS institutions. In essence, we need to promote sharing but also ensure the confidentiality of the information that’s shared.

We try to strike this balance in the practical rules of the road we describe below. We want to give institutions the flexibility to use the information that HEDS shares in ways that help them advance their missions while at the same time ensuring that institutional data, practices, and possible concerns are not identifiable.

We mention the *Rule of Five* several times in the tables below. The *Rule of Five* means that you can only identify the institutions in your comparison group if that group contains at least five institutions. If your comparison group includes less than 5 institutions, you cannot name the institutions without written permission from the survey liaisons and primary contacts¹ at those institutions. You must also send copies of those permissions to the HEDS Director.

HEDS collects and shares a lot of different kinds of data. This means that these rules are complex. Please let us know if you have any questions, comments, or concerns about what we've outlined below. We will also be sure to include the relevant rules for sharing with any data that we distribute (e.g., in survey reports or data exchange spreadsheets).

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¹ See <https://www.hedsconsortium.org/heds-college-university-members/> for a list of primary contacts. Please contact us to find out who the survey liaisons are.

Data Source	Share with restrictions	Share without restrictions
<p>HEDS Non-Climate Surveys</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HEDS Alumni Surveys • HEDS New Student Survey • HEDS Research Practices Survey • HEDS Returning Student Survey • HEDS Senior Survey 	<p>Your institution’s unit-record data file</p> <p>We also send all institutions a unit-record data file (typically an MS Excel or SPSS file) that includes data from only your students, alumni, or employees. You are free to share the results of any analyses from this unit-record data in any way you’d like so long as you maintain the confidentiality of the survey respondents. You may also share the unit-record data file itself, as long as you maintain a degree of confidentiality that is consistent with your institution’s practices and IRB review (if necessary), <u>and is consistent with the commitments to participants detailed in the survey introduction.</u></p> <p>Unit-record data file with data from all participating HEDS institutions</p> <p>For a few of these surveys, HEDS institutions have the option of downloading a unit-record data file that includes data from all HEDS institutions that participated in the survey. These data do not include personal information from the people who took the survey, but they do include information that identifies the participants’ institutions. In using this unit-record data file:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You should treat data that identify institutions the same way you would treat data that identify students, i.e., allow limited circulation among people at your institution who understand and will follow their obligation to keep these data confidential. You should never circulate data or analyses that link individual institutions and their data beyond this small group. • You should feel free to analyze these data for reports or other work on your campus, but in any documents where you disseminate your findings, you should follow the <i>Rule of Five</i> for describing your comparison groups. <p>Custom reports that consortiums or institutions ask HEDS to produce</p> <p>The <i>Rule of Five</i> applies to any custom reports that HEDS produces. So, you can only identify the institutions in your comparison group if that group contains at least five institutions. If your comparison group includes less than 5 institutions, you cannot name the institutions without written permission from the survey liaisons and primary contacts at those institutions. You must also send copies of those permissions to the Director of HEDS.</p>	<p>Summary report</p> <p>We send all participating institutions (both members and non-members) a summary report comparing your institution to other institutions. The summary report lists all of the HEDS members and non-members that participated in the survey, but it aggregates data from all institutions besides your own into one or more comparison groups. These summary reports do not identify data from individual institutions.</p>

Data Source	Share with restrictions	Share without restrictions
<p>HEDS Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey</p>	<p>Your institution’s open-ended comment report We send all participating institutions (both members and non-members) a report with the open-ended comments that your institution’s respondents made to the survey. These open-ended comments are not linked to the unit-record data. Even though HEDS has reviewed all comments and removed identifying information from the comments, you should exercise caution in sharing these reports at your institution. When your institution administered this survey, it committed to maintaining the anonymity of respondents. It’s possible that people who read the reports may, based on their knowledge of your institution, be able to deduce the identity of respondents who made comments.</p> <p><i>NOTE: Given the sensitive nature of the data this survey collects, we do not share a multi-institution unit-record data file from this survey with HEDS institutions.</i></p>	<p>Summary report We send all participating institutions (both members and non-members) a summary report that compares your institution to other institutions. The summary report lists all of the HEDS members and non-members that participated in the survey, but it aggregates data from all institutions besides your own into one or more comparison groups.</p> <p>Your institution’s unit-record data file We also send all institutions a unit-record data file that includes data from only your students and employees. However, because of the sensitive nature of this survey, we promise anonymity to everyone (staff, faculty, and students) who takes this survey. And we take this promise to heart. This means we will deprecate identifying information in your institution’s unit-record data file to ensure that you will not be able to identify the people who took the survey based on their responses. This will limit the kinds of analyses that you can do with your unit-record data file.</p>

