

Making Sense of...The 2020 Census

Overview:

- The U.S. Census is approaching, to be conducted in spring 2020 (April 1, 2020 is the official reference day). People living in the U.S. can respond online, by phone, or by mail. The U.S. Census Bureau will then send workers to the homes of those who do not respond.
- The Census is conducted every 10 years and is the only full count of residents in the U.S. Every person living in the United States, whether citizen or foreign national, is included in the Census.
- Census population counts determine the allocation of around \$675 billion from the federal government to states and communities (towards education, hospitals, and other essential public programs). Congressional and state legislative districts are also drawn based on Census counts. Thus, an accurate Census count is crucial to an appropriate distribution of funding and a correct allocation of federal and state legislative power.
- Colleges face the challenge of educating their communities about the way the Census applies to campus settings. Residential students should be counted at their campus home.
- There are several reasons for concern that the 2020 Census may result in an undercount:
 - Some [are hesitant to participate in the Census](#), including individuals of color.
 - The Trump Administration has proposed adding a question about the respondent's citizenship status. [The addition of that question was blocked by the courts, but Census researchers found that the proposal still may suppress participation rates.](#)
 - For the first time, residents will be able to respond online, increasing fears that unequal access to Internet might privilege the count of richer and often whiter communities.
 - According to the Brennan Center, the Census has been “chronically underfunded” this decade, raising concerns about the Bureau’s ability to appropriately modernize.

Readings:

- [Census 2020](#), Campus Compact
- [2020 Census Could Lead to Worst Undercount of Black, Latinx People in 30 Years](#), NPR
- [Influencing Policy into 2032: Preparing Campuses and Students to Respond to the 2020 Census](#), NASPA
- [Funding the Census](#), Brennan Center for Justice
- [Census 101: What You Need to Know](#), U.S. Census Bureau
- [Everything You Need to Know About the 2020 Census](#), Univision
- [2020 Census: Count Colleges In](#), James Madison University

Questions for discussion:

- Students can be difficult to reach, some might have privacy concerns, and international students may need informational support. How can colleges and universities make sure their students are counted?
- Some communities of Americans are hesitant about participating in the Census (See NPR link above). Is it ethical to urge them to participate? If so, how could this be done sensitively? If not, why not?
- How does the Census count play into issues of political power and equity in the United States?
- What do you see as the dangers of a Census count that misrepresents who lives in the United States?
- Why might there be attempts to politicize the Census in 2020 or in any other future Census count?
- How might those interested in a fair Census count control against outside forces (political actors with a partisan agenda, media outlets propagating misinformation, etc.) interfering with a fair, accurate Census count?