SOME COMPARISONS OF OFFICE OF EDUCATION AND CENSUS BUREAU STATISTICS ON EDUCATION

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Sound educational planning and proper evaluation of the output of the school systems rest, to a considerable extent, on the adequacy of factual knowledge about the educational enterprise. Through statistics we are able to gauge such facts as the extent to which formal educational programs serve the population, the educational status and relative progress of children and young adults in school, and the number of persons expected to pass through the school systems in future years. It is especially important, therefore, that the data which are used in this planning and evaluation are reliable, internally consistent, and relevant to the problem at hand.

The purpose of this paper is to examine critically the correspondence of educational data gathered by the two largest collectors of such information in the United States, namely the Office of Education and the Bureau of the Census. More specifically, comparisons will be made between selected series of data on school enrollment and educational attainment from the Biennial Survey and annual fall surveys of the Office of Education and the decennial census and Current Population Survey of the Census Bureau. 1 How consistent are these series of data? What accounts for differences that do exist? What implications do the findings based on these comparisons have for the application of education data?

Before undertaking these comparisons, it might be helpful to review briefly the major differences which might account for variations in the data, such as in data-collecting techniques, program objectives, and definitions employed by the data collectors.

1. Quite different bases for collecting the data are used by the two agencies. The Office of Education statistics are generally collected by mail questionnaires sent to the officers of State school systems and of institutions of higher education. The Current Population Survey data are collected by household interviews in which the respondent (most often a housewife) provides information about all of the residents. The 1960 Census data were collected partly by self-enumeration and partly by household interview.

2. In both agencies, the statistics on students (which are of most concern in this paper) are gathered in conjunction with statistics on other items. In the Office of Education studies, although the whole survey may be related to educational information, data on teachers, classrooms, and school finances are often collected in the same questionnaire as are the student data. In the Census Bureau censuses and surveys, the education information is collected at the same time as other information about the population, such as marital status, labor force status, income, and so forth. The Office of Education data are used to describe the status of the school systems, its staff, and pupils; the census data are intended to describe the educational status of the population, including those out of school as well as those in school.

3. The adequacy of the data-collection process is difficult to assess. For each data series. there are numerous possible errors arising from this source. The States which compile information for the Office of Education must summarize the reports from local school districts. The local data-collection forms vary considerably in content and language, and some estimation is involved where data are missing or where a local survey has not been taken. Furthermore, although the Office of Education provides the States with standard definitions, deviations from prescribed definitions and instructions are known to exist. In the Census Bureau censuses and surveys, the respondent may sometimes lack complete knowledge about other household members or may sometimes have erroneous information. Also, while interviewers are provided with standard definitions, it is often difficult to transmit this knowledge to the respondent or to have the many respondents interpret the definitions in the same way. Moreover, in the case of the Current Population Survey, which is based on a small national sample, and, to a lesser extent, in the decennial census, which used a 25-percent sample for education data, the statistics are subject to errors of sampling variability.

4. The questions or items used to collect the information in the different sources vary somewhat in definitions employed and time references used. For example. Census Bureau data on college enrollment are intended to refer to all students in college programs which may lead to a degree, whereas Office of Education statistics on college enrollment exclude some types of junior or community college students, such as those in terminal-occupation programs. Also, decennial census data are collected in April and refer to enrollment since February 1 of the year (generally the spring semester), whereas the CPS and Office of Education survey data on college enrollment are collected in the fall of the year. These and other such definitional differences are discussed further in later parts of the paper.

5. In all of the sources, variations may be introduced because of errors in processing or editing the data. Both agencies review the assembled information for reasonableness and internal consistency. Using different techniques, both agencies supply missing information, either by referring to an additional source or by some estimation procedure.

6. There are, of course, other reasons for differences in the data collected, such as different population or geographic coverage and different ways of presenting the data in published form. These several differences must be considered carefully when comparisons of different sets of data are made.

For the most part, the Office of Education and Bureau of the Census collect different kinds of education data; however, there are some types of information which both agencies collect and which may be compared. I have chosen, for illustrative purposes, four kinds of comparisons. First, public elementary and secondary enrollment by State, according to the 1960 Census, the 1959 O.E. fall survey, and the 1959-60 O.E. Biennial Survey, are examined. Second, public school enrollments by grade, according to the census and the Biennial Survey, are compared. Third, comparisons of public and private college enrollment, based on the 1960 Census, the Current Population Survey, and the O.E. fall survey of higher education, are made. Finally, some attention is paid to the correspondence of census data on educational attainment and O.E. data on high school graduates and college degrees.

