

Evaluation Report Covering Employment Status

FINAL REPORT

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Helping You Make Informed Decisions

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	iii
1. BACKGROUND	1
1.1 Motivation for the 2006 ACS Content Test.....	1
1.2 Previous Testing or Analysis for Employment Status	1
2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SELECTION CRITERIA.....	2
2.1 Research Question 1	2
2.2 Research Question 2	2
2.3 Research Question 3	2
2.4 Research Question 4	2
2.5 Research Question 5	2
2.6 Research Question 6	3
2.7 Research Question 7	3
2.8 Research Question 8	3
2.9 Research Question 9	3
2.10 Research Question 10	3
2.11 Research Question 11	3
3. METHODOLOGY	3
3.1 Data Collection Methods	5
3.2 Sample Design	5
3.3 Methodology Specific to the Research Questions	6
4. LIMITATIONS.....	9
4.1 General Content Test and Content Follow-Up Limitations.....	9
4.2 Limitations Specific to Employment Status	10
5. RESULTS	11
5.1 Response to the Content Test and Content Follow-Up.....	11
5.2 Research Question 1	11
5.3 Research Question 2	11
5.4 Research Question 3	12
5.5 Research Question 4	14
5.6 Research Question 5	14
5.7 Research Question 6	15
5.8 Research Question 7	15
5.9 Research Question 8	15
5.10 Research Question 9	15
5.11 Research Question 10	15
5.12 Research Question 11	16

6. SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS.....	16
References.....	18
Appendix A: Information Page.....	A-1
Appendix B: Cognitive Testing Report	B-1

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Content Test Response Rates.....	11
Table 2. Employment Status, Control vs. Test.....	12
Table 3. Employment Rate Statistics, Control vs. Test.....	12
Table 4. Employment Status Statistical Comparison, Control vs. Test.....	13
Table 5. Employment Status Statistical Comparison, Control vs. Test.....	13
Table 6. Labor Force Item Nonresponse Rates, Control vs. Test.....	16

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Test Objective

- In January through March of 2006, the American Community Survey (ACS) conducted the first test of new and modified content since the ACS reached full implementation levels of data collection. The results of that testing will determine the content for the 2008 ACS.
- The ACS uses the employment status concept (as officially defined by the Department of Labor) to classify the civilian working-age population (16 years and over) into three major categories: employed, unemployed, not in the labor force.
- Research comparing ACS data on employment status with corresponding data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) revealed substantial differences between their estimates. In relation to the CPS, the ACS underestimates employment and overestimates unemployment.
- Since the CPS is the “gold standard” for household estimates of employment status, the overall objective of the ACS 2006 Content Test for the employment status items was to bring the ACS estimates closer to the CPS estimates, without a significant decrease in data quality as reflected by an increase in response errors (bias), response variability, and nonresponse rates.

Methodology

- The estimates of employment and unemployment in the ACS are developed by recoding the pattern of responses to a battery of six questions. The 2006 Content Test focused on three of the questions in this battery: *at work last week*, *temporarily absent*, and *looking for work*.
- The test versions differed from the control versions in the following ways:
 - For the *at work last week* question, we separated the inquiry into two parts, in an effort to give respondents -- particularly people with irregular kinds of work arrangements -- two opportunities to grasp and respond to the correct intent of the question. We removed a supposedly confusing reference to work for profit; and we expressed the meaning of work in the question itself rather than parenthetically.
 - For the *temporarily absent* question, we revised the list of examples of reasons for work absences to include maternity/paternity leave, family or personal reasons, and bad weather.
 - For the *looking for work* question, we modified the expression ‘looking for work’ by adding the word ‘actively,’ emphasized in all capital letters, to provide respondents with a clearer idea of who should be counted as looking for work.

- The changes to the above three questions result in a different battery of employment-status questions for the test panel than for the control panel. The Content Test focused on comparing the employment status data derived from each of these batteries.
- The reinterview part of the Content Test (that is, the Content Follow-up Survey) attempted to measure differences in response bias between the test and control panels. To do so, it asked a series of probing questions about employment status taken from the more detailed employment status sequence of questions in the CPS.

