



# NASFAA

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT FINANCIAL AID ADMINISTRATORS

# NASFAA Staffing Model

## Usage Guide



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# Introduction

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For more than 10 years, NASFAA produced a staffing model to help financial aid offices compare their staff sizes with those of similar institutions in an effort to assist Title IV-granting institutions in complying with federal regulations that require an adequate number of qualified staff to administer federal student aid programs (34 CFR 668.16(b)). In 2022 NASFAA removed the staffing model from our website, as the most recent version from 2019 used data from the 2017-18 award year, and response rate to our 2022-23 Benchmarking Survey was not high enough to update the model with more recent data.

In 2023, NASFAA employed Trellis Strategies to assist their Research Department in examining the existing model and determining how the model and required data collection could be streamlined to encourage member participation while reducing the burden on schools. In early 2024 NASFAA deployed a new staffing model survey, this time with only five questions, that was met with responses from over 1,000 unique institutions — our largest sample size to date. As a result, NASFAA is able to renew its staffing model online for members.

This guide details the changes to the new model for 2024, including updated characteristics, new guidelines for interpreting staffing size in our output, and details on how variables were updated.

Questions on the NASFAA Staffing Model or this Usage Guide can be directed to NASFAA's Research Department at: [Research@nasfaa.org](mailto:Research@nasfaa.org).

## Interpreting the Staffing Model Output

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In 2024, NASFAA updated the way it collected financial aid office size for the first time since the creation of the Staffing Model. Former versions of the model relied only on the survey question, “How many FTE employees worked in your office (do not include student interns, work-study employees, or unpaid volunteers)?” While this question provided a meaningful data point, for many offices that had open or vacant positions, or did not feel adequately staffed, it only provided an output of what existed, not a model for what offices that were fully staffed had, or felt they needed. In 2024, NASFAA and Trellis Strategies redesigned the question to a more accurate structure by collecting the following data points:

- Total number of permanent employees in your financial aid office
- Total number of open positions
- Number of additional employees, excluding open positions, that the office need to be fully staffed<sup>1</sup>

While the final number is more subjective, the overall result gives the user a more accurate picture of a total number of permanent employees, open positions, and additional employees needed to be fully staffed in a financial aid office of their peers.

<sup>1</sup> Respondents were told via hover text “For the purposes of this survey, fully staffed means having all approved positions filled with qualified people. This question is not intended to measure mandatory staffing for compliance purposes.”

# Methodology

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**Survey Testing:** In December 2023, NASFAA's Research Department administered a six-question electronic survey to our Rapid Response Network. This group is composed of approximately 200 financial aid administrators from all sectors of postsecondary education. The survey was open for approximately 10 business days. There were 88 completed responses submitted, resulting in a 44% response rate. Based on this testing, one survey question was eliminated from the final survey instrument due to difficulty answering the question and statistical significance.

**Survey Distribution:** In January 2024, NASFAA's Research Department administered a five-question electronic survey to the primary contact at 2,658 member institutions. The survey was open for approximately 10 business days. There were 1,018 responses submitted, resulting in a 38% response rate.

**Data Cleaning and Analysis:** While the online survey was only five questions, the model itself examined multiple additional variables for each institution, pulled from IPEDS, the FSA Data Center, and the College Scorecard. These variables are outlined in the sections to follow. To map the additional variables, Trellis Strategies used each responding institution's OPEID and UNIT ID.

**UNITID/OPEID:** These variables come from the College Scorecard's 2021-22 crosswalk files<sup>2</sup>. This combination allowed for the merging of IPEDS and FSA data not attached to a NASFAA survey response. In this way, the online web tool can function much like the survey in that a school can simply enter their UNITID or OPEID and their enrollment and application information may be pre-populated. In addition, the full final dataset contains additional institutional characteristic variables from this crosswalk. This file was downloaded on February 7, 2024. More information on additional variables can be found in the data dictionary by downloading all data files. This data was last updated on October 10, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Link to download: <https://collegescorecard.ed.gov/data/>

# NASFAA Staffing Model Variables

The 2024 NASFAA Staffing Model uses the following public datasets in its calculations:

Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS)<sup>3</sup>: IPEDS is the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System. It is a system of interrelated surveys conducted annually by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). IPEDS gathers information from every college, university, and technical and vocational institution that participates in the federal student financial aid programs. The Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended, requires that institutions that participate in federal student aid programs report data on enrollments, program completions, graduation rates, faculty and staff, finances, institutional prices, and student financial aid. For the purposes of this work, data used was from the 2021-22 award year.

Federal Student Aid Data Center<sup>4</sup> (FSA Data Center): The Federal Student Aid Data Center is the centralized source for information relating to the federal financial assistance programs. The information available in the Data Center is divided into the following four categories: student aid data, school data, Federal Family Education Loan (FFEL) Program Lender and Guaranty Agency Reports, and Business Information Resources. For the purposes of this work, data used was from the 2022-23 award year.