As seen in table 1, public school enrollment (that is, in kindergarten through the twelfth grade) was 35.3 million in the 1960 Census and 35.2 million in the 1959 O.E. fall survey. One might have expected the census figure to be slightly lower because the data refer to the spring semester and some slight attrition at these grades takes place between the fall and spring terms. However, some shifting from parochial or other private schools to public schools probably also takes place during that time, and this shifting would compensate for the attrition effect. At any rate, the figures are quite close, with the census total being only slightly over 100 percent of the O.E. figure. Looking at the comparison by States, one sees some greater discrepancies. Nevertheless, in only 13 States is the deviation as great as 3 percent and in only one State (Alaska) is the deviation extreme. 2/ Most of these differences, moreover, can probably be accounted for, in great part, to varying definitions of residence or to transfers or residential mobility between States between the fall and spring. Some information to test this hypothesis will be available in later census reports.

The differences between the O.E. Biennial Survey figures and either of the other two sources are greater than the differences between those two sources. Here, obviously, the main factor is the nature of the Biennial Survey data, which are a cumulative count of all children enrolled in the State during the school year. Because of transfers, some students may enroll in the school systems of two or more States during the year. Even so, the Biennial data show a marked tendency to correspond, in level, to the census and O.E. fall figures.

The discrepancies between the 1960 Census statistics and the O.E. Biennial Survey data are of about the same order of magnitude, as seen in table 2, when a division is made between the elementary and secondary level (that is, between kindergarten through the eighth grade and the ninth through the twelfth grades). At the national level, the differences is a bit greater at the elementary then at the secondary level. Figures from the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey for the fall of 1959 fit in generally well with the decennial census and O.E. Biennial figures. At the elementary level, the CPS figure falls below the other two series (possibly. in part, because four-year-olds, some of whom are in kindergarten in the fall, are not included in the age coverage for enrollment in the CPS). At the secondary level, the CPS figure falls exactly between the census and O.E.figures.

Shifting to a comparison of grade distributions in the census and the Biennial Survey, as shown in table 3, we find exceptionally good correspondence except at the first and twelfth grades. The reasons for the differences at these grades are somewhat difficult to determine; however, there are some clues. The Biennial figure, which is higher at the first grade, is a cumulative count, and it is possible that duplication is greatest at the first grade where the number of grade repeaters is high. On the other hand, because of the way the decennial census data on grade in which enrolled are collected and tabulated (that is, by combining responses to a question on school enrollment with responses to a question on highest grade attended, where net overreporting of the latter is generally found), it may be that errors of misreporting in the census are greatest at the first and twelfth grades (at the latter grade because of some erroneous inclusion of older persons in adult education courses). 3/ Some support for the latter hypothesis was discovered by extending the comparison to include the grade distribution from the fall 1959 Current Population Survey in which grade enrollment is obtained by a more direct question than in the census. The CPS figures, which are not shown in the tables, are clearly much closer to the Biennial Survey than to the decennial census figures, including comparisons at the first and twelfth grades.

Comparisons of college enrollment by State can be made between the 1960 Census and the 1959 O.E. fall survey of higher education. According to table 4, the census figures for the United States as a whole and for most of the States are considerably below those from the O. E. survey. At the national level, the census figure is 13 percent less than the O.E. figure. There is a great deal of variation in the relationship by States. The primary reason for these differences, which incidentally are very similar to those be-tween the 1950 Census and the 1949 O. E. fall survey, probably can be found in the time of the year to which the data refer. Considerable attrition in college enrollment takes place between the fall and spring semesters. A special inquiry concerning fall and spring enrollment, sent to the largest universities in six States where

the census figure fell appreciably below the 0.E. figure, showed that the attrition rate was very close to the difference between the two sets of data. $\frac{4}{}$ Further confirmation of this explanation is found by comparing the national figure on college enrollment obtained from the fall 1959 Current Population Survey with the 0.E. fall estimate. The CPS figure, which was 3,340,000, is remarkably close to the 3,377,273 number resulting from the 0.E. fall survey, especially in view of the slight definitional differences and sampling variability in the CPS.

