**College Students: Where RU? COVID-19 could lead you to**

**the wrong census location**

COVID-19 has added a twist to the census that every family with a college student should recognize. When campuses shut down and students went home in March, it created a confusing situation: Is an empty campus really the correct place to count a student? The answer is, “yes,” if the student would normally be living on campus this school year.

The guiding principle is that federal funds often follow people. So, the census needs to count people where they spend *most* of their time. For any student living on campus, that means being counted at a school address. Semester, quarter or spring breaks, or pandemic shutdowns, are all considered as temporary for full-time students who live most of the year away from home in a college town. It does make sense to count on-campus students when it comes to allocating population-based federal funds.

Here’s a breakdown of some typical college student situations.

**A student lives with their family and commutes to campus.**

Easy. The student is counted as part of their family household at the household address.

**A full-time student lives during the school year on campus in a dorm or other housing owned by the college or university – including university-owned fraternity or sorority houses.**

Easy in principle. Students should be counted at their campus addresses. This is considered part of the Group Quarters Enumeration that the Census Bureau has been working on with campus administrators to adjust and get information for the census count.

**A full-time student lives alone during the school year away from home but off-campus in an apartment or house.**

Not hard. The student should respond to the census survey as an independent household of one person at the address of their off-campus residence. Their family should *not* include them in their household(s). A student who is home during a campus closure might miss a census form sent to their school address. Not a problem. The student should simply fill out the online form at

<https://2020census.gov/> and use the Non-ID response option.

**A full-time student lives with one or more roommates during the school year off-campus in an apartment or house.**

Now it gets interesting. The student and their roommates should be counted at their off-campus residence, even if they are all staying with their families right now. It makes sense to have just one person collect information from all roommates and fill out the online survey at <https://2020census.gov/>. So, this is a good chance for roomies to check in with each other, find out how everyone is doing, and coordinate a single census survey. However, the Census Bureau allows for multiple entries from a single address using the non-ID response, so a student who can’t contact roommates should go ahead and fill it out for themselves and have their roommates do the same at https:// 2020census.gov/.

**A full-time student is off campus this spring for a semester abroad or other similar program. The student may be at home, or elsewhere, under “stay-in-place” orders.**

The student should be counted in their parents’ household.

And one final piece of advice for students: As important as it is for every person to be counted, using “I was filling out my census form” as an excuse for a late assignment probably falls into the same category as “the dog ate my homework.”

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