

# NC-SARA Reported Enrollment Mirrors National Distance Education Data with Some Notable Exceptions

COMPARISON TO 2015 IPEDS DISTANCE EDUCATION DATA

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## Introduction

NC-SARA has produced a 2017 Enrollment Report that summarizes institutional reporting to the National Council as outlined in the State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA). The purpose of this paper is to provide a national context by comparing key NC-SARA data points to the most current federal government's [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System](#) (IPEDS) data. IPEDS data collection is managed by the U.S. Department of Education through the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) (NCES) and reporting is required of all institutions of higher education that offer federal financial aid in the U.S. states and territories. The most current distance education data is from the 2015 Fall IPEDS reporting.

## Methodology

IPEDS distance education enrollment data are reported by institutions annually, each fall in the Fall Enrollment (EF) component of their submission to the federal IPEDS data collection. Distance education data for 2016 were reported to IPEDS in the fall of 2016 and to NC-SARA in the spring of 2017. Similarly, distance education data for 2015 were reported to IPEDS in the fall of 2015 and to NC-SARA in the spring of 2016. It is important to note that a more accurate comparison would be the 2016 IPEDS distance education data, but those data are not yet published.

To compare institutional data reported to NC-SARA in the spring of 2017 to national data, the 2015 IPEDS distance education data reported by the 1,477 institutions that were operating under SARA and that responded to the request to submit data were analyzed. In-state and out-of-state "exclusively distance education enrollment" was collected for each of the institutions. Of the 1,477 institutions that reported to NC-SARA in 2017, no IPEDS distance education data were found for 29 institutions; 17 were independent for-profit and 12 were private non-profit. IPEDS data were located for all 788 public institutions. Additional details about the methodology of NC-SARA reporting can be found in the [NC-SARA 2017 Enrollment Report](#).

## Reporting Institutions by Sector

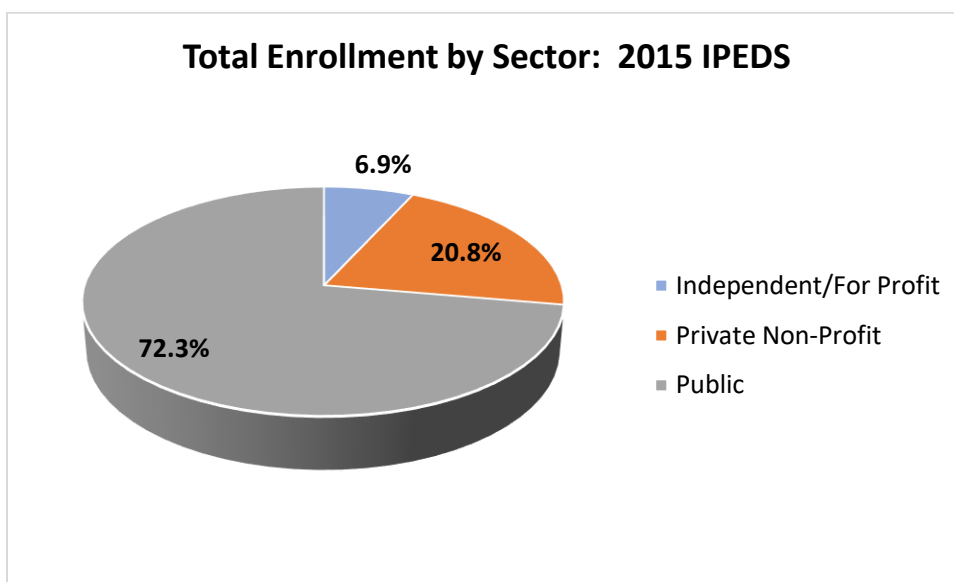
The Fall 2015 IPEDS data reveals that there were 4,763 degree granting institutions that reported data. The number of institutions reporting to IPEDS is relatively stable. It has been in the range of 4,750 to 4,765 since 2012. There are some changes each year, as institutions are created and others fail and stop reporting enrollment. The other variation in the number of institutions is related to campus consolidation and expansion. Each institution of higher education has a unique IPEDS identifying number.

The number of institutions operating under SARA in the spring of 2017 is 1,494. This means that institutions operating under SARA represent almost one-third (31.4%) of all degree-granting institutions in the U.S.

	Total Number of Institutions Reporting	NC-SARA as Percent of Institutions Reporting
2015 IPEDS	4,763	
2017 NC-SARA (2016 IPEDS)	1,494	31.4%

### IPEDS Total Student Enrollment by Sector: Fall 2015

We know from [previous IPEDS analysis](#)<sup>1</sup> that distance education enrollment trends vary by sector. Therefore, a comparison of 2015 IPEDS data by sector is provided. Public institutions consistently are the largest sector, with 72.3% of total enrollments in 2015. Private non-profit institutions represent 20.8% and independent for-profits represent just 6.9% of the total enrollments reported to IPEDS.