The college enrollment statistics may be compared further according to whether enrollment was in a public or private college, as in table 5. This information was collected in a decennial census for the first time in 1960 but has been collected over a period of years in the Current Population Surveys and in the O.E. fall surveys. The percentage of college students in public colleges consistently runs somewhat higher in the CPS than in the O. E. survey. Because of this difference, a check was made on the CPS reports in 1958. Respondents were asked in the usual way whether a college enrollee was in a public or private college and, at another point in the interview, were also asked for the name of the college being attended. Classification of the college names was made by using the Office of Education college directory and comparaisons were made on a case-by-case basis with the CPS report. The results are shown in table 6. If, as seems proper, one accepts the 0. E. classification, the CPS reports which were in error were largely those in which a private college was reported as public. Since many private colleges have place names (such as the University of Dayton), this particular type of error is understandable. Some further instructions to CPS interviewers in 1959 on this matter did not result in improved reporting, however, as can be seen in table 5; but the 1960 decennial census figures matched exactly, percentagewise, with the O. E. figures. The greater census accuracy in reporting this item probably can be explained because college students were counted in the census where they attended school and they tended to report for themselves, whereas in the CPS unmarried college students are reported by their parents whose knowledge of the type of control of the college may have been incomplete.

As a final illustration, I shift from an examination of enrollment statistics to an examination of educational attainment statistics. There are few direct comparisons between Census Bureau and Office of Education data of this type which can be made but it is possible to make some indirect comparisons. For instance, according to the March 1959 Current Population Survey, about 6.9 million persons 25 to 29 years old were high school graduates (that its, had completed four years of high school or some college); if one sums the number of high school graduates each year reported by the Office of Education for a five-year period corresponding to the time at which this age group should have completed high school, about 6.0 million persons are recorded as high school graduates. The most obvious reason for this difference is the probable net overreporting of persons completing high school, according to the CPS; however, it is difficult to match cohorts in the two sets of data, and some persons receive high school equivalent certificates at a late age. It is significant to note that in a special study conducted by the Census Bureau, in which information was gathered about youths, reported as high school seniors in the October 1959 CPS, as to their high school status in the fall of 1960, an estimated 1,803,000 were reported as high school graduates; and this number agreed exactly with the independent estimate made by the Office of Education based on their survey.

When the number of college graduates (that is, the persons who had completed four or more years of college, according to the CPS) for the same 25-to-29 year age group is compared with the number of college degrees (bachelors and first professional level, according to 0.E.) for the appropriate time period, the CPS figure is found to be slightly lower than the O.E. figure (about 1.2 vs. 1.4 million). Quite likely, some net overreporting of college graduates in the CPS was more than compensated for by the fact that the O.E. data included many persons (maybe up to 10 percent of the total with bachelor or first professional degrees) who received a professional degree after having received a bachelor's degree in the same five-year period. Also, here again. the difficulty of exactly matching cohorts is vital.

To sum up, although the illustrations shown here cover only some of the comparisons which could be made, and although probably not all of the differences found can be rationalized, it seems reasonable to conclude that, allowing for fundamental variations in definitions, coverage, time references, and the like, there is remarkable correspondence between Office of Education and Census Bureau statistics on education. However, although this finding can be, and is, comforting to those of us who produce the data, the main point of the paper goes beyond this discovery.

The fact is that there are differences in the several sets of data and these differences are there largely because the different data producers rightly structure the collection of data to meet the needs of their major consumers. Therefore, unless the nature of the data and the reasons for differences in the sets of statistics are considered by the data users, serious errors in application and interpretation might be the result. This argues, I think, for two recommendations: (1) Consumers of these education statistics should not take too lightly the differences in the data and should not use the sets of data interchangeably without qualification. This requires, I believe, some type of educational program. (2) Perhaps, to some degree, the sort of careless misuse or misinterpretation of education data which is often

heard in some speeches and found in some publications is attributable to a lack of emphasis by the data producers on the nature and quality of the data. I am not sure what the best approach is here, but it is incumbent upon both producers and consumers to see that statistics which are collected and published are properly presented, correctly analysed and interpreted, and judiciously applied.

