

H-1B Performance Reporting Instructional Sheet: Workforce Integrated Performance System (WIPS)

Invalid Column Error Caused by Blank Final Columns

This instructional sheet is to help you troubleshoot an Invalid Column Number error in WIPS that occurs due to blank columns at the end of your Excel data file.

What is an Invalid Column Error?

The Invalid Column Number error is a format error generated when WIPS detects that the data file has less than or more than the required number of columns. The number of columns must correspond with the number of data elements in the current H-1B PIRL.

The current [H-1B PIRL 2025](#) has **70 data elements and requires 70 columns to be in your data file.**

Why Do Blank Columns Result in an Invalid Column Error?

When one or more data elements at the end of the H-1B PIRL are left blank in your data file, the empty columns may not be recognized (i.e., counted) when you convert your Excel document to a .csv or .txt file. WIPS will conclude your upload does not have the required 70 columns.

Below are the final columns in the [H-1B PIRL 2025](#) :

2700	2908	2911	3004	3011
Social Security Number	Date Started Registered Apprenticeship Program	Date Completed Registered Apprenticeship	Individualized Services Provided Virtual/Online	Sexual Orientation
999999999				
999999999				
999999999				
999999999				
999999999				
999999999				
999999999				

Any or all of the data elements in the four columns after PIRL 2700 may be blank in your data file if they are not applicable to your grant or you have not yet collected data for them.

WIPS requires that your data file contain no column headers. Without column headers, the file looks like this:

999999999				
999999999				
999999999				
999999999				
999999999				
999999999				
999999999				
999999999				
999999999				

When there is nothing in the columns after PIRL 2700, this data element is the last column counted in your file by WIPS. Because those additional columns are not recognized, your upload file will only have 66 columns and you will receive an invalid column error.

These instructions are to help you convert an Excel spreadsheet into one of the required formats (.csv or .txt) and ensure blank columns are recognized. **If any row has an entry in the column, you do not need to follow these instructions. This only applies when you have one or more columns at the end of the PIRL file with NO data in any rows.**

How Do I Know If I'm Receiving the Error Due to this Issue?

One way to doublecheck if this issue is occurring, is to open your .csv or .txt file and review your data in Notepad. Open your file in Notepad by right clicking the file and selecting OPEN WITH and select Notepad.

Viewing the data in the example below, you can see that each row of data ends with the PIRL 2700 (SSN) and there are no commas after the SSN data element. In Notepad, the commas represent columns.

```

,0,,20171002,20170911,20180513,0,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111126
,0,,20171002,20170912,20180513,0,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111127
,0,,20171002,20170913,20180513,0,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111128
,0,,20171002,20170914,20180513,0,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111129
,0,,20171002,20170915,20180513,0,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111130
0,,20171002,20170916,20180513,1,,,,,,,,,,,,,111111131

```

You need to see four additional commas after the SSN to represent those final blank columns.

Fixing the Error: How Do I Ensure WIPS Will Recognize 70 Columns and Accept My Data File?

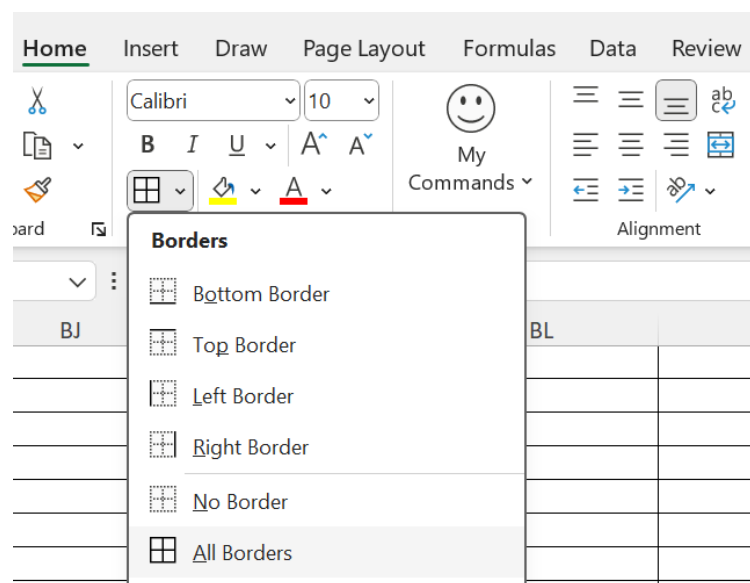
There is more than one way to adjust your Excel spreadsheet so that when you convert it to .csv or .txt, WIPS will recognize the correct number of columns. These instructions provide you with one quick and simple method for fixing this error by adding **borders** to your columns in your Excel sheet. The borders result in the recognition of blank columns when you convert your file.

Steps to Add Borders:

1. Select the columns to be included. In the image below, Column BR is the 70th column.

BN	BO	BP	BQ	BR
999999999				
111111112				
111111113				
999999999				
111111115				
111111116				

2. On your ribbon, select the Border tool and All Borders.



3. Now there are borders around the relevant cells. **Do not add borders to extra rows or columns.**

BN	BO	BP	BQ	BR	BS	BT
999999999						
111111112						
111111113						
999999999						
111111115						
111111116						

4. Save the spreadsheet as a .csv file and then open it in Notepad.

5. Now when you look at the **end** of each row of data, you can see the commas after PIRL 2700 (SSN) and know that the system is recognizing those final four columns.

```
,,20241231,0,20241015,,1,1,999999999,,,,  
,,20251130,0,20241015,20260115,0,0,999999999,,,,  
,,20251130,0,20240315,20251202,0,9,111111112,,,,  
,,20251130,1,20240315,20251011,0,9,111111113,,,,  
,,20241231,0,20240222,,1,9,999999999,,,,  
,,20241231,0,20250315,,1,9,222222223,,,,  
,,20241231,1,20241015,,0,1,222222224,,,,  
,,20251130,0,20240315,20260214,1,1,222222225,,,,  
,,20251130,0,20240315,20260131,1,1,222222226,,,,
```

This file is ready to upload with the required 70 columns.

Remember, if you have a code value in the final column in your data file in any row, then the system will recognize the columns at the end of the PIRL and you will not need to complete these steps.

This step is only necessary when you have one or more columns at the end of your data file with no data in any of the rows.

Tip: With H-1B PIRL 2025, it is possible to have a code value in the final (70th) column for all participants! By entering data in this final column, you will ensure that all 70 required columns are retained, and you will not need to complete these additional steps. The final data element in the H-1B PIRL 2025 is *PIRL 3011 Sexual Orientation*. Code values for this data element include: 1=Straight/Heterosexual; 2=Gay, Lesbian, or Homosexual; 3=Bisexual; 4=Another sexual orientation; 9=Participant did not self-identify.

Although WIPS will allow you to leave this data element blank, you can make it standard to enter a code value in this data element for all participants.

[Can I Just Add Dummy Data to the Final Column to Get WIPS to Accept the File?](#)

No, you should not add data that you know is not correct just so the final column is not blank. When you certify your QPR, you are certifying that the data you submit is accurate and you have documentation of what you submit.

Adding miscellaneous data to a column may also result in logic errors if the data you entered does not align with the rest of the code values for that participant.

What Should I Do if I'm Still Getting an Invalid Column Error?

This error is generated when WIPS detects there are too many or too few columns, but there may be other reasons besides blank final columns why you are receiving the error. Please see additional [reporting technical assistance resources](#) for additional troubleshooting ideas.