Data Source	Share with restrictions	Share without restrictions
<p>HEDS Sexual Assault Campus Climate Surveys</p>	<p>Your institution’s open-ended comment report We send all participating institutions (both members and non-members) a report with the open-ended comments that your institution’s respondents made to the survey. These open-ended comments are not linked to the unit-record data. Even though HEDS has reviewed all comments and removed identifying information from the comments, you should exercise caution in sharing these reports at your institution. It’s possible that people who read the reports may, based on their “insider knowledge,” be able to deduce the identity of respondents who made comments.</p> <p>Comparison tool We send all HEDS institutions that participate in the undergraduate version of the survey a spreadsheet with institution-level data for key questions and indicators. The spreadsheet is set up so that you can quickly choose institutions to include in a custom comparison group. This spreadsheet should be treated with the same care and commitment to confidentiality as data that include identifiable information about students or employees. You should not identify the institutions in your custom comparison groups in any reports or materials that you disseminate, whether within your institution or publicly, without receiving written permission from the institutions’ survey liaisons and primary contacts. You must also send copies of those permissions to the Director of HEDS.</p> <p><i>NOTE: Given the sensitive nature of the data this survey collects, we do not share a multi-institution unit-record data file from this survey with HEDS institutions.</i></p>	<p>Summary report We send all participating institutions (both members and non-members) a summary report that compares your institution to other institutions. The summary report aggregates data from all institutions besides your own into one or more comparison groups. Because of the extreme sensitivity of the data we collect in this survey, participating institutions have <i>complete</i> control over whether or not they acknowledge that they’ve participated in this survey. That means that, unlike our other summary reports, we do not list the institutions that participated in the survey. We will never publicly identify institutions that have participated in these surveys, and even if you know the identity of other HEDS institutions that participated in the surveys, you are obligated to keep their identity confidential unless you have explicit permission from the institutions’ survey liaisons and primary contacts. You must also send copies of those permissions to the Director of HEDS.</p> <p>Your institution’s unit-record data file We also send all institutions a unit-record data file that includes data from only your students or employees. However, as we do with the unit-record data file from the HEDS Diversity and Equity Campus Climate Survey, we promise anonymity to everyone who takes this survey. This means that we will also deprecate identifying information in your institution’s unit-record data file(s) to ensure that you will not be able to use the data to identify individual participants. This will limit the kinds of analyses that you can do with your unit-record data file(s).</p>

Data Source	Share with restrictions	Share without restrictions
<p>HEDS Data Exchanges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AAUP Faculty Compensation Data • Common Data Set • COVID Retention Study • Deposits • NACE First-Destination Data • NACUBO Tuition Discounting Study • NSSE • Starting Salaries Data 	<p>All data exchange spreadsheets, reports, and files may be shared with restrictions.</p> <p>You should treat data that identify institutions the same way you would treat data that include information that identifies students or employees, i.e., allow limited circulation among people at your institution who understand and will follow their obligation to keep these data confidential. You should never circulate data or analyses that link individual institutions and their data beyond this small group.</p> <p>You should only develop reports from these data for your institution if your institution has contributed to the data set. Your data is the “fee” you pay for using the data for analyses and reports.</p> <p>You should feel free to analyze these data for reports or other work on your campus, but in any documents where you disseminate your findings, you should follow the <i>Rule of Five</i> for describing your comparison groups.</p>	

