



CARROT: CDS

Common Data Set

The Common Data Set is a format that allows colleges to deliver complete and standard information about their institutions to the publishers of college guides. So anytime you read about college rankings, class size, graduation rates, etc., this information probably came from the Common Data Set.

The CDS is a 27-page questionnaire that is sent to colleges each year. It's kind of a beast to fill out and many colleges either don't fill it out or have an outdated CDS. There is no law that says a college has to participate, but it does make it easier to respond to inquiries. It collects information in 10 categories:

- General information
- Enrollment and persistence
- First-time, first-year (freshman) admission
- Transfer admission
- Academic offering and policies
- Student life
- Annual expenses
- Financial aid
- Instructional faculty and class size
- Degrees conferred

And asks questions like:

- "Please check off all types of aid available to undergraduates at your institution:"
- "Please report the number of instructional faculty members in each category for fall 2007."
- "List the typical tuition, required fees, and room and board for a full-time undergraduate student for the FULL 2008-2009 academic year."

The CDS also provides definitions of terms like "full-time undergraduate." This ensures that numbers and statistics are fair representations for all schools. So when you, the potential student, go to compare two colleges, you will be comparing apples to apples if you use common data.

These efforts are overseen by an advisory board that includes lots of national academic associations and counsels.

As a potential student, you can use the common data set to get the low-down on a college's make-up. You can find out everything from a college's enrollment to graduation rates to academic admissions factors. You can also see what percentage of students is involved in fraternities and sororities and why incoming freshmen chose this school.

All of this information is published by higher education organizations and mainstream publications like U.S. News & World Report.

For full information on the Common Data Set, and to download the questionnaire, visit www.commondataset.org.