Research Questions and Results

- **Question:** Do the changes to the *at work last week*, *temporarily absent* and *looking for work* questions (in other words, “does the test battery”) increase the estimate of employed people (in relation to the CPS estimate)?
Results: The percentage of people 16 years and older who were employed was higher for the test panel than for the control panel.
- **Question:** Does the test battery reduce the estimate of unemployed people (in relation to the CPS estimate)?
Results: The percentage of people 16 years and older who were unemployed was not statistically different between the control and test panels. However, the unemployment rate was lower for the test panel.
- **Question:** Does the test battery reduce response error (bias) in the individual categories of the employment status concept?
Results: The net difference rates were significantly lower in the test panel for the categories, ‘employed’ and ‘not in labor force.’

Summary

The selection criteria for the battery of test questions were based on the results for the three major categories of the employment status concept. The results showed that the test questions produced a higher estimate of employed people. While the test questions did not produce a lower estimate of unemployed people, the overall unemployment rate was lower for the test panel. The unemployment rate is the more useful measure because it excludes people who are not in the labor force. Finally, the net difference rate, a measure of response error, for the estimates of ‘employed’ and ‘not in the labor force’ was lower in the test panel and the rate for ‘unemployed’ was not significantly different between the control and test panels. Our findings indicate that, empirically, the test version of the questions performed better than the existing ACS questions.

However, while the test questions may have produced more favorable estimates than the control questions, there remains room for improvement. The comparison of the test and the Control Follow-up results show that respondents are answering the employment series of questions inconsistently. The structure and wording of these questions should be revisited in future ACS content tests.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Motivation for the 2006 ACS Content Test

In January through March of 2006, the American Community Survey (ACS) conducted the first test of new and modified content since the ACS reached full implementation levels of data collection. The results of that testing will determine the content for the 2008 ACS. The year 2008 marks the first year of a three-year aggregated data product that includes data from the same year as the 2010 decennial census (2008 - 2010). Similarly, 2008 is the midpoint year for the first five-year data product that includes data from 2010 (2006-2010). Given the significance of the year 2008, the ACS committed to a research program during 2006 that will result in final content determination in time for the 2008 ACS. This research is the 2006 ACS Content Test.

Through the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Interagency Committee on the ACS, the Census Bureau included subject matter experts and key data users from other federal agencies in identifying questions for inclusion in the Content Test. In general the Content Test evaluated alternatives for questions which showed some indication of a problem, for example, high missing data rates, estimates which differed systematically from other sources of the same information, or high simple response variance as measured in the Census 2000 Content Reinterview survey. In addition, the Content Test also included testing of three new topics proposed by other federal agencies for inclusion in the ACS.

To meet the primary objective of the 2006 ACS Content Test, analysts evaluated changes to question wording, response categories, instructions, or examples relative to the current version of the questions. Additionally, the Content Test design reflected two secondary objectives. One of the secondary objectives addressed form design alternatives for the basic demographic section of the form. The second addressed the content of the questionnaire mailing package. Results indicated no interaction between either of the two secondary objectives and the first objective addressing changes made to questions. Thus, this report will only address testing specific to the first objective - testing of alternative questions, response categories, etc. Specifically, this report discusses Employment Status.

1.2 Previous Testing or Analysis for Employment Status

Analysis of employment data from the ACS reveals that employment levels are underestimated and unemployment levels are overestimated relative to benchmark data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) or from the Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS) program at the Bureau of Labor Statistics. The current ACS uses the same questions as were used for Census 2000. Like the ACS, Census 2000 also underestimated employment and overestimated unemployment. Extensive analysis of the nature and probable causes of the CPS to Census 2000 differences revealed areas where changes to the questions or approach might reduce the gaps. The results of the exact-match study of the CPS to Census 2000 were useful in guiding the revision of the Content Test question wording changes.