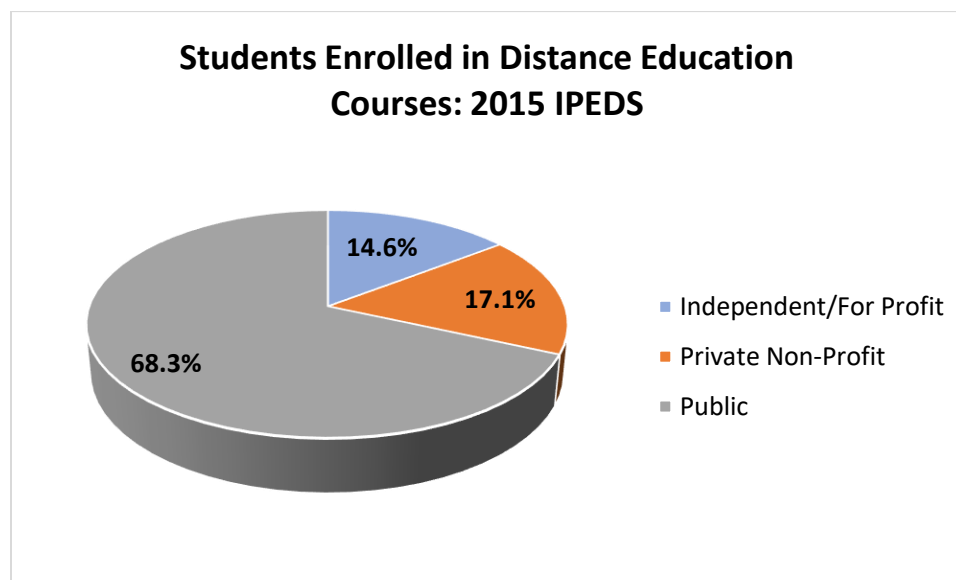


	Total Reported Enrollment	Total Reported Enrollment as Percentage
Independent/For Profit	1,390,802	6.9%
Private Non-Profit	4,223,923	20.8%
Public	14,651,642	72.3%
Total	20,266,367	

<sup>1</sup>Poulin, R. and Straut, T. (2015) Highlights of Distance Education Enrollment Trends from IPEDS Fall 2014, <https://wcetfrontiers.org/2015/12/21/ipeds-fall-2014-de-highlights/>

## Distance Education Enrollment by Sector

According to the Digital Learning Compass 2015 IPEDS data analysis<sup>2</sup>, public institutions of higher education host over two-thirds (68.3%) of all distance learners. Private non-profit institutions represent 17.1% of distance education enrollments and independent for-profit institutions account for 14.6% of distance education enrollments.



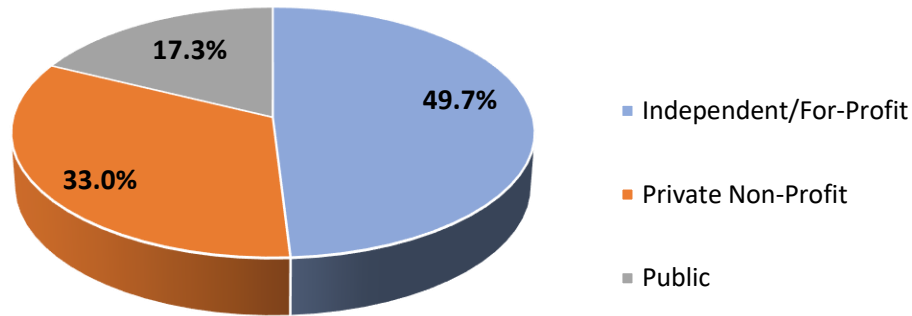
	Total Reported Distance Education Enrollment	Reported Distance Education Enrollment as Percentage
Independent/For Profit	870,918	14.5%
Private Non-Profit	1,020,622	17.8%
Public	4,080,565	67.8%

## NC-SARA Reporting Institutions by Sector

This is an area where NC-SARA data varies from the national data, primarily because NC-SARA **does not publish in-state enrollment**. The purpose of SARA is to provide reciprocity for inter-state activities. Enrollment reported to NC-SARA in 2017 (2016 IPEDS data) reveals that independent for-profit institutions reported a large proportion of distance education enrollment.

<sup>2</sup> Allen, I.E., and Seaman, J., Digital Learning Compass: Distance Education Enrollment Report 2017, p. 13 <http://digitalllearningcompass.org/>

### 2017 NC-SARA Reported Enrollment by Sector



Sector	Total Reported Enrollment	Sector Total %
Independent/For-Profit	582,040	49.7%
Private Non-Profit	385,978	33.0%
Public	202,707	17.3%
Total	1,170,725	

### Students Enrolled Exclusively in Distance Education Courses by Student Location

To better understand the impact of in-state distance education enrollment on total distance education enrollment, an analysis of the reported 2015 IPEDS distance education data was completed by sector. It is important to note that this analysis includes only those reported enrollments that were “exclusively in distance education courses” per the IPEDS protocols. As has been previously noted in the Digital Learning Compass 2017 Distance Education Enrollment Report<sup>3</sup>, “While the public perception has often equated distance education with the for-profit sector of higher education, public institutions actually command the market.” Most public institutions of higher education are primarily focused on serving students in their own state.

