

Audit Highlights



Highlights of Legislative Auditor report on the University and Community College System of Nevada's (UCCSN) Validity and Reliability of Enrollment Data issued September 22, 2004. Report #LA04-17.

Background

The Nevada Constitution provides for a state university to be controlled by a Board of Regents. The first institution was established in 1874. In 1969, the Legislature established the University of Nevada System with campuses in Reno and Las Vegas. In 1993, the name was changed to the University and Community College System of Nevada (UCCSN). An elected 13 member Board of Regents governs the UCCSN which includes the Chancellor's Office (System Administration), and 11 institutions and professional schools.

The funding of higher education is based upon formulas that use student full-time equivalents (FTE) as their basis. These formulas consider, for each course, the number of students and credit hours. FTE enrollment increased from 44,199 in fiscal year 1999 to 54,037 in fiscal year 2003. In fiscal year 2003, UCCSN reported state-supported expenditures of approximately \$527 million.

Purpose of Audit

The purpose of this audit was to determine the validity and reliability of enrollment data. Our audit included an examination of enrollment data at the University and Community College System of Nevada for the fall 2003 semester. Detailed testing occurred at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR), University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), Community College of Southern Nevada (CCSN), and Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC).

Audit Recommendations

This audit report contains five recommendations to improve controls over the enrollment reporting process. These recommendations will help strengthen policy over the calculation of student FTE, and provide a common method for using SIS to efficiently designate which courses should be included in the official FTE count. In addition, they will help provide better guidance on which courses should be included in the official student FTE count. Finally, the recommendations help ensure stronger security over access to SIS.

UCCSN accepted all five recommendations.

Status of Recommendations

UCCSN's 60-day plan for corrective action is due on December 21, 2004. In addition, the six-month report on the status of audit recommendations is due on June 21, 2005.

University and Community College System of Nevada

Validity and Reliability of Enrollment Data

Results in Brief

Before a budget for the University and Community College System of Nevada can be created, colleges and universities must make a count of all students. This count, called the student Full-Time Equivalent (FTE), is the driver for a large portion of the System's state-supported budget. As a result, an accurate count of students is critical.

We found the count of student FTE to be valid and reliable at the institutions reviewed. However, improvements can be made in the process to provide greater consistency throughout UCCSN and reduce the risk of inaccuracies. These improvements can begin by directing institutions to create formal written procedures and review processes when calculating FTE numbers. In addition, further improvements can be made by clarifying policies regarding which courses can be included in the official FTE count. System Administration policy dictates that summer courses and those paid from non state-supported accounts should not be included in the FTE count. However, some courses found during the audit did not meet this standard. Furthermore, security over the database that houses electronic enrollment information needs strengthening.

Principal Findings

Student FTE counts begin with each institution downloading enrollment data from their mainframe database and extracting only those courses that will be used to generate the official count. Each of the selected institutions has a different process for downloading and compiling this data that is reported to System Administration. Standard written procedures have not been created to ensure the integrity of the student FTE calculation process. This increases the potential for errors to be introduced into the process.

One of the difficulties encountered when calculating student FTE figures is the elimination of courses that do not meet the definition of state supported. This is because each institution has thousands of courses every semester to sort through. One of the institutions we reviewed, CCSN, has overcome this challenge using a method to identify each course as state-supported in the Student Information System (SIS) database. This has allowed them to efficiently identify which courses should be included in the FTE count. However, the other three institutions have a more complex method to identify these courses. By having a common method, manual processes are reduced and reliability of the information increases.

System Administration policy states that any course taught 51% during a summer semester cannot be included in the FTE count. However, 15 courses that occurred during the summer 2003 semester or between summer and fall semesters were included in the official fall 2003 student FTE count. These courses accounted for 43 FTE's. To ensure consistency, System Administration should provide additional guidance to institutions and direct them to periodically review courses for those occurring during summer semesters.

To be included in student FTE counts, all normal costs and revenues of a course should be included in an institution's state-supported accounts. However, for 16 courses reviewed, instructors were paid from non state-supported accounts, and yet were included in the fall 2003 student FTE count. These 16 courses accounted for 26 student FTE's. This has resulted from confusion at the universities and community colleges as to whether some courses should be included in the FTE count or not. Additional guidance by System Administration will help to clarify these matters and provide greater consistency.

At three of the selected institutions reviewed, we found a small number of users with inappropriate update access to enrollment data. UNR was the only institution whose users all had the appropriate level of access. For the three where exceptions occurred, the individuals either no longer worked for the institution or changed job responsibilities and no longer required this level of access to SIS. This situation increases the possibility that unauthorized changes could be made to SIS data thereby reducing its reliability. Periodically reviewing the security list will reduce the risk of unauthorized access to enrollment data.