Research into the improvement of the ACS battery of questions also included expert review of the existing questions by survey methodologists from the Census Bureau, Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the Justice Department; ACS interviewer debriefings; behavior coding of CATI interviews; and 40 cognitive interviews.

Three of the ACS employment status questions were modified for the test panel. The *at work last week* and *temporarily absent* questions are key components in the measurement of employed people and people who are not in the labor force, while the *looking for work* question is a component in the measurement of unemployed people. The test versions of these ACS questions were designed to improve the measurement of employment status by addressing several deficiencies that the research mentioned above suggested are present in the current question wording.

2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SELECTION CRITERIA

2.1 Research Question 1

Do the changes to the *at work last week*, *temporarily absent*, and *looking for work* questions (“the test battery”) increase the estimate of employed people (in relation to the CPS estimate)?
Selection criteria: The estimate of employment for the test panel is higher than the estimate of employment for the control panel.

2.2 Research Question 2

Does the test battery reduce the estimate of unemployed people (in relation to the CPS estimate)?
Selection criterion: The estimate of unemployment for the test panel is lower than the estimate of unemployment for the control panel.

2.3 Research Question 3

Does the test battery reduce response error (bias) in the individual categories of the employment status estimates? **Selection criterion:** The net difference rates for the employment status components are lower in the test panel than the control panel.

2.4 Research Question 4

Does the test battery reduce (or at least not increase) response variability in the employment status estimates? **Selection criterion:** Only examined as supporting data for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

2.5 Research Question 5

Do the changes to the *at work last week* question impact the distribution of responses to that question, producing a balance between the ‘employed, at work’ and the ‘employed, not at work’ categories that is closer to the CPS balance than in the control version? **Selection criterion:** Only examined as supporting data for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

2.6 Research Question 6

Do the changes to the *temporarily absent* question impact the distribution of responses to that question by increasing the proportion of nonworkers who respond ‘yes’ to the question? **Selection criterion:** Only examined as supporting data for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

2.7 Research Question 7

Do the changes to the *looking for work* questions impact the distribution of responses to that question by increasing the proportion who respond ‘no’ to the question? **Selection criterion:** Only examined as supporting data for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

2.8 Research Question 8

Do the changes to the *at work last week* question adversely impact item nonresponse? **Selection criterion:** Only examined as supporting data for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

2.9 Research Question 9

Do the changes to the *temporarily absent* question adversely impact item nonresponse? **Selection criterion:** Only examined as supporting data for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

2.10 Research Question 10

Do the changes to the *looking for work* questions adversely impact item nonresponse? **Selection criterion:** Only examined as supporting data for Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

2.11 Research Question 11

Does the distribution of responses and the item nonresponse rate for the *at work last week* question adversely impact the universe for the *journey to work* questions? (For informational purposes only.)

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection Methods

3.1.1 The 2006 ACS Content Test data collection

The 2006 ACS Content Test consisted of a national sample of approximately 62,900 residential addresses in the contiguous United States. (The sample universe did not include Puerto Rico, Alaska and Hawaii). To meet the primary test objective of evaluating question wording changes, approximately half of the sample addresses were assigned to a test group (31,450) and the other half to a control group (31,450). For the topics already covered in the ACS, the test group included the proposed alternative versions of the questions, and the control group included the current version of the questions as asked on the ACS. Both the test and control questionnaires included three new topics not currently on the ACS. Both test and control included the three new topics to keep context and questionnaire length consistent between the two versions.

The ACS Content Test used a similar data collection methodology as the current ACS, though cost and time constraints resulted in some deviations. Initially, the ACS collects data by mail from sampled households, following a mailing strategy geared at maximizing mail response (i.e., a pre-notice letter, an initial questionnaire packet, a reminder postcard, and a replacement questionnaire packet). The Content Test implemented the same methodology, mailing each piece on the same dates as the corresponding panel in the ACS. However, the Content Test did not provide a toll-free number on the printed questionnaires for respondents to call if they had questions, as the ACS does. The decision to exclude this service in the Content Test primarily reflects resource issues in developing the materials needed to train and implement the operation for a one-time test. However, excluding this telephone assistance allows us to collect data that reflects the respondent's interpretation and response without the aid of a trained Census Bureau interviewer.

