STUDENT IDENTIFIERS

Since the beginning of the CIRP Freshman Survey in 1966, HERI has asked respondents to enter a student identifier.* The Social Security Number (SSN) has always been HERI's identifier of choice, and the relevant instruction on the survey form asked students to "**PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER**".

Over the years, some institutions have asked HERI if they could have the students enter a locally generated student identifier in place of the SSN, and we have been happy to accommodate them provided the local identifier fit within the space available. As more and more institutions have moved away from using SSN as their student identifier, we decided to make the accommodation more formal. Starting with the 2004 Freshman Survey, the relevant instruction on the survey form asks the student to "**PLEASE PROVIDE YOUR ID NUMBER (as instructed)**."

Although this new wording of the instruction explicitly gives your institution more choice about which student identifier to use, it also places a new responsibility on you. Whether you choose to continue using the SSN or switch to a locally generated identifier:

YOU <u>MUST</u> INSTRUCT YOUR STUDENTS <u>WHICH</u> STUDENT IDENTIFIER TO ENTER IN THE SPACE PROVIDED

Failure to give this instruction to students may result in the students entering no identifier at all, or different students entering different identifiers. Either of these outcomes would reduce the long-term value you can derive from the results of the survey.

If you are thinking of using a locally generated student identifier in place of the SSN, please see the next page for considerations which should be taken into account before making a decision.

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* HERI uses this student identifier for three purposes:
- To link the responses of individual students to our follow-up surveys to the responses they made on the Freshman Survey, providing a longitudinal file by which changes in student activities, attitudes, and goals can be measured.
- To allow institutions to merge data from the Freshman Survey to data they keep on the students throughout their college careers, allowing similar sorts of longitudinal analyses.
- To help locate current addresses of students for the purpose of administering long-term follow-ups.

USING A LOCALLY GENERATED STUDENT IDENTIFIER

The student identifier field on the CIRP Freshman Survey form is designed to hold a Social Security Number – 9 numeric characters. To determine whether and how your local student identifier can be successfully entered into that field, please see below.

If the identifier is all numbers and exactly 9 digits long
Your students need only enter it in the same manner they would enter an SSN.

If the identifier is all numbers and less than 9 digits long
Please direct the students to enter their ID starting with the <u>leftmost</u> column of bubbles on the ID grid, leaving blank any unneeded columns on the right.

If the identifier contains special characters (dashes, slashes, periods, etc.)
Direct the student to skip these characters when entering their identifiers. If this results in the identifier taking up less than 9 digits, direct the students to start entering the identifier in the leftmost column of bubbles, leaving blank any unneeded columns on the right.

If the identifier contains letters
The identifier cannot be used, <u>unless</u> letters in the identifier are <u>not</u> required to uniquely identify the student. Some institutions use letters in an identifier as a matter of convenience – for example to allow someone to quickly determine the student's school, department, or current status.

Check with your Registrar, Data Processing Center, or whichever entity at your institution created the student identifier to determine if the letters are necessary to uniquely identify a student. If they are not, direct the students to enter the numeric part of the identifier <u>only</u>. If the numeric portion is less than 9 digits, direct the students to start entering the identifier in the leftmost column of bubbles, leaving blank any unneeded columns on the right.

If the identifier is longer than 9 digits/letters
It is unlikely that all the characters in a very long identifier are required to uniquely identify a student`. There are several steps you can take to reduce the length of the identifier.
- If there are any special characters or letters in the identifier, deal with them as described above.
- If there are still more than 9 digits in the identifier, check with the entity that created it to see if some subset of those digits uniquely identify the student, and direct the student to enter those digits only (e.g. "the last six digits").

AND MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL

Whether or not you use the SSN or a locally generated student identifier, ***make a record of which identifier you used*** (and any additional instructions for entering it, such as those described above). You will need to give the same instructions should you participate in the YFCY or CSS follow-up surveys.

If you have any questions about this matter, please call us at (310) 825-1925, or email us at *heri@ucla.edu*.