Former Staffing Model Variables:	Updated 2024 Variable:
Institution type: NASFAA database	NASFAA database, via IPEDS
Region: NASFAA database	NASFAA database
Region: NASFAA database Survey Question: How many FTE employees worked in your office (do not include student interns, work-study employees, or unpaid volunteers)?	Survey Question  Please record the number of full-time and part-time employees, including yourself. Full-time is defined as working 35 hours per week or more. In all questions, part-time employees should be included and counted based on their hours worked.  What is the total number of permanent employees in your financial aid office? Do you have open positions in the financial aid office? If yes, enter the total number of positions: How many additional employees, excluding open positions, would your office need to be fully staffed <sup>5</sup> ?
Survey Question: Total number of undergraduate students from Part II Section D, question #7a (3) FISAP	Undergraduate/Graduate Enrollment <sup>6</sup> : Undergraduate and graduate enrollment was downloaded from IPEDS on 2/6/2024. These variables are a part of IPEDS’ “12-month unduplicated headcount by race/ethnicity, gender and level of student: 2021-22” data set. The variables are all undergraduate and all graduate students, respectively. The name of the dataset in IPEDS is EFFY2022. Its corresponding full data dictionary can be downloaded along with the file. The name of the variable being used is EFFYTOTLT, or “Grand total,” where EFFYALEV, an indicator of student level, is set to 2 (undergraduate students) or 12 (graduate students).
Survey Question: Total number of graduate/professional students from Part II Section D, question #7b (4) FISAP	
Survey Question: Aid Applicants: What was the total number of students who filed a FAFSA that was received at your institution during the 2017-18 award year? (Include the UNDUPLICATED count of enrolled students.)	Survey Question: What was the total number of students who filed a FAFSA that was received at your institution during the 2022-23 award year?  Include the unduplicated count of enrolled students.  FAFSA Submissions <sup>7</sup> : This data comes from FSA’s 2022-23 Q8 report. This report details the total number of FAFSAs submitted by full academic application cycle and by quarter by postsecondary school. This data was downloaded on February 6, 2024.

<sup>3</sup> <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://studentaid.gov/data-center>

<sup>5</sup> Respondents were told via hover text “For the purposes of this survey, fully staffed means having all approved positions filled with qualified people. This question is not intended to measure mandatory staffing for compliance purposes.”

<sup>6</sup> Link to download: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/DataFiles.aspx?gotoReportId=7&fromIpedS=true&sid=07ee8fa4-a623-4611-979c-afd40464213&rtid=7>

<sup>7</sup> Link to download: <https://studentaid.gov/data-center/student/application-volume/fafsa-school-state>

## NASFAA Staffing Model Variables

<p>Survey Question: Aid Recipients: What was the total number of students who received financial aid at your institution at any time during the 2017-18 award year? (Include the UNDUPLICATED count of enrolled students.)</p>	<p>Undergraduate Students Awarded Aid<sup>8</sup>: Undergraduate students awarded aid comes from IPEDS' "Student financial aid and net price: 2021-22" data set. This data set was downloaded from IPEDS on February 6, 2024. The name of the data set in IPEDS is SFA2122. Its corresponding full data dictionary can be downloaded along with the file. The name of the variable being used is UAGRNTN, or "Number of undergraduate students awarded federal, state, local, institutional or other sources of grant aid".</p>
<p>Survey Question: Excluding the financial aid office, indicate the total number of permanent FTE employees across the areas listed below who are also involved in some aspect of financial aid administration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student Accounts/Cashier/Bursar,</li> <li>• Admissions,</li> <li>• Registrar,</li> <li>• Career Services/Student Employment Office,</li> <li>• Scholarship Office,</li> <li>• Loan Collection,</li> <li>• Veterans Services Office,</li> <li>• Institutional Advancement/Fundraising Office,</li> <li>• Accounting/Comptroller,</li> <li>• Gear Up,</li> <li>• TRIO,</li> <li>• Academic Advising,</li> <li>• Athletics,</li> <li>• Student Affairs,</li> <li>• Residence Life,</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>	<p>New Survey Question:</p> <p>Excluding the financial aid office, indicate the total number of unduplicated permanent employees (both part- and full-time) in other departments/areas who are also involved in some aspect of financial aid administration (e.g., admissions counselor who also assists with financial aid applications).</p> <p>For the purposes of this question, full-time is defined as working 35 hours per week or more.</p> <p>In all questions, part-time employees should be included and counted based on their hours worked.<sup>9</sup></p>
<p>Survey Question: Which best describes your financial aid office environment? (Multiple Choice)</p>	<p>Same Survey Question</p>
<p>Survey Question: Does your institution have a one-stop shop? (Multiple Choice)</p>	<p>Same Survey Question</p>

<sup>8</sup> Link to download: <https://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/DataFiles.aspx?gotoReportId=7&fromIpedes=true&sid=07ee8fa4-a623-4611-979c-affd40464213&rtid=7>

<sup>9</sup> Respondents were not asked to provide this data by individual office type.

## Staffing Model Predicting Variables and Coefficients

The final model is the result of testing to identify factors related to staffing at NASFAA member institutions around the country. The dependent variable is the combined total of all current employees, open positions, and additional positions needed to be fully staffed. The model was tested thoroughly for common statistical problems, among them multicollinearity, heteroskedasticity, and overfitting. This model was found to be the most consistently predictive of staffing while also having all factors statistically significant. Robust standard errors were used in the model. The factors included in the model explain just under 78% of the variation in staffing. Among the changes from previous years, the only sector found to be statistically different from zero in the regression was that of private two-year institutions. While sector may be an important factor in staffing, this year's version of the model left Trellis and NASFAA unable to conclude with certainty that sectors apart from two-year private institutions contributed to staffing in any meaningful way. Minority-serving institution designations entered the model in the place of other sector information. Parameters and their corresponding coefficients can be found in the table below.

Variable	Parameter Estimate
Intercept	4.76841
Undergraduate Enrollment	0.00063750
Graduate Enrollment	0.00118
Graduate Enrollment Squared (Divided by 100)	0.00000153
HBCU	3.15336
HSI	1.42836
Private 2Yr	-2.35610
Q4_Mix	2.51278



# Acknowledgments

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NASFAA would like to thank the nearly 1,100 financial aid professionals who participated in the 2024 Staffing Model Survey. The model could not be renewed without their support and information.