The ACS follows-up with mail nonrespondents first by Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) if a phone number is available, or by Computer Assisted Personal-visit Interviewing (CAPI) if the unit cannot be reached by mail or phone. For cost purposes, the ACS subsamples the mail and telephone nonrespondents for CAPI interviewing. In comparison, the Content Test went directly to CAPI data collection for mail nonrespondents, dropping the CATI data collection phase in an effort to address competing time and resource constraints for the field data collection staff. While skipping the CATI phase changes the data collection methods as compared to the ACS, eliminating CATI allowed us to meet the field data collection constraints while also maintaining the entire mail nonrespondent universe for possible CAPI follow-up. Using CATI alone for follow-up would have excluded households for whom we do not have a phone number.

The ACS also implements an edit procedure on returned mail questionnaires, identifying units for follow-up who provided incomplete information on the form, or who reported more than five people living at the address. (The ACS questionnaire only has space to collect data for five people.) This is called the Failed Edit Follow Up operation (FEFU). The ACS calls all households identified as part of the FEFU edit to collect the remaining information via a CATI operation. The Content Test excluded this follow-up operation in favor of a content reinterview, called the Content Follow-Up (CFU). The CFU also contacts households via CATI but the CFU serves as a method to measure response error, providing critical evaluative information. The

CFU operation included all households who responded by mail or CAPI and for whom we had a phone number. More information about the CFU operation follows below.

The Content Test mailed questionnaires to sampled households around December 28, 2005, coinciding with the mailing for the ACS January 2006 panel. The Content Test used an English-only mail form but the automated instruments (both CAPI and CFU) included both English and Spanish translations. Beginning February 2006, a sample of households that did not respond by mail was visited by Census Bureau field representatives in attempt to collect the data. The CAPI operations ended March 2, 2006.

3.1.2 Content Follow-Up data collection

The CFU reinterview, conducted by the Census Bureau's three telephone centers, provided a method for measuring response error. About two weeks after receiving the returned questionnaire or completed CAPI interview, the responding unit entered the CFU operation. Telephone staff completed the CFU interviews between January 17 and March 17, 2006. At the first contact with a household, interviewers asked to speak with the original respondent. If that person was not available, interviewers scheduled a callback at a time when the household member was expected to be home. If at the second contact we could not reach the original respondent, interviewers completed the interview with another adult household member.

The CFU reinterview did not replicate the full ACS interview. Rather, the CFU used the roster and basic demographic information from the original interview and only asked questions specific to the analytical needs of the Content Test. Reinterview questions were of two general formats: the same question as asked in the original interview (in some cases, modified slightly for a CATI interview), or a different set of questions providing more detail than the question(s) asked in the original interview for the same topic. For topics in which the CFU asked the same question as the original interview, the CFU asked the test or control version of the question based on the original treatment. For these cases, the goal was to measure the reliability of the answers – how often we obtained the same answer in the CFU as we did in the original mail or CAPI data collection. For topics using a different question or set of questions than the original interview, we asked the same detailed series of questions regardless of the original treatment condition. Generally, these questions were more numerous than what we could ask in the ACS. In some cases the questions came from another existing survey, for example, for labor force, we asked the labor force questions from the Current Population Survey questions. In other cases the CFU asked additional probing questions based on prior testing results, such as for health insurance. For these topics, the goal was to measure how close the original answers were to the more detailed CFU answers.

3.2 Sample Design

The sample design for the ACS Content Test consisted of a multi-stage design, with the first stage following the Census 2000 Supplementary Survey (C2SS) design for the selection of

Primary Selection Units (PSUs) defined as counties or groups of counties. The first stage selection of PSUs resulted in 413 PSUs or approximately 900 counties being selected.

