



San Diego College of Continuing Education Guidelines for Protecting Data Sensitivity (GPDS) Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Q1. What is the purpose of the GPDS?

San Diego College of Continuing Education encourages research on education issues and believes that information should be transparent and available to students, faculty, staff, and the general public. At the same time, the Institution upholds these guidelines on the access, security, use, and dissemination of sensitive data in order to assure the integrity of research and protect the rights and privacy of personnel and students. The GPDS reinforces the exercise of sound judgment and the professionalism of data stewards.

Q2. What determines the “need-to-know”?

The research question determines the “need-to-know.”

- A research question generally is a problem to be solved, decision to be made, or knowledge to be gained through the gathering, analysis, and consideration of information.
- A good research question guides the process of seeking information to contribute to knowledge and/or practice.

If a requestor has a research question that can only

- be answered with Level III data and
- the requested data are necessary for
 - reasonable operation,
 - strategic planning,
 - the accomplishment of the requestor’s expected and stated job duties, and/or
 - serving a legitimate educational interest, then there is a need-to-know. Examples include, but are not limited to, schedule development, Program Review, and data-driven decision-making by School Deans or Department Chairs.

Q3. Who do I consult when I am not sure about the level of confidentiality or sensitivity associated with a research request?

You may contact the San Diego College of Continuing Education Research and Planning Analyst, Jesus Rivas at jrivas@sdccd.edu or (619) 388-4936

Q4. What are the requirements to obtain research data?

- There is a “need-to-know”.
- Data is not already publically available. Check the San Diego College of Continuing Education [Institutional Research](#) website for existing research reports to avoid duplication of requests.
- All requestors of research must read through the *Guidelines for Protecting Data Sensitivity Form (GPDS)* (page 1 and 2). Due to the highly sensitive nature of Level III data, requestors of these data must also sign and submit the *GPDS Statement of Responsibility* to the Continuing Education Research and Planning Analyst prior to prioritization of the proposed research.
- Complete and sign a Request for Research Form and email it to the San Diego College of Continuing Education Research and Planning Analyst, Jesus Rivas, at jrivas@sdccd.edu You must obtain your supervisor or program chair’s signature AND your dean’s signature prior to submittal.
- Contact Continuing Education’s Research and Planning Analyst, as needed.
- The Research and Planning Analyst requires a minimum of two to six weeks for basic research questions. For large scale projects, the timeframe is dependent upon OIE’s current schedule of research projects, institutional priority of committed and proposed research, and available research personnel.

Q5. What is the meaning of aggregated/disaggregated data?

Data specificity is on a continuum with extremes of aggregated data on one end and disaggregated data on the other. The following example illustrates this principle of data specificity:

- **Level I** - Aggregate data in the extreme would be data such as an institution-wide student profile, which is an unduplicated count of students (headcount) by student demographics (ethnicity, gender, age, income level, etc.).
- **Level II** - Institution-wide data can be disaggregated, or broken out, at the program or subject level. For example, success rates for programs assigning grades.
- **Level III** - If we disaggregate further and break it out by class (a single CRN (section), or group of CRNs, depending on the class record structure), we would be able to see data for a single instructor's class (Level III). For research such as success rates, we may disaggregate even further and determine rates for individual students.

While aggregate data in the extreme would include data such as institution-wide figures, disaggregated data in its extreme would comprise any data that are personally identifiable to individual personnel or students. Rarely do research questions necessitate personally identifiable information; most research questions can be answered with Level I or Level II data.

Q6. Can I access Level I data requested by and generated for others?

YES. The Continuing Education Office of Planning, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness keeps copies of all reports it produces. Your access is dependent upon your need-to-know.

Q7. Where can I access existing research and information stored online?

Visit: [SDCE Institutional Research website](#)

Or: [SDCCD Office of Research and Planning website](#)

Q8. If my school, department, program, unit, or discipline generates and maintains Level III data, does GPDS apply to all these data?

YES. Good research practices dictate ethical and professional behavior. All sources of Level III data demand adherence to existing GPDS policy. Although all data (including data used for SLO assessment) are not generated or maintained by Continuing Education's Office Planning, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness, GPDS guides the access, security, use, and dissemination of all levels of data including sensitive data throughout the institution.

Q9. What are the consequences for unauthorized dissemination of Level III data?

Failure to comply with these precautions and restrictions could result in serious consequences, as per Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Individuals receiving Level III data from the Continuing Education Office of Planning, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness must comply with the GPDS policy. Standards of good judgment and professionalism are required when working with highly disaggregated information. Existing District disciplinary procedures are enforced when inappropriate dissemination of Level III data occurs.

Q10. May Level III data be shared with my colleagues?

NO. Unauthorized reproductions and dissemination of Level III data are prohibited. Please see GPDS for additional dissemination guidelines.

Q11. How does GPDS differ from the District Institutional Review Board (IRB)?

Requests for data from the Continuing Education Office of Planning, Research, and Institutional Effectiveness are under the auspices of the GPDS. External research requests involving Continuing Education students or personnel as human subjects must be reviewed and approved by the SDCCD Institutional Review Board (IRB).