FOOTNOTES

1/ The Census Bureau also gathers data on public school organisation and finance through its Government Division's program, but no consideration is being given to that source in this paper. Likewise, no comparisons are being made in the area of teacher statistics or of other education items for which both agencies collect data. 2/ The Office of Education does not count some schools in Alaska as regular public schools which would be so regarded in the census.

3/ Some recent analysis of census and 0.E. grade distributions in 1940, 1950, and 1960 shows greater convergence in the two series at each later date.

4/ This suggests that the extent of underenumeration of college students in the census may have been small. A proper evaluation of this point, however, must await data from the 1960 Census evaluation program, which includes a specific check on the coverage of college students.

	Publi	c school enrol	lment,	Census as neveent of		
	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	grades K to 12				
		1959 OE	1959-60 OE	1959 05	1959-00 UE	
Area	1960	rall of	Blennial	Fall	Biennial Summer	
	Census 1/	Survey 2/	Survey 1/	Survey	Survey	
					<u> </u>	
UNITED STATES	35,282,104	35,182,343	36,142,790	100.23	97.62	
Alabama	781,605	775,931	787,269	100.72	99.28	
Alaska	47,739	39,449	44,450	121.01	107.40	
Arizona	292,685	280,369	302,182	104.39	96.86	
Arkansas	419,085	422,060	424,206	99.30	98.79	
California	3,256,081	3,190,745	3,199,455	102.05	101.77	
Colorado	378,990	371,608	393,679	101.99	96.27	
Connecticut	468,607	460,311	476,749	101.80	98.29	
Delaware	79,095	77,761	80,874	101.72	97.50	
Dist. of Columbia	114,910	116,587	122,446	98.50	93.05	
Florida	967,867	919,491	993,496	105.20	97.42	
Georgia	939,641	930,624	949,099	100.97	99.00	
Hawaii.	144,082	140,491	139,429	102.50	100.04	
Idaho	163,222	155,590	102,039	104.70	04 53	
	1,009,995	1,003,442	1,707,009	100.09	94•JJ 04 55	
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	475,007	477,077 610,002	631 412	77.70	97.25	
	606 118	603 202	603 100	100.46	100.46	
Maine	107 050	107 035	195,214	100.46	101.40	
Mamiland	578.810	583,015	596,363	99.28	97.06	
Massachusetts	855,184	831,230	859,865	102.83	99.46	
Michigan	1.623.903	1.609.893	1.625.247	100.87	99.92	
Minnesota	672,952	682.306	681,358	98.63	98.77	
Mississippi	565,051	560,000	566,421	100.90	99.76	
Missouri	756,364	805,000	820,724	93.96	92.16	
Montana	143,662	142,850	144,973	100.57	99.10	
Nebraska	282,957	274,262	282,719	103.17	100.03	
Nevada	63,053	60,279	66,415	104.60	94 94	
New Hampshire	103,897	102,745	105,773	101.12	98.23	
New Jersey	1,033,711	1,015,000	1,050,992	101.84	98.36	
New Mexico	225, 387	211,334	231,004	106.65	97.57	
New York	2,727,540	2,697,477	2,828,853	101.11	96.42	
North Carolina	1,072,045	1,082,213	1,105,412	99.06	96.98	
North Dakota	141,238	130,173	136,766	108.50	103.27	
Ohio	1,852,762	1,832,479	1,905,995	101.11	97.21	
Oklahoma	510,751	533,928	533,409	95.00	97•74 07 09	
Uregon	380,938	379,699	300,772	100.33	97.90	
Pennsylvania	1,894,009	1,940,905	1,955,001	77.10	90.95	
	129,177	120,400	410 000	100.00	97.01	
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	2.016 340	2.08/ 5/0	2.068.158	96.73	97.49	
Iltah	230.260	228.826	235,034	100-63	97.60	
Vermont	74.647	72,822	72,790	102.51	102.55	
Virginia	808,668	820,578	841.574	98.55	96.09	
Washington.	616.339	609.024	608.999	101.20	101.21	
West Virginia	428.658	451.875	460.429	94.86	93.10	
Wisconsin	692.746	700,000	732,238	98.96	94.61	
Wyoming	78,089	75,488	81,431	103.45	95.90	

