

Colleges and universities have a special responsibility to the communities in which we are situated to ensure a complete count in the 2020 Census because it will directly impact political representation, federal funding and demographic statistics for college towns.

## IN BRIEF: WHY THE CENSUS MATTERS

- The Census is not just an exercise in bean counting. The framers of the Constitution intended for it to be an important form of political empowerment of the people over government. Mandated under Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution, the Census provides data necessary to appoint representatives among the states for the House of Representatives and to redistrict legislative districts.
- In addition to determining representation, an accurate Census helps every community get a fair allocation of resources. Census data are used to help determine how \$675 billion is distributed from the federal government to state and local governments, including funding for programs like Head Start, Medicare, SNAP and Pell grants. A December 2018 report by the George Washington University Institute of Public Policy estimated that census numbers guide \$880 billion a year in federal funding distributed for schools, roads and other public services in local communities.
- One Census Bureau tract highlights 50 different ways census data are used including: the distribution of federal funds and state funds; assessing the potential for the spread of communicable diseases; making business decisions and understanding consumer needs; rural area development; planning for faith-based organizations; planning new schools; attracting new businesses to state and local areas; planning for hospitals and other health services; and designing public safety strategies. Demographic data from the Census are used by businesses to determine, for example, where to build new supermarkets, and by emergency responders to locate injured people after natural disasters.



*“In order to accommodate our laws to the real situation of our constituents, we ought to be acquainted with that situation. It may be impossible to ascertain it as far as I wish; but we may ascertain it so far as to be extremely useful, when we come to pass laws, affecting any particular description of people. If gentlemen have any doubts with respect to its utility, I cannot satisfy them in a better manner, than by referring them to the debates which took place upon the bills intended collaterally to benefit the agricultural, commercial, and manufacturing parts of the community.*

-James Madison, Census of the Union, February 2, 1790

James Madison made sure that the first Census Act allowed the collection of “useful” social and economic information to support decision-making and resource allocation.



## ABOUT THE 2020 PROCESS

The 2020 Census will be a monumental undertaking and faces a number of challenges because of budget restrictions, employing new technology (2020 is the first time the Census Bureau will be urging most households to submit their census responses online), and because of politics (especially whether there will be a question about citizenship).

- Most households can start participating around mid-March 2020, when letters with instructions are scheduled to be sent to 95 percent of homes around the country.
- The 2020 count will be the first one to allow all U.S. households to respond online. Paper forms will still be available, and, for the first time, people can call 1-800 numbers to give responses over the phone. The online survey option is expected to help improve the return rate, but the digitization of the census process creates new online security concerns and worries about the possible underrepresentation of minority groups who do not have easy access to technology.
- The Census Bureau includes every person living in the U.S. — regardless of citizenship or immigration status.
- College students will be counted in the communities where they go to school and live the majority of the year. Most college students should be counted at their college address, either on campus or off campus. They should be counted at their parents' home only if they live and sleep there most of the year.
- The Supreme Court is set to hear arguments over the controversial "citizenship" question on April 23. The Trump administration insists it wants to add the question because the responses can be used to better enforce Voting Rights Act protections in cases of discrimination against racial and language minorities. Critics of the question point to Census Bureau research suggesting that asking about citizenship in the current political climate will discourage households with noncitizens from participating in the census.
- Respondents can skip questions, submit an incomplete census form, and still be included in the head count.
- Under current federal law, the Census Bureau cannot share census responses identifying individuals with the public or other federal agencies, including immigration authorities and other law enforcement, until 72 years after the information is collected. The Census Bureau, however, can release anonymized census information about specific demographic groups at a level as detailed as a neighborhood.
- The Census Bureau is expected to announce the new population counts by December 31, 2020. That's the bureau's deadline for sending to the President numbers for the reapportionment of congressional seats, which goes into effect beginning with the 2022 elections.

## WHAT CAN VIRGINIA COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES DO?

Off-campus, adult, renter and highly mobile students are at risk of being uncounted for a variety of reasons. Survey research data and response rates have shown that those who know more about how census data are used and about the process are more likely to participate.

### ENGAGE STUDENTS

- Students must learn why the census is so important and how the process works.
- Engage students and let them lead! It gives them a chance to practice civic skills and they know the best ways to communicate with peers.
- Develop educational exercises and resources for use in classes. Create a module with resources on Collab, Canvas, etc. that can be accessed by all faculty and students.
- Encourage students to start their own Complete Count Committee on campus.
- Because of high levels of distrust in government institutions, we must prepare students as liaisons to their own hard-to-count communities.
- The 2020 Census is also an employment opportunity for students.  
[www.2020census.gov/jobs](http://www.2020census.gov/jobs)
- Develop campus systems and awareness-raising for these groups.

### CAMPUS ADMINISTRATION IDEAS

- Include a reminder and link to complete the census online in your campus registration system in Spring 2020 when students will be registering for Fall 2020 courses or completing Spring 2020 graduation check-in.
- Send a university-wide educational email early in Spring 2020 semester and again on Census Day.
- Join a state-wide campus competition for completion percentage.
- Sponsor residence hall completion competitions.
- Place full-page and online ads in student papers.
- Sponsor a campus poster competition.
- Organize social media campaigns, including chats, Facebook profile frames & social media filters.
- Sponsor a student video competition.
- Include census completion as part of your campus residence hall move-out checklist.

### RESOURCES

Census Bureau: <https://2020census.gov/en>  
VA Complete Count Commission:  
<https://www.commonwealth.virginia.gov/completecount/>  
James Madison Center for Civic Engagement:  
<https://www.jmu.edu/civic>

### OFF-CAMPUS IDEAS

- Interior and Exterior Bus Signs
- Door Hangers
- Email/Letter to landlords
- Complex office posters
- Coffee sleeve stickers
- Food delivery inserts
- Off Campus Living Website