Within sampled PSUs, households were stratified into high and low response strata based on tract-level mail response rates to the Census 2000 long form and a stratified systematic sample of households was selected. The strata were defined such that the high response stratum contained 75 percent of the housing units that reside in tracts with the highest mail response rate. The balance of the tracts was assigned to the low response stratum. To achieve similar expected number of mail returns for the high and low response strata, 55 percent of the sample was allocated to the low response strata and 45 percent to the high response strata.

A two-stage sampling technique was used to help contain field costs for CAPI data collection. The initial sample of PSUs was sorted by percentage of foreign-born population since the majority of that target population responds via CAPI. At least one item undergoing testing in the content test required an adequate sample of this population. The 20 PSUs with the highest percentage of foreign-born population were included with certainty and the remaining PSUs were sampled at a rate of 1 in 3. For the second stage, mail nonresponding households were sampled at a rate of 1 in 2 within the top 20 PSUs and at a sampling rate of 2 in 3 within the remaining PSUs. The final design designated 151 PSUs be included in the CAPI workload.

In the majority of PSUs, we assigned cases to both the control and test groups. To maintain field data collection costs and efficiencies, PSUs with an expected CAPI workload of less than 10 sampled addresses had all of their work assigned to only one treatment (either control or test). The PSUs were allocated to the two groups such that the aggregated PSU characteristics between the two groups are similar for employment, foreign born, high school graduates, disabled, poverty status, tenure, and Hispanic origin. For more information on the 2006 ACS Content Test sample design, see Asiala (2006).

There was no sampling for CFU. A CFU interview was attempted for all responding households to the Content Test for which we had a phone number.

3.3 Methodology Specific to the Research Questions

The figure below presents a side-by-side comparison of the existing and test questions from the self-administered mail-out questionnaire. The existing ACS question wording was used in the control panel of the Content Test (shown on the left). The research referenced in section 1.2 resulted in changes to the *at work last week*, *temporarily absent*, and *looking for work* questions for the test panel (shown on the right).

The purpose of the *at work last week* question is to ascertain whether a person performed any work at all for pay or profit during the reference period. For the *at work last week* question, the following concerns were addressed:

- The phrase “either pay or profit” at the end of the question leads to confusion about the nature of the work being asked about.

- The question may incorrectly suggest to people who work only a few hours or who do not have a “regular” job, such as contingent, temporary, marginal, or casual workers, or people who are self-employed, that only formal, employer-employee, types of work arrangements are being considered.
- The emphasis on ‘ANY work’ may incorrectly suggest to people who have regular jobs that the question is only asking about work outside of their normal jobs.
- The lengthy italicized statement after the question may be more confusing than enlightening.
- The intent of the question may be difficult for retired people to grasp, particularly if they are doing a minimal amount of part-time work.

The test version of the *at work last week* question was split into two parts. In Part (a) the word ‘job’ was added to identify people with regular jobs, while the parenthetical “(or business)” was intended to capture business owners. The phrase “either for pay or profit” in the existing ACS question was removed and the lengthy italicized statement that follows was incorporated into part (b) of the question. The intent of part (b) was to capture people who worked only a few hours or who did not have “regular” jobs, such as contingent, marginal, temporary, or casual workers, or people who are self-employed.

Control Panel:

Test Panel:

<p>28 LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for either pay or profit? Mark (X) the "Yes" box even if the person worked only 1 hour, or helped without pay in a family business or farm for 15 hours or more, or was on active duty in the Armed Forces.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No → SKIP to question 34</p>	<p>28 a. LAST WEEK, did this person work for pay at a job (or business)?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes → SKIP to question 29 <input type="checkbox"/> No – Did not work (or retired)</p> <p>b. LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for pay, even for as little as one hour?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No → SKIP to question 34a</p>
<p>34 a. LAST WEEK, was this person on layoff from a job?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes → SKIP to question 34c <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>b. LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, labor dispute, etc. → SKIP to question 37 <input type="checkbox"/> No → SKIP to question 35</p> <p>c. Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes → SKIP to question 36 <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>	<p>34 a. LAST WEEK, was this person on layoff from a job?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes → SKIP to question 34c <input type="checkbox"/> No</p> <p>b. LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave, other family/personal reasons, bad weather, etc. → SKIP to question 37 <input type="checkbox"/> No → SKIP to question 35</p> <p>c. Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes → SKIP to question 36 <input type="checkbox"/> No</p>
<p>35 Has this person been looking for work during the last 4 weeks?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No → SKIP to question 37</p>	<p>35 During the LAST 4 WEEKS, has this person been ACTIVELY looking for work?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No → SKIP to question 37</p>
<p>36 LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work if recalled?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, could have gone to work <input type="checkbox"/> No, because of own temporary illness <input type="checkbox"/> No, because of all other reasons (in school, etc.)</p>	<p>36 LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work if recalled?</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Yes, could have gone to work <input type="checkbox"/> No, because of own temporary illness <input type="checkbox"/> No, because of all other reasons (in school, etc.)</p>