Data Source	Share with restrictions	Share without restrictions
Baccalaureate Origins of PhDs	<p>This data file should not be shared outside of the consortium.²</p> <p>When using the Baccalaureate Origins of Doctorates data to describe the performance of your institution on this outcome, please adhere to the following guidelines:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use descriptions of your institution that highlight percentile ranks or comparisons to broad groups of institutions. For example, “[HEDS Institution name] is in the top 10% of institutions whose students go on to earn PhDs,” or “[HEDS Institution name] is in the top 10 of institutions whose students go on to earn PhDs,” or “A higher percentage of students from [HEDS Institution name] go on to earn PhDs than any other institution in the Midwest.” 2. Be cautious in using explicit ranks in statements or analyses. For example, we suggest avoiding, “[Institution name] is ranked 8th among liberal arts colleges in the number of students who go on to earn PhDs, compared to [Competitor institution name] which is ranked 9th, and [Comparison institution name] which is ranked 10th.” 3. Avoid publicly listing HEDS institutions that you are using as your comparison group with these data. Once again, saying “ranked first among top private institutions in the South” is fine, but saying, “We are ranked higher than [HEDS Institution 1], [HEDS Institution 2], and [HEDS Institution 3],” violates the spirit of the HEDS Statement of Understandings. <p>See the memo we issued on 5/18/2020 for more information.³</p>	

² See <https://www.hedsconsortium.org/heds-college-university-members/> for a list of consortium members.

³ See <https://hedsconsortium.box.com/s/8xdw09xvc52qqa1es5pk2r1qs2x8d513> for a copy of the message we sent to the listserv.

Data Source	Share with restrictions	Share without restrictions
HEDS Listserv	<p>All information from the listserv may be shared with restrictions. You should treat the listserv as a closed and private community resource. We encourage people at HEDS institutions to post questions to the listserv. One of the benefits of the HEDS listserv is that it is populated by hundreds of people with diverse backgrounds, expertise, and knowledge, so the listserv community can address a wide range of questions.</p> <p>When you post a question to the listserv, please summarize the responses you receive and send them back to the whole listserv. This summary is how you contribute to the knowledge and expertise of the HEDS community and thank the people who took time to respond to your query. Since the HEDS listserv is private and inside our community, you should feel free to identify institutions in your summaries.</p> <p>If you respond to a question on the listserv, please send your response directly to the person who posted the question rather than to the whole listserv. Everyone on the listserv will receive a summary of all the responses compiled by the person who posted the question.</p> <p>You should treat all summaries or responses to questions on the listserv that identify institutions the same way you would treat information that identifies students or employees – that is, allow limited circulation among people at your institution who understand and will follow their obligation to keep these data confidential. You should never circulate data or analyses that link individual institutions and their data beyond this small group. You should also feel free to analyze these data for reports or other work on your campus, but in any documents where you disseminate your findings, you should follow the <i>Rule of Five</i> for describing your comparison groups.</p>	

Data Source	Share with restrictions	Share without restrictions
HEDS Webinars and HEDS Annual Conference	<p>Webinar/Conference presenters</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When giving a presentation using quantitative data, follow the <i>Rule of Five</i> with comparison groups. • Begin your presentation with a slide describing how audience members can share the data or the information you intend to present. We'll create categories for presenters to use (e.g., "tell anyone," "what goes on here stays here," "this is only to be shared among HEDS institutions"). <p>Webinar/Conference participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please abide by the rules of sharing as specified by the presenters. • Any comments you make in the webinar will follow the rules of the road that the presenters or webinar organizers lay out at the beginning of the presentation/webinar. 	
Overall summary HEDS reports on survey or institutional data		<p>These reports discuss aggregate data and do not identify the institutions that participated or discuss data for individual institutions. They are designed to be public, and they do not fall under the HEDS Statement of Understandings. You may share them without restrictions.</p>