Frequently Asked Questions

(OK, some got asked just once, but they were good questions)

Answers from Bob Barde, “the census guy”

Motivation

Q: Why is this census being done?
A. It is being done as part of a project that a number of us are involved in (including Pat Cunneen, Robin Kincade, Wayne Black, Judy Irving, and Karyn Noel among many others) to produce a written, comprehensive, comprehensible history of the club AND to archive our historical materials.

Q: Is someone planning to eventually profit of this data -- including writing a book that they personally market about the club?
A: I have proposed to write a book FOR the South End ABOUT the South End and its history. And I hope many South Enders will help me/us write it. If any money is to be made off the book (which I doubt), then the Club will make it. I have a perfectly fine day job at Cal from which I am soon to retire, so my only reason for doing this is my love of the club and the challenge of writing history. If you're interested in my qualifications for writing our history, they're in the c.v. on my webpage <http://staff.haas.berkeley.edu/barde/_public/>

Q: If you want to know about the history of the club, why don’t you just look around at the photos on the walls?
A. If all you need to know about this club can be obtained from the pictures on the walls, you won't want to take up reading at this stage in your life. But if you would like to learn about, or contribute to, the rich history of the South End Rowing Club, taking the Census would be a good start. And responding with contributions of material—everything from photos to oral histories-- for the club history will be helpful, too, and there will be a time for that.

Q: Isn’t this going to be used to tell us how to run the club, which groups we need to admit more of so the club can look just like San Francisco?
A. The Census makes no assumptions about what the Club should be in any aspect. Nowhere do we say that the club should reflect the city’s ethnic mix, income
distribution, age profile, sports preferences, etc. But as a social scientist I am curious about such things, and as a member of the South End I'd like to know more about the organization I belong to, and share that knowledge with other members. The census is not being done for the purpose of "how to run a swim club".

Q: Why didn’t members get a chance to vote on this?
A: The Board discussed the Census at length several times and approved doing this. Individual members get to vote individually on this—if you’re against it, vote against it by not taking it; if you think that this portrait of the club is worth having, vote for it by taking the Census.

Methodology

Q: How will my privacy be protected?
A: In this world, you have to trust somebody - your friends, the US Census taker, or the people who promise not to share YOUR data with anyone. There’s no reason to trust my promise of maintaining your confidentiality other than a) the Board has vetted me and the process pretty thoroughly, b) the Qualtrics survey software we use is set up so that I cannot capture your email or identity, c) I have taken National Institute of Health training in the Protection of Human Subjects, d) part of my day job is managing a lab where maintaining respondents' confidentiality is the very foundation of our business, and e) I could never again look my fellow South Enders in the eye if it were otherwise.

Q: I don’t like some of the questions, and some I don’t like the possible answers we are given to chose from. Isn’t it bad science?
A: It is unlikely that we could please everyone regarding the questions and the possible responses (see "Census, U.S."). In designing the census I worked with sociologist colleagues at Cal who are pros in this field. Perhaps we could have done better (as in allowing people to make more than one “race”), but this is what we have done.

Q: Will South Enders have access to the data?
A: NO to individual level data, and "probably YES" to aggregate/club-level data if the Board says so.
**Q:** Is this survey expected to be a true statistical sample of the club (i.e. a confidence level has been established that it reflects the true nature of the club)? And if this is true, why would you tell people it's OK to opt out from answering some of the questions? The US Census doesn't allow opt out so that the information will be as accurate as possible.

**A:** Reaching all the members IS a problem (the old "sample selection bias"). We will address this by a) announcing the Census in the newsletter that goes out in the mail, b) going to events such as Old Timers luncheons to work with folks who aren't on list serves or aren't computer-savvy, c) putting up a poster(s) at the club, and d) encouraging people to spread the word through their own networks. We will never get a 100% "sample" of any population; even the US Census misses people (lots of people). This does not invalidate the results, it just makes interpreting them more challenging. The more people who respond, the less the challenge.

**Q:** Wouldn't a qualitative Studs Terkel/Howard Zinn approach be better suited to this effort? Oral histories and interviews will provide a far better anecdotal image of who we are than a survey in which spotty results will be achieved at best.

**A:** The larger "club history" project will use "quantitative methods" (such as the Census) where we can and "qualitative methods" (oral histories and archival material) throughout.

**Q:** Is it possible that giving our ethnic/racial background to any agency will be opening us to charges of discrimination. Even though we don't discriminate, the government uses statistics to level charges.

**A:** We are always a potential target for private lawsuits (see “Clark, Diddo”). Would the census make us more open to lawsuits about diversity? I think that highly unlikely, and given our “open enrollment” policy it is hard to see how it actually would. Any person or agency wanting to sue us for racial discrimination could get the courts to order us to provide data on the racial/ethnic composition of our membership. The census would provide us with insurance, in the form of hard and easily accessible data, against any potential lawsuit based on diversity.

**Q:** Would seeing data on our racial/ethnic make-up actually provoke a lawsuit?

**A:** Only if the data showed that we really do discriminate in some way. I don’t think the data will show that, but IF they did, might they make us take a second look at ourselves?
Q: Why are the choices for gender so limited? How does it make any transgendered club members feel?

A: This follows the Federal Census; since 1790, the only two choices have been Male and Female.

Q: What does GFY stand for?

A: Good For You. And for all 240 people who have taken the Census as of 4/8/2012.

Undoubtedly this does not address all the questions or concerns that South Enders might have about the Census. I would be happy (well, "willing") to entertain questions. Just consider whether you’d like to do this off-line rather than burdening the listserve. Either way, this is an important matter and deserves a serious, civil discussion. My email is barde@haas.berkeley.edu