



Field of Degree question – at risk for elimination from the American Community Survey

The Issue

The U.S. Census Bureau has identified the “Field of Degree” question as a candidate for removal from the American Community Survey (ACS). This question *will be removed* unless the Census Bureau is persuaded to keep it. This recommendation jeopardizes the National Science Foundation’s (NSF) congressionally mandated charge to provide a broad range of high quality data on the workforce to inform decision making in the United States.

National, state, and local policymakers, the NSF and other Federal Agencies, researchers, and many others rely on the ACS’ “Field of Degree” question (Question 12) to produce the Nation’s only source of comprehensive information about the U.S. science and engineering workforce.

Specifically, the ACS “Field of Degree” question enables NSF’s National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES) to identify scientists and engineers, a rare segment of the U.S. population. Elimination of this question will reduce the quality and utility of data essential to fulfilling NCSES’ mandate to “...collect, acquire, analyze, report, and disseminate statistical data related to the science and engineering enterprise in the United States.” Among the specific impacts, elimination of this question will adversely affect the quality and availability of data for the National Science Board’s *Science and Engineering Indicators* report and the *Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering* report, both mandated by Congress.

NCSES is continuing to explore both the impacts of this recommendation and if and how these data could be collected via other mechanisms. The preliminary conclusion is that it would be difficult if not impossible to achieve the same level of quality through alternate means. Additionally, if acceptable alternate means were identified, it almost certainly would result in both significant additional costs to the Federal government and additional burden to survey respondents.

How You Can Help Retain the “Field of Degree” Question

The National Science Board believes that retaining Question 12 on the ACS will ensure our Nation continues to have available the highest quality data on the scientific workforce through the most efficient and cost effective means possible. **If you share our concern, we encourage you to respond to the Census Bureau’s Federal Register Notice call for public comment [HERE](#) on or before the December 30, 2014 deadline.**

For more information, please see the [Federal Register Notice](#) or visit the [ACS Content Review home page](#).