Table 1.--PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENT IN KINDERGARTEN THROUGH THE TWELFTH GRADE, IN THE UNITED STATES, BY STATE: 1960 CENSUS, 1959 OFFICE OF EDUCATION FALL SURVEY: AND 1959-60 OFFICE OF EDUCATION BIENNIAL SURVEY

Table 1 continued

- 1/ Refers to enrollment at any time between February 1 and April 1, 1960.
- 2/ Refers to full-time enrollment "on or about October 1, 1959, or the nearest date thereto when enrollment can be considered stabilized."
- 3/ These "State enrollment data generally represent a cumulative count of the total number of different pupils registered at any time during the school year in each State."
- Note: An estimate of public school enrollment in grades K to 12 in the United States, according to the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey in October 1959, was 34,929,000.

Sources:

U.S. Bureau of the Census. <u>U.S. Census of Population: 1960. General Social</u> and <u>Economic Characteristics</u>. Final Reports PC(1)-C, Parts 1-52.

U. S. Office of Education. <u>Fall 1960 Statistics on Enrollment. Teachers. and</u> <u>Schoolhousing in Full-Time Public Elementary and Secondary Day Schools</u>. Circular No. 634, 1960. (Includes revised 1959 data.)

U. S. Office of Education. <u>Preliminary Statistics of State School Systems</u>, <u>1959-1960</u>. Circular No. 663, July 1961.

U. S. Bureau of the Census. "School Enrollment: October 1959," <u>Current Population</u> <u>Reports</u>, Series P-20, No. 101, May 22, 1960.

Table 2.--PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLIMENT IN KINDERGRAFEN THROUCH THE EIGHTH GRADE AND NINTH THROUCH THE TWELFTH GRADE IN THE UNITED STATES, BY STATE: 1960 CENSUS AND 1959-60 OFFICE OF EDUCATION BIENNIAL SURVET

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Table 2 continued

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Cf. footnotes on table 1.

Note: According to the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey in October 1959, for the United States, there were an estimated 26,358,000 enrolled in grades K to 8 and 8,571,000 enrolled in grades 9 to 12.

Cf. source notes on table 1.

	1	Numbers	Percent	Percent distribution		
Grade	1960 Census <u>1</u> /	1959-60 OE Biennial Survey <u>2</u> /	1960 Census <u>1</u> /	1959-60 OE Biennial Survey <u>2</u> /	percent of OE Survey	
Total, K to 12	35,282,091	36,146,846	100.0	100.0	97.60	
Kindergarten	1,846,374	1,923,384	5.2	5.3	95.99	
first	3,479,028	3,739,471	9.9	10.3	93.03	
econd	3.345.237	3,445,997	9.5	9.5	97.07	
hird	3.235.740	3,311,361	9.2	9.2	97.71	
ourth	3.035.552	3.145.630	8.6	8.7	96.50	
'ifth	3.013.021	3.116.819	8.5	8.6	96.66	
lixth	2,995,919	3.070.084	8.5	8.5	97.58	
eventh	3.046.627	3,170,737	8.6	8.8	96.08	
äghth	2.669.149	2,706,398	7.6	7.5	98.62	
inth	2.357.127	2.415.806	6.7	6.7	97.57	
enth	2.215.375	2.264.299	6.3	6.3	97.83	
leventh	2.055.546	2.068.567	5.8	5.7	99.37	
welfth 1/	1.987.396	1.768.293	5.6	4.9	112.39	

Table 3.--PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLIMENT, BY GRADE, IN THE UNITED STATES: 1960 CENSUS AND 1959-60 OFFICE OF EDUCATION BIENNIAL SURVEY

Cf. footnoes on table 1.

1/ Includes postgraduate high school students.

