



Office of Institutional Research and Analytics

Data Request Policy

- I. **Purpose/Rationale:** The purpose of this policy is to establish a set of guidelines and procedures to enable the Colby community to access and use College data accurately, efficiently, and ethically for reporting, research, trend analysis, and related activities.
- II. **Policy Statement:** The Office of Institutional Research and Analytics (IRA) serves as the authoritative source of aggregated statistical information about Colby College.ⁱ Therefore, any requests for such information should be directed to IRA and not the office or individual that stewards the information. For example, inquiries for student enrollments should come to IRA and not the Registrar's Office. IRA provides summary statistics on many aspects of the College, including students, courses, programs, degrees awarded, etc. Many such data can be disaggregated by factors such as demographic characteristics, department affiliation, major, etc.
- III. **Scope:** This policy applies to faculty, staff (with the exception of the executive leadership team), students, and parties external to Colby College.
- IV. **Definitions:**
 - **Aggregated data:** Information presented in summarized statistical format, in which individual characteristics are not identifiable.
 - **Official data:** Data that represent Colby College, its constituencies, or some unit therein and has been vetted by the Office of Institutional Research & Analytics.
 - **Unit record data:** Data that represent characteristics, results, responses, etc. of individuals.
- V. **Procedures:**ⁱⁱ
 - **Making a request:** Requests for data must be made in writing. While we encourage you to discuss your needs with office staff verbally, a written record of the request is ultimately necessary. Please send requests to: institutionalresearch@colby.edu. Additional procedures and considerations may vary based on the requestor (see details below):
 - **Colby Faculty & Staff:** Colby faculty and staff should provide the following information when making a data request:

1. A clear description of the content of data needed (e.g., students enrolled in majors in Arts & Sciences courses)
2. The timeframe for which data are needed (e.g., fall data for the past five academic years)
3. Date by which data are needed. The office requires at least a week to respond to most requests; depending on their complexity, some requests may require much longer (two weeks or more), especially if consultation with members of Colby's leadership team is required. The office will provide requestors with feedback on the required time for response when request is received.
4. Intended use of the data. Will the data be used only internally? Will it be shared with any external parties? Will it be used for any decision-making?
5. How will the data be protected?

➤ **Colby Students:** The office is supportive of students who wish to use College data for course or independent research projects. The following apply:

1. *Course projects:* When making a request, students should:
 - a. Provide information on the course for which the data are needed, including the instructor.
 - b. Provide a clear description of the content of data needed (e.g., students enrolled in majors in Arts & Sciences courses)
 - c. Provide the timeframe for which data are needed (e.g., fall data for the past five academic years)
 - d. Indicate the date by which data are needed. Note some data requests may require approval from members of Colby's senior administration; therefore, they should be made as early in a project's planning as possible. The office requires at least a week to respond to ANY student request for data. More complex requests may require much more time (up to two weeks or more).
 - e. Clearly explain how the data will be used and with whom it will be shared. This explanation should include any claims or hypotheses the data will be used to test or support.
2. *Independent study/research projects:* The guidelines listed above also apply to student independent study/research projects using aggregated Colby data. However, given that such projects are generally more complex than course assignments, more time is required for response. Therefore, students working on semester-long projects requiring aggregated Colby data should contact the office early on in their planning stages to discuss their needs and expect that a response will take at least **three weeks**.

➤ **External Parties:** Except in rare instances, only data that have already been made public will be provided to parties external to Colby College.

- **IRA Assessment of Request:**

- After receiving a request, IRA will discuss at its weekly staff meeting (held on Mondays).
- Depending on the nature of the request and the sensitivity of the data being requested, IRA may need to review the request with a member of Colby's senior leadership team and/or may require that the requestor obtain endorsement or approval from someone else (supervisor, member of the College leadership team, department chair, course instructor for student requests, etc.).
- IRA will inform requestor of whether request can be met and the timeline for delivery.
- **Delivery:**
 - Responses to requests for simple statistics will be delivered in an email from the Institutional Research email.
 - Responses to more complex summary statistics (tables with disaggregations, charts, etc.) will be delivered in .pdf with a date, data source, and "Institutional Research and Analytics" stamp.
 - Deliverables will show suppressions for sensitive data based on responses fewer than five (5).

VI. Related Documents/Resources:

- <https://web.colby.edu/datagovernance/resources/>
- <https://web.colby.edu/datagovernance/best-practices/>

¹ In some cases (e.g., for research projects), IRA may provide unit-record data, but the requestor must make a compelling case for why data are required at the individual level. Moreover, such data will be provided only to the extent allowed by regulations such as [FERPA](#), [IRB](#) guidelines, etc. Such regulations constitute a minimum threshold for determining whether unit record data will be shared; simply because they allow for its provision does not mean the office will, in fact, provide the data. Other considerations include the extent to which the data expose vulnerabilities for students, faculty, departments, or other Colby stakeholders or entities.

ⁱⁱ **Special Considerations and Procedures for Requests for Unit-Record Data:** Most requests for unit record data (such as lists contact lists of students, faculty, or staff) should be directed to the [data steward](#) responsible for those data. When such data are need for a research-related project (e.g., for conducting a survey or other study), it is appropriate to contact IRA. See considerations and procedures below.

- **Faculty and Staff Requests for Unit-Record Data**
 1. Requests should be made at least **two weeks** prior to the day when the data are needed, as IRA may need to consult with members of Colby's leadership team or others before releasing the data.
 2. Make clear how the data will be used.
 3. Clarify strategies for protecting the data and the identities of individuals in the dataset.
 4. Expect that you may be asked to share your project with IRA before it can be finalized.
 5. Explain how you will discard the data after the project has been completed.
- **Independent Study Student Requests for Unit-Record Data**
 1. The request must be received at least a **month** before the assignment is due.
 2. Students must make a compelling case as to why unit-record data are necessary for the project.
 3. Any request for unit record data must be accompanied by a letter of support from the supervising faculty member.
 4. Clear strategies for how the data will be used, stored, and protected must be outlined. In addition, the student must have a plan for discarding the data once the project is completed.
 5. The student must agree to share a draft of the project with the office for review before turning it into the faculty member.
- Students working on course projects and parties external to Colby will **NOT** be given unit-record data.
- Individual Responses to **Open-ended Questions**
 1. Individual comments or responses to open-ended questions on institutional surveys will generally not be shared with requestors.

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2. In rare instance when such information is shared, any comments that contain the names of specific individuals or clearly reference specific individuals will be redacted.
- Data will NOT include any identifying information and will not be delivered an email attachment.