The purpose of the *temporarily absent* question is to obtain a measure of individuals who have a job that they did not work at last week. For the *temporarily absent* question the following concerns were addressed:

- The question does not make clear that people who are on maternity or paternity leave are considered to be temporarily absent from their jobs.
- People may mistakenly think that they should answer ‘yes’ only if they are absent for one of the reasons explicitly enumerated in the list of examples.
- The list of examples does not explicitly contain reasons, such as bad weather, that an individual could be absent from work because the job itself is temporarily unavailable.
- Question wording for this item varies among the modes of ACS data collection (self-administered paper form, CATI, and CAPI).

The test version of the *temporarily absent* question was informed, in part, by cognitive testing that found the existing question did not make clear who should be considered temporarily absent from their jobs. It was found that people on maternity or paternity leave, in particular, may not have considered themselves to fit this classification. The test version modified the existing wording to include maternity leave, other family/personal reasons, and bad weather to the list of examples.

The purpose of the *looking for work* question is to determine whether an individual is unemployed by ascertaining whether that individual used any active method to look for work during the reference period of the last four weeks. People who are actively seeking work constitute the major component of the unemployed population. In the CPS, a screener question determines whether a person has been doing anything to find work during the reference period; a followup question asks specifically about all the things the person has done to find work. Job search activities are categorized as ‘active’ or ‘passive’ in the CPS question and only those respondents who are actively looking for work (e.g., placed or answered job advertisements) are classified as ‘unemployed.’ Passive job searchers (e.g., looked at want ads) are classified as ‘not in the labor force.’

The ACS, on the contrary, does not have a followup question about job search activities. As worded, the current ACS *looking for work* question does not effectively communicate the notion of active versus passive job searching. For the *looking for work* question the following concerns were addressed:

- There is no distinction between active versus passive job search methods, which could lead to individuals who are not in the labor force being misclassified as unemployed.
- The question may be mistakenly answered in the affirmative by contingent, temporary, marginal, or casual workers who misclassify themselves as not at work in the *at work last week* question and who typically look for new work as an ongoing part of their type of job.

The test version of the question shown in the figure emphasizes the word ‘actively,’ by putting it in all capital letters, as a means of communicating more clearly, without a followup question, the distinction in job-searching activities.

The CFU used the full CPS battery of employment questions. These questions are intended to measure bias and response variance in the control and test questions.

In analyzing the results of the content test, we compared the control and test questions according to nonresponse rates and response distributions. We compared net difference rates and simple response variances. For the analysis, we used SAS datasets containing all the merged observations from the control, test, and CFU surveys for each individual in the study.

4. LIMITATIONS

4.1 General Content Test and Content Follow Up Limitations

As noted in section 3.1, Data Collection Methods, the Content Test maintained the same basic mail data collection methodology as the ACS, but differed in the mail nonresponse follow-up operations. In general the deviations did not impact the validity of the results, and in many cases increased the effectiveness of the testing. However, some aspects of the Content Test implementation should be considered in evaluating the data.

