

Education Department Guidance Regarding Census Takers

The Department of Education's Family Policy Compliance Office (FPCO), has issued written guidance on how colleges and universities should deal with census takers. The census will be taken in 2010, and the Census Bureau has announced that it plans to visit each college and university on three separate occasions. The first visit will be between September 28 and October 23, 2009. In this initial visit the Census Bureau will attempt to determine if group living quarters, such as college residence halls and dormitories, exist at the school and, if so, to obtain the address of the dormitories, the number of students living in those group quarters, and the contact person (*i.e.*, college resident assistant) for each group housing unit.

During the second visit, between February 1 and March 12, 2010, the Census Bureau will request from the college or university "directory information," *i.e.*, names and campus addresses of the students living in group housing. After receiving the names and addresses, the Census Bureau will provide resident assistants with envelopes addressed to each student containing a one-page census form to be completed by the student. The Census Bureau will attempt to collect these forms during the same time period. On its third visit, the Census Bureau will then ask the college or university to supply the information requested on the one-page form for any student who did not complete and return the form to the Census Bureau. The Census Bureau hopes the entire process will be completed prior to May 14, 2010.

The FPCO has indicated how college and universities can cooperate with the Census Bureau and remain in compliance with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). First, a college or university should not release any information, including directory information, pertaining to a student who has exercised his or her right to "opt out" of directory information disclosures, without obtaining the written consent of the "opting out" student. If the student has not elected to "opt out," however, and the college or university has made a designation of "directory information," then the designated directory information can be given to the Census Bureau without the written consent of the student. The FPCO cautions that information about a student's race, ethnicity, or sex, however, should not be released by a college or university except upon the prior written consent of the involved student. Finally, the FPCO advises that a college or university should not release the Social Security number of a student under any circumstances.