

University Decision Support Data Disclosure Guidelines

Clients of University Decision Support (UDS) request university data, student records and other confidential information in summarized or detailed form hundreds of times a year. The following guidelines are designed to help our clients understand UDS data protocols, as well as how UDS safeguards Northeastern's reputation and the privacy of its students and employees. If questions arise about requests for information, whether internal or external, that are not directly addressed by these guidelines, please contact [UDS](#) or the Office of the General Counsel (OGC)¹.

University Data Reporting Guidelines

1. **External requests for data:** An external request for data refers to a request from or on behalf of external entities, including government agencies, university and program accreditors, professional organizations, college guidebooks and media outlets, and includes requests to UDS from a member of the university community for the purpose of providing data to an external entity. (Be aware that as a private university, Northeastern is not subject to federal or state Freedom of Information or public records act requirements or requests for information.)

External requests for data and information about the University, whether for use in responding to questionnaires (guidebooks, rankings, etc.) writing grant proposals, or gathering data for accreditation reviews, should be directed to UDS. All media requests for information or comment should be directed to the Division of External Affairs. These offices will coordinate activities to make accurate, consistent and timely information available in response to appropriate requests. To improve the chances of meeting external deadlines, requests should be made as far in advance as possible.

In particular, UDS is the primary contact and final submitter of *ranking and guidebook data*. While we work extensively with our colleagues in the colleges to obtain and report accurate data that puts Northeastern's best foot forward, it is essential that ranking and guidebook information is coordinated, double-checked, and timely. Therefore UDS is the primary contact for ranking and guidebook surveys, and holds logins and passwords to these surveys, even if they are for department or college-level purposes.

All ranking, guidebook, and accreditation data that is published externally is sent for review to the Senior Leadership Team no fewer than five business days in advance of the submission deadline.

¹ These guidelines address requests for information produced directly by University Decision Support; those interested in self-service access to university data sources such as Argos or Cognos should visit the [UDS website](#) to find out more and request access.

2. **Publicly available data:** Pre-approved data that may be used for internal or external purposes is available on the [UDS website](#) via the **Fact Sheet** or the **Common Data Set (CDS)**. These two sets of information are publicly available and may be used for internal analysis or to answer external questions. Consumers of this information should be sure they understand the context and definitions behind the data before using it or releasing it to others. UDS is available to answer any questions about this data. Beyond the Fact Sheet and CDS, however, external requests for information should be referred to UDS.
3. **Internally available data:** In addition to data that is publicly available on the UDS website, there are resources, such as the **Fact Book**, available only to faculty and staff on the UDS SharePoint site *for internal analysis only*. This data should not be shared externally in any form without first consulting with UDS.
4. **Survey Research Guidelines:** Internal surveys/questionnaires that are sponsored by the administration at the college or university level for purposes of program evaluation, policy initiatives, and planning (i.e. student satisfaction survey, campus climate survey, faculty surveys), are coordinated by University Decision Support in collaboration with the relevant unit(s). Colleges or administrative units wishing to conduct a survey of faculty, staff, or students should consult with UDS to find out if such research has already been conducted, when other surveys of the same population are being administered, or to get procedural and content help. More details on best practices for survey research can be found on the [UDS website](#).
5. **Single-purpose use and limits of dissemination:** Information distributed by UDS to a department, college, or administrative unit is for the specific use of that unit and should not be disseminated beyond its original audience and intent. In order to avoid data being used incorrectly or being disseminated to those not authorized to see it, users must consult with and get approval from UDS before using such information for another purpose or audience.
6. **Priorities for fulfilling data requests:** The main criterion for fulfilling a request for data is that the information will be used for University administrative purposes, such as a request from a faculty council, administrative office, or committee. This could be any office or committee composed of Northeastern faculty or administrative staff, such as a Faculty Senate committee, a task force on Undergraduate Education, a Program Review committee, a Dean's office, and the like. In determining what can be provided, UDS needs to be mindful of institutional priorities and deadlines. UDS also needs to consider the time and effort required to prepare a special request against the usefulness the data will have in support of the education and research missions of the University. Listed below are the highest priority items within UDS responsibilities.
 - a. Federal, state, and accrediting agency reporting, where compliance is mandatory

- b. Requests by members of the Board of Trustees, Deans, and senior administrators
 - c. Faculty representatives of standing committees, to support institutional planning and exploratory analysis
 - d. Requests by departments or programs for use in educational assessment or program review
 - e. Regular reporting to Northeastern University's data sharing partners (such as the Colonial Group)
 - f. A limited set of nationally- and internationally-recognized college guidebooks and rankings
 - g. Requests for data to support personal research or classroom usage by individual members of the university community are handled on a case-by-case, and a time-available basis. If the requested data is readily available and the confidentiality requirements are met, UDS will then work with the requestor to make the appropriate data available. UDS encourages the use of data that is already collected and available rather than individual members having to collect it independently. Please refer to point #2 in this document for the list of available data.
7. **Human Subjects review:** Faculty, staff, and students who are engaged in research involving human subjects (i.e. clinical testing, surveys, interviews, or other physical intervention) must have their research tools and protocols reviewed by the Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB), administered by the Office of Human Subject Research Protection (HSRP) prior to commencing the research. Information regarding the review process can be obtained by contacting the HSRP Office. Approval for the use of data from the Registrar for individual student information, and Human Resources Management for individual faculty and staff information, is required after approval by the Human Subjects Research Review Committee.
8. **FERPA:** Northeastern University, and therefore UDS, complies with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act ([FERPA](#)) of 1974, also known as the Buckley amendment. UDS makes every effort to safeguard student identity by, for example, not distributing lists that display both student names and identification numbers. Questions regarding FERPA should be referred to the [Office of the Registrar](#).
9. **Data about individuals:** UDS's policy is to disseminate only aggregate data. Requests for unit-record level data (i.e., de-identified individual data) will be handled as follows:
- a. Requests from external parties or agencies will be evaluated by the Associate Vice Provost of UDS in consultation with other offices on campus including General Counsel and those offices that are custodians of the requested data.
 - b. Requests from internal offices will be evaluated by the Associate Vice Provost of UDS.

- c. Requests for information concerning small numbers of *specific* individuals should be referred to the appropriate office, shown below in the table:

Data Type	Responsible Office
Students	Office of the Registrar
Employees	Human Resources Management
Alumni	Internal requests – Advancement Information Systems External requests – Vice President of Alumni Relations
Gifts to Northeastern University	Advancement Information Systems
Members of the Board of Trustees, Overseers, or Corporation	Office of the Board of Trustees

Related Policies:

[Policy on Confidentiality of University Records and Information](#)

[Policy on Appropriate Use of Computer and Network Resources](#)

[Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act](#)