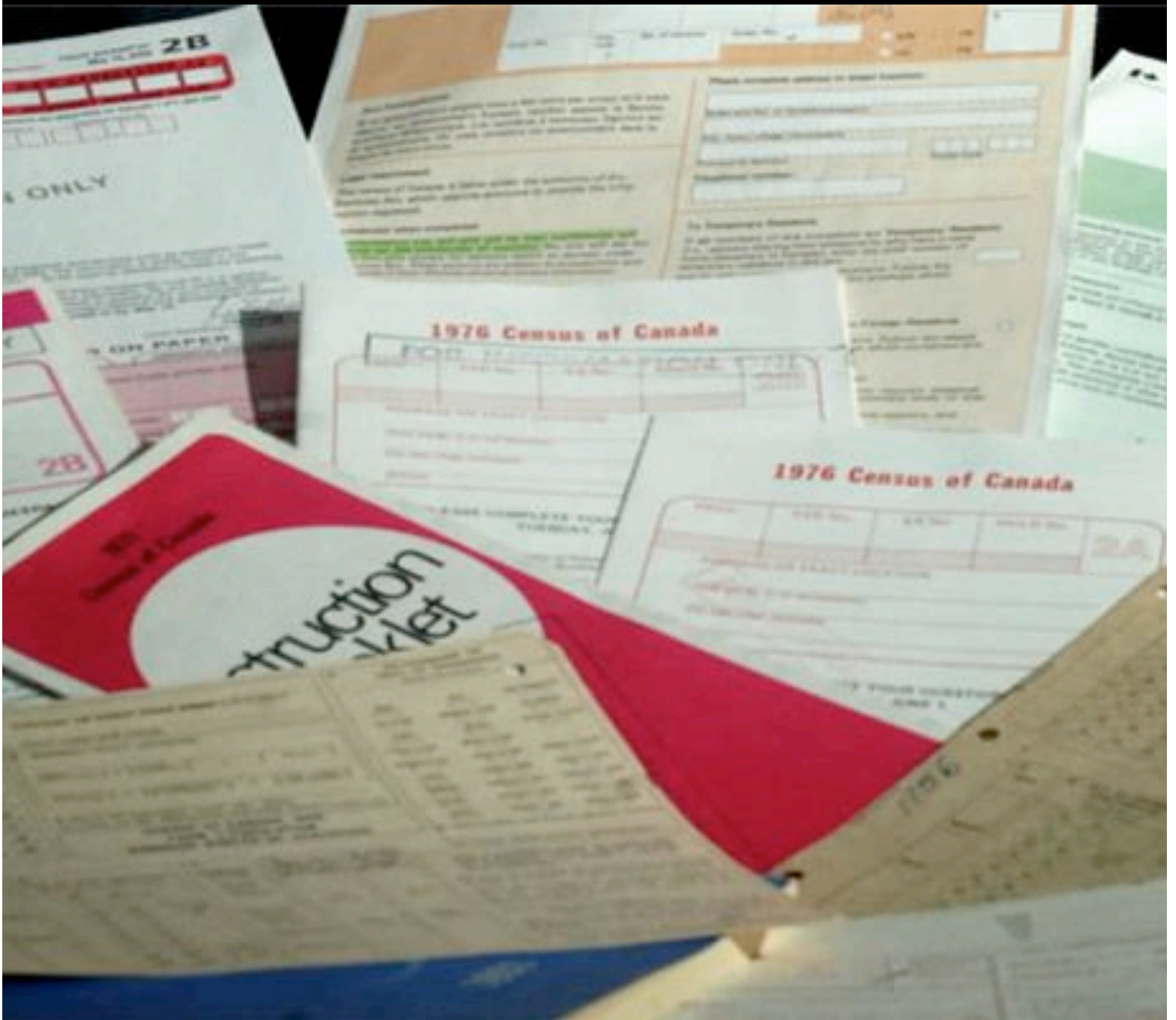


November 18, 2010
253-D Centre Block

HUMA Committee (Removal of Census Long Form) Committee Comments



Ms. Chair -

My name is Aden Murphy and I'm the chairperson of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations and student at the University of Alberta, and I'm with Spencer Keys, CASA's government relations officer, based here in Ottawa.

CASA represents 320,000 students in 26 universities, colleges and technical institutes in Canada. We are here today to continue our vocal opposition to scrapping the mandatory long-form and talk about how this deepens the problem of effective information about learning in Canada.

In addition to federal advocacy, such as our lobby days that have been occurring on the hill over the last week, we also conduct policy analysis and primary research. Last year, CASA conducted a research survey of 21,000 undergraduate students at our member institutions to get an accurate reading of issues relating to student debt, work habits, and literacy about the student financial assistance system – at great cost to our organization. This survey would have been impossible if we did not have a reliable benchmark against which to measure our sample.

This was not an opinion survey but a professionally designed research survey built to withstand academic scrutiny, and it's already being used to help student financial aid administrators and civil servants consider areas of improvement in student financial assistance.

The mandatory census is the only statistically reliable means of weighting voluntary surveys, like CASA's. The long-form census provides invaluable information on critical topics including post-secondary attendance and completion rates, awarded certificates, diplomas and degrees, as well as interprovincial, inter-territorial and international flows of skilled personnel.

One example of how this census information is used is that it benchmarks the enrolment projections that the governments, like Alberta, uses to plan long-term enrolment growth at institutions. The reliability of the mandatory long-form is essential to building the planning framework model that, for example, sees growth of nearly five hundred students at the University of Lethbridge over the next decade. Inaccurate data could easily lead the province to underestimating enrolment growth and causing a gap between the number of seats and the number of qualified students from southern Alberta able to attend that university. This is one important example of where adequate, accurate data helps post-secondary education.

Canada already suffers from a lack of adequate, comparable data on our post-secondary system, and further cutbacks in the size of and scope of learning data collected by federal ministries and departments is being contemplated. While planned long ago to end this year, it is regrettable that the Youth in Transition Survey is finished, and that the National Graduates Survey is only guaranteed for 2010-2011.

Learning data has always been a problem in Canada. In stark contrast to the vast majority of industrialized nations, Canada does not have a centrally audited and comparable source of nationally collected data available to evaluate quality in higher education. In fact, in 2007

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Canada ranked last among 40 OECD nations when it comes to the amount of post-secondary education information provided to *Education at a Glance*, an annual international survey comparing a wide range of indicators.

Our current learning infrastructure is highly fragmented, and spread out over multiple departments and institutions. This has resulted in needless duplication of research, prevented the establishment of efficient networks of data collaboration and sharing of best practices (even though Statistics Canada is required by law to coordinate these activities).

Those departments and institutions that do collect and analyze learning information are not resourced to conduct the number and type of studies (both long-term and short term) needed to address key questions about major transitions throughout the lives of our citizens (starting data collection when a student enters grade school, rather than at 15 like the YITS survey does).

Sufficed to say, the dearth of effective educational statistics at the governmental level means the private sector has had to respond. Contributions like CASA's survey have had to fill the void but those efforts are rendered much less effective without a mandatory census.

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.

The mandatory long-form must be brought back for the 2011 Census. If issues around coercion are truly a concern: rather than changing the essential nature of the census, public consultations should be held to review the punishments given for failure to send back a census form.

Thank you for your time.