	Colleg	e envollment	Census as percent		
	1040	- 1050 Office of Education			
Aren	1900	1999 Office of Education			
~10a	census 1/	Fall Survey Z/	Education Survey		
UNITED STATES	2,935,446	3.377.273	86.92		
Alabama	39,638	46.138	85.91		
Alaska	1.849	2,767	66.82		
Arizona	23, 394	32,785	71.36		
Arkansas	21,937	23,529	93.23		
California	325.918	411.029	79.29		
Colorado	40.710	45.832	88.82		
Connecticut	41.914	47,015	89.15		
Delaware	4,990	6,434	77.56		
Dist. of Columbia	23,553	44,583	52.83		
Florida	55.167	64,607	85.39		
Georgia	47,430	47,564	99.72		
Hawaii	8.636	9,645	89.54		
Idaho	11.530	11.082	104.04		
Illinois	156,883	182.721	85.86		
Indiana	78,163	89.322	87.51		
Iowa	48.123	54.063	89.01		
Kansas	42.262	50.102	84.35		
Kentucky	38.034	43.652	87.13		
Louisiana	47.471	53,996	87.92		
Maine	11.811	11,561	102.16		
Maryland	48.029	54.095	88,79		
Massachusetts	118,733	127,779	92,92		
Michigan	132.157	152,294	86.78		
Minnesota	65.499	71,777	91.25		
Mississippi	31,145	33,102	94.09		
Missouri	66,179	79,360	83.39		
Montana	11.618	11,923	97.44		
Nebraska	25,155	31,298	80.37		
Nevada	3.248	3,708	87.59		
New Hampshire	11,375	11,556	98.43		
New Jersey	82,032	82,039	99.99		
New Mexico	13,660	16,575	82.41		
New York	313,147	342,208	91.51		
North Carolina	61,219	66,410	92.18		
North Dakota	12,656	13,242	95•57		
Ohio	137,368	164,749	83.38		
Oklahoma	45,942	55,763	82.39		
Oregon	33,859	40,421	83.77		
Pennsylvania	159,777	179,084	89.22		
Rhode Island	15,196	17,473	86.97		
South Carolina	28,709	31,232	91.92		
South Dakota	12,783	13,989	91.38		
Tennessee	50,474	59,886	84.28		
Texas	151,412	179,322	84.44		
Utah	30,023	30,378	98.83		
Vermont	8,985	8,325	107.93		
Virginia	50,406	53,325	94.69		
Washington	54,867	62,350	88.00		
West Virginia	22,523	28,255	?9. 71		
Wisconsin	63,302	70,478	89.82		
Wyoming	4,555	6,540	69.65		

Table 4.--COLLEGE ENROLLMENT, FOR THE UNITED STATES BY STATE: 1960 CENSUS AND 1959 OFFICE OF EDUCATION FALL SURVEY

Table 4 continued

- 1/ Refers to enrollment at any time between February 1 and April 1, 1960 in college programs which may lead to a degree.
- 2/ Refers to enrollment of degree-credit students "as of the earliest date on which the enrollment becomes stabilized; normally this is within 2 weeks after the opening of the term." Excludes students in technical institutes, terminal-occupational programs, or organized occupational curriculum, even though they may be degree-credit students.
- Note: Total college enrollment in the United States, excluding Alaska and Hawaii, according to the Census Bureau's Current Population Survey in October 1959, was 3,340,000.

	1960	1960 Census		1959 CPS		1959-60 OE Survey	
Type of enrollment	Number	Percent distri- bution	Number	Percent distri- bution	Number	Percent distri- bution	
Total Public Private	2,935,446 1,727,789 1,207,657	100.0 58.9 41.1	3,340,000 2,120,000 1,220,000	100.0 63.5 36.5	3,402,297 2,002,868 1,399,429	100.0 58.9 41.1	

Table 5.--PUBLIC AND PRIVATE COLLEGE ENROLLMENT IN THE UNITED STATES: 1960 CENSUS, 1959 CURRENT POPULATION SURVEY, AND 1959-60 OFFICE OF EDUCATION BIENNIAL SURVEY

Table 6.--COMPARISON OF CPS ENTRIES ON PUBLIC OR PRIVATE COLLEGE ENROLLMENT WITH OFFICE OF EDUCATION CLASSIFICATION OF COLLEGES ATTENDED BY CPS RESPONDENTS: UNWEIGHTED CPS SAMPLE, OCTOBER 1958

Category	Number	Percent
Number of college students in sample Name of college not given or incomplete Total number of cases with college reported Number with same classification in CPS and OE Number with different classification in CPS and OE OE-Public; CPS-Private OE-Private; CPS-Public Net number with different classification	2,062 143 1,919 1,778 141 26 115 89	- 100.0 92.7 7.3 1.4 6.0 4.6

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