- As noted, the Content Test did not include CATI data collection in order to meet field data collection constraints. While the design of the Content Test allowed all sampled housing units an opportunity to participate even without CATI, questions administered differently over the phone did not get the benefit of a full CATI operation (though some of the CAPI interviews actually do occur by phone). However, since only ten percent of ACS data is collected by CATI and CATI interviewers are trained to help respondents understand question intent and response categories, overall ACS data quality should not suffer when questions are implemented using CATI.
- Though the test design required that field interviewers work only control or only test cases, interviewers in both conditions worked regular ACS production interviews at the same time they completed the Content Test cases. By design the control instrument very closely replicated the ACS production instrument, only differing in the addition of the three newly proposed topics. As a result, interviewers in the test condition had to learn and use two very different instruments, while control interviewers used basically the same instrument between their Content Test cases and ACS production. Thus, test interviewers experienced more challenges in completing their overall caseload. Interviewer debriefing suggested that test interviewers had some difficulty dealing with the two very different instruments simultaneously which may have some impact on the administration of the test version.
- On the first day of CFU interviewing, we discovered a usability problem with the CFU instrument. Left unaddressed, the usability problem could have potentially impacted comparisons between the Content Test and CFU responses when looking specifically at gross difference rate or simple response variance calculations. However, we immediately implemented two steps to mitigate any data problems—a special instruction sheet to remind interviewers about how to avoid the potential problem and a procedure to report any problems to headquarters for repair. Interviewers followed the instructions and reported 90 cases to us. Post-collection processing corrected all reported errors, though it is possible that some cases went unreported.
- The CFU universe did not include non-telephone households and vacant housing units. This only affects those question topics included in the CFU study that are related to the non-telephone household or vacant universes.

4.2 Limitations Specific to Employment Status

Because the CPS is considered the “gold standard” for labor force estimates, the overall objective of the Content Test was to bring the ACS estimates for the employment status items closer to the CPS estimates. Several factors, in addition to the design and wording of the set of six questions used in the ACS may be involved in the differences in the estimates.

The CPS is conducted using telephone and personal visits by highly trained interviewers while the ACS is conducted by mail, telephone, and personal visit interviews; about half of the responses are by mail.

The CPS also asks a more detailed and extensive series of questions (16 questions versus 6 questions) than the ACS does about labor force participation in order to satisfy completely and objectively the measurement requirements of the official definition of unemployment. Because the CPS asks more detailed questions, it provides a more specific measure of the unemployment rate than the ACS. The measurement of ‘unemployed’ in the ACS relies more on the interpretation of broader concepts by the respondent.

One limitation of the Content Test data is related to the timing of the mail-out operation. The self-administered mail forms were sent out December 27, at a time when there are more temporary workers in the labor force. It is also a time when respondents may have been temporarily absent from regular jobs because of holiday vacations.

Finally, the Content Test asked about work done “last week.” Since the responding units entered the CFU operation about two weeks after the receipt of their questionnaires, this time period reference was different from the original interview (either control or test) to the CFU. In order to reconcile this discrepancy, an additional question was added to the CFU battery that referred respondents back to the week prior to the first interview. We compared their employment status reported in the original interview to the recalled status reported in the CFU. Our analysis found some change in employment status between interviews, however, the difference was not large enough nor consistent enough to indicate that the time period reference affected our results.

5. RESULTS

5.1 Response to the Content Test and Content Follow-Up

Control and test treatments groups obtained equivalent response rates overall, and for each mode of collection. Similarly, response to the Content Test is comparable to response for the production ACS.

The table below gives the weighted response rates for each data collection operation and a test of differences between the control and test groups. The overall response rate reflects the final response to the initial data collection (mail and CAPI only). There were no significant differences between response rates for the control and test groups. Note that the denominator for each calculation included only eligible cases for each mode.

Table 1. Content Test Response Rates, Control vs. Test

Response Rate	Total (%)	Control (%)	Test (%)	Difference (%)	Margin of Error (%)	Significant
Overall response rate	95.7	95.8	95.5	-0.3	± 0.9	No
Mail response rate	51.3	51.5	51.2	-0.3	± 2.2	No
CAPI response rate	92.4	92.6	92.1	-0.4	± 1.7	No
CFU response rate	76.2	75.9	76.4	0.5	± 1.6	No

5.2 Do the changes to the *at work last week, temporarily absent, and looking for work* questions (in other words, “does the test battery”) increase the estimate of employed people (in relation to the CPS estimate)?

