



The Honourable Tony Clement
Minister of Industry
235 Queen Street
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0H5

July 19th, 2010

Minister Clement,

I am writing you to convey the serious concerns the members of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA) have with the recent decision to replace the mandatory long form, utilized in the national census, with a voluntary survey. CASA represents over 315,000 students from 25 institutions across Canada.

The data obtained through the long questionnaires in previous censuses has provided public policymakers, and concerned stakeholders who conduct research into higher learning with crucial demographic data that is the keystone to properly weighting samples in other research.

Further, the long form provides significant insight into how Canada's system of higher learning is performing, how Canada compares to other countries with regard to post-secondary education, and helps to identify where, when, and how all levels of government in Canada should invest in learning and training.

For example, the long form has provided invaluable information on critical topics including post-secondary school attendance and completion rates, awarded certificates, diplomas, and degrees, as well as interprovincial, inter-territorial and international flows of skilled personnel.

However, the soundness of this data could be put into significant jeopardy if the mandatory long form is replaced with a voluntary survey. Voluntary surveys are subject to self-selection biases, while a mandatory census is not. These selection biases undermine the confidence, reliability, and usefulness of the data collected. The strength of a mandatory census is to eliminate this bias.

Considering that Canada already suffers from a lack of adequate, comparable data on our post-secondary system, and that further cutbacks in the size and scope of learning data collected by federal ministries and departments is being contemplated, the ramifications of this alteration to census data collection must not be underestimated by the federal government.

Our students are deeply concerned that this change will seriously impede the capacity of all interested parties to conduct comprehensive and timely analysis into higher education issues. As such, CASA is asking the federal government to endorse the following points regarding the census form:

1. **Reinstate the use of both the short (Form 2A) and long (Form 2B) questionnaires used to enumerate the Canadian population in the 2006 Census for the 2011 Census.**
2. **Rather than changing the essential nature of the census, if the government is deeply concerned about the coercive aspect of the census, they should hold public consultations to review the punishments given for failure to send back a census form.**

On behalf of our members,

Zach Dayler
National Director
Canadian Alliance of Student Associations

Cc: The Right Honourable Stephen Harper