

Final Report of Working Group on Group Quarters in the ACS

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Recommendations and Observations

We made recommendations and observations in 10 areas in April 2013. ACS responded to our comments in September 2014. We have discussed all of these with ACS staff:

1. Need for continued collection of GQ data in the ACS
2. Need for additional support from upper levels of the Census Bureau
3. Change GQ forum to a GQ Working Group
4. Sampling frame
5. Sampling
6. Imputation
7. Weighting
8. Concerns of different groups of ACS GQ users
9. GQ questionnaire
10. Research

1: Importance of GQ Data in the ACS

Working Group Recommendation

- The ACS is an extremely important source of demographic and social data for policy, business and scientific purposes.
- It is essential that, as a replacement for the long form of the Census and as a source of data about the entire United States population, the ACS continue to collect data about the GQ population.

ACS Response

- **GQ, like other ACS operations, is contingent on annual reevaluation and funding.**

2: Additional Census Bureau Support

Working Group Recommendation

The ACS staff has made progress on many important issues. Substantial further progress requires additional support from upper levels of the Census Bureau in areas such as:

- Making clearer to non-ACS parts of the Census Bureau that improving the GQ data in the ACS is a priority, including that it is justifiable for non-ACS Census personnel to devote time to cooperative efforts.
- For example, Census Bureau support would be key to revising the Charter of the GQ Forum, which would facilitate standardizing GQ definitions and improving the GQ sampling frame.

ACS Response

- **GQ, like other ACS program operations, is contingent on annual reevaluation and funding.**

3: GQ Forum

Working Group Recommendation

- The GQ Forum has facilitated communication among groups concerned with GQ data.
- It would be desirable for the GQ Forum to function as a working group that would take action on issues and initiatives such as improving the sampling frame and agreeing on consistent GQ facilities definitions.
- For this to happen, the Charter of the GQ Forum would need to be revised.
- It would be useful to review whether the Inter-Agency Task Force has been helpful in improving ACS GQ data.

ACS Response

- **The Group Quarters Working Group was established with its membership representing multiple areas across the Census Bureau. The goal is to have a corporate collaboration on GQ data collection for all surveys and the decennial census, to improve the frame, and to clarify or improve definitions. The working group has reached out to researchers in the Census Survey Measurement (CSM) area to conduct qualitative interviews with administrators at large universities across the country. The results of these interviews will help with possible revisions to the definitions, as well as better data collection at college/university student housing.**

4: Sampling Frame

Working Group Recommendation

- The accuracy of the sampling frame is key to the GQ data.
- Updating the GQ sampling frame between censuses should be a high priority, which is not consistently done now.
- We strongly endorse continued ACS cooperation with the Justice Department regarding federal prisons and encourage close cooperation with state prison agencies to improve the sampling frame.
- We strongly encourage cooperation with state agencies that monitor GQ facilities to improve the sampling frame, even if the data available differ by state.

ACS Response

- **Updating the sampling frame is part of the Group Quarters Working Group charter. GQ updates to the MAF began in Sept. 2014.**
- **Cooperation with state agencies is part of the charter.**

5: Sampling

Working Group Recommendation

- ACS has changed to interviewing in college dorms during the academic year only. This was a good idea.
- Information on change of GQ type and on shift between GQ/non-GQ status should be used to update the sampling frame. This is not currently done.
- Analyses of changes in GQ type and GQ/non-GQ shifts would be informative.

ACS Response

- **The GQ frame is updated annually with corrections identified during data collection. HU/GQ conversions have been removed from the frame, and ACS is working on how to add them to the correct frame.**

6: Imputation

Working Group Recommendation

- Often imputation of specific characteristics or of entire respondents is necessary.
- ACS now only imputes respondents of the appropriate sex to same-sex GQs. This was a good change.
- In the PUMS file, there should be an imputation tag for an entire imputed GQ respondent and for specific imputed variables. This is not now done.
- There should be consideration of whether there is a maximum number of times a particular respondent is used for imputation. There is no current limit.

ACS Response

- **There is currently no flag for whole imputed records, since the weighted estimates without the imputed records are not valid. By not distinguishing them, it helps disclosure avoidance for the GQ population.**

Working Group Response

- **Still some concerns about imputation procedures**

7: Weighting

Working Group Recommendation

- A problem with GQ estimates for sub-state divisions has been due to omission of GQs.
- The ACS has adopted a new imputation procedure for data when it is known a GQ exists in the geographic area, but the GQ was not in the sample.
- The new procedure gives good results, based on comparisons shortly after a census.
- Much of the value of this new procedure depends on the quality of the sampling frame and the updating of the sampling frame between censuses.

ACS Response

- **The new procedure is continuing to be applied, given its many benefits.**

8: Concerns of Different Groups of Users

Working Group Recommendation

- There are two main groups of users of ACS GQ data:
 - Users of data for small geographic areas
 - Users of PUMS microdata
- What GQ data do those concerned with data for small geographic areas need besides age, race and ethnic composition of the population?
- What GQ data do those concerned with the PUMS data, need for cross-tabulations, statistical analyses and study of interrelations between characteristics?
- It is important that the requirements of both types of users be considered by the new ACS Data Users Group.

ACS Response

- **Anyone can join the online community and there are groups for subgroups of users.**

G9: GQ Questionnaire

Working Group Recommendation

- Although a few questions, such as travel time to work, are not asked of the GQ institutional population, most of the questionnaire is identical.
- It should be considered whether a shorter set of questions should be asked of the institutionalized GQ population.
- It should be considered whether only age, race and ethnicity should be collected for the institutionalized GQ population and whether these data could be obtained from administrative sources or filled out by administrators.
- This would be much less expensive and could allow data collection from a larger number of institutional GQs.

ACS Response

- **Research continues on this. There will be close cooperation with the 2020 Census on use of administrative records.**

Working Group Response

- The planned cooperation with the 2020 Census on use of administrative records is a good idea.

10: Research

Working Group Recommendation

- Several observations and recommendations have referred to research undertaken by ACS staff, such as the need for analyses of changes of GQ type and between GQ and non-GQ status. Also the recent ACS research on imputation methods is quite important.
- In order to further improve the quality of the ACS GQ data, continued research in these and other areas will be essential.

ACS Response

- **ACS continues research on how to provide quality estimates within budget constraints.**

Closing Comments

- We have had many useful and productive conversations about GQ ACS data within the Working Group and with ACS staff.
- We hope our observations and recommendations are helpful in further improving the quality of ACS GQ data and implementing cost savings.
- We also hope that our work will be helpful in developing future improvements in the overall ACS.