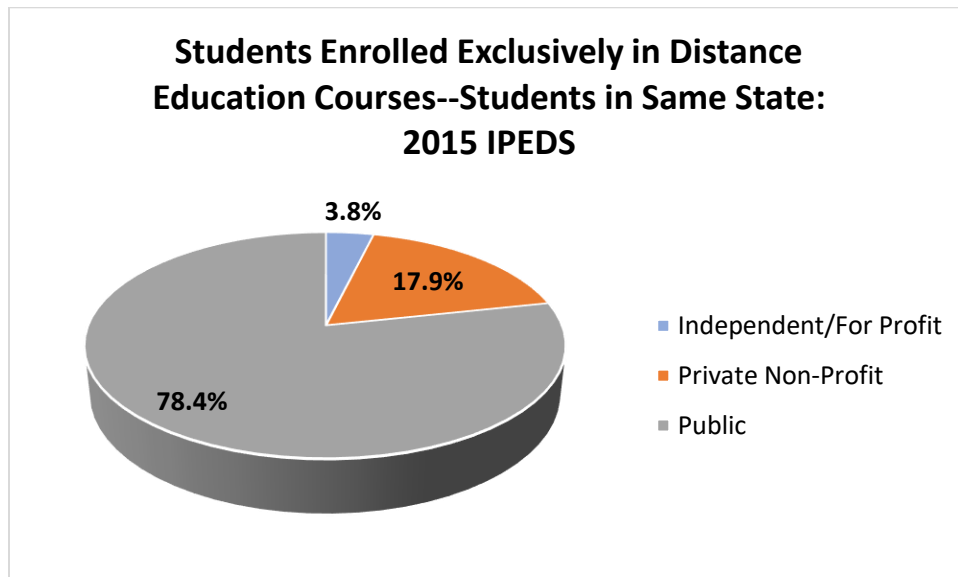
Of the 788 public institutions that were operating under SARA during the 2017 reporting period, 83.7% (737,977) of their exclusively distance education enrollments were in-state, while 16.3% (144,241) were

<sup>3</sup> Allen, I.E., and Seaman, J., Digital Learning Compass: Distance Education Enrollment Report 2017, p. 13 <http://digitalllearningcompass.org/>

in another state. The fact that public institutions focus on serving in-state students should be considered when comparing reported NC-SARA data and IPEDS data by sector.

#### In-State Exclusively Distance Education Enrollment

The 2015 IPEDS data reported for the institutions operating under SARA supports the assertion that public institutions of higher education are primarily focused on serving students in their own state. Even when students are studying exclusively at a distance, an overwhelming 78.4% of distance enrollments are at institutions in the same state as the students. None of these enrollments are reported to NC-SARA.

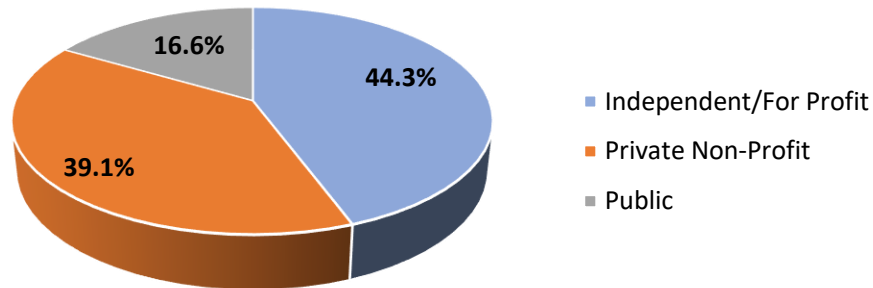


Sector	Total Reported Enrollment	Sector Total %
Independent/For-Profit	35,516	3.8%
Private Non-Profit	168,167	17.9%
Public	737,977	78.4%

#### Out-of-State Exclusively Distance Education Enrollment

The picture is quite different when we look at “exclusively distance education” enrollments where the students are reported to live outside the state of the institution in which they are enrolled. In this case, independent for-profit institutions lead reported enrollment with 44.3%, followed closely by private non-profit institutions. Public institutions reported 16.6% of out-of-state exclusive distance education enrollments reported to IPEDS by institutions operating under SARA.

**Students Enrolled Exclusively in Distance Education Courses--Students Out-of-State: 2015 IPEDS**



Sector	Total Reported Enrollment	Sector Total %
Independent/For-Profit	385,497	44.3%
Private Non-Profit	340,072	39.1%
Public	144,241	16.6%

### Summary

SARA was established as a voluntary agreement among member states and U.S. districts and territories that establishes comparable national standards for interstate offering of postsecondary distance education courses and programs. One goal of SARA is to improve transparency in the reporting of distance education data in the U.S. In the two years that data have been reported, improvements in process have been significant. As with any new reporting process, refinements in expectations and communications are to be expected. This report highlights the significant differences in reported enrollment by sector and provides national IPEDS data to help provide context.

SARA data will never fully mirror IPEDS data for the simple reason that NC-SARA does not collect in-state enrollment in distance education offerings. This fact affects the public sector greatly since the lion’s share of distance education enrollments at public institutions are in-state.