Sixty-six percent of people 16 years and older were employed in the test panel compared with 63 percent in the control panel (Table 2). ‘Employed’ includes the categories of ‘employed, at work’ and ‘employed, not at work.’

One reason for asking the two-part question was to reduce the likelihood of employed people being misclassified as not working if they were confused by the single-item question format. The distribution of employment status reflects a shift of people from the ‘not in labor force’ classification to ‘employed;’ 31 percent of the population were not in the labor force in the test panel compared with 33 percent of the control panel.

A second reason for the two-part format was to increase the likelihood of capturing marginal workers or those who work only a minimal number of hours. Analysis of the two-part test question found that 42 percent of the respondents who answered ‘no’ to part (a) and ‘yes’ to part (b) of the question reported working 20 hours or less.

Table 2: Employment Status, Control Vs. Test

Employment Status	Control (%)	Test (%)	Difference (%)	Margin of Error (%)	Significant
Employed	62.8	65.7	2.9	± 1.4	Yes
Unemployed	4.1	3.6	-0.5	± 0.5	No
Not in labor force	33.1	30.7	-2.4	± 1.4	Yes

$\chi^2 = 12.10$ with 2 degrees of freedom, significant at 0.0024 level.

5.3 Does the test battery reduce the estimate of unemployed people (in relation to the CPS estimate)?

The percentage of people 16 years and older who were unemployed was not statistically lower at the national level between the control and test version of the question (Table 2). There was also

no significant change between the panels at the high response stratum or low response stratum levels (see Sample Design, section 3.2).

The addition of the word ‘ACTIVELY’ to the *looking for work* question does not appear to be enough to make a distinction between active and passive job-seekers. However, the nonresponse rates for *looking for work* were not statistically different and the percent unemployed was nominally, although not statistically, lower in the test panel so the modified question does not seem to have posed any difficulty for the respondents.

Table 3: Employment Rate Statistics, Control Vs. Test

Employment Status	Control (%)	Test (%)	Difference (%)	Margin of Error (%)	Significant
Labor Force Participation Rate (In LF/Total)	66.9	69.3	2.9	± 1.4	Yes
Employment/Population Ratio (Emp/Total)	62.8	65.7	2.4	± 1.4	Yes
Unemployment Rate (Unemp / In LF)	6.1	5.2	-0.9	± 0.8	Yes

Additionally, Table 3 shows that the unemployment rate, a derived measure which excludes people not in the labor force and active-duty military personnel, was lower at the national level for the test panel than the control (5.2 percent versus 6.1 percent, respectively).

5.4 Does the test battery reduce response error (bias) in the individual categories of the employment status concept?

The net difference rate is used when we assume the CFU provides a better measure than the control or test versions of a question. In that case, differences give an estimate of the systematic response error, or bias, for a given response category. The smaller the net difference rate, the less biased the question item. Table 4 shows that for the full six categories of employment status, the net difference rate was significantly lower in the test panel for those ‘employed at work’ (-0.9 percent versus -2.5 percent) and ‘not in labor force’ (0.8 percent versus 1.8 percent) at the national level. The net difference rates were not higher in the test panel for any values of employment status overall.

Table 4: Employment Status Statistical Comparison, Control Vs. Test

Employment Status	Net Difference Rate					Simple Response Variance				
	Control vs CFU (%)	Test vs CFU (%)	Diff (%)	Margin of Error (%)	Signif	Control vs CFU (%)	Test vs CFU (%)	Diff (%)	Margin of Error (%)	Signif
Emp, at work	-2.5	-0.9	-1.6	0.8	Yes	6.2	5.3	-0.9	0.6	Yes
Emp, not at work	0.4	0.0	-0.4	0.5	No	1.4	1.3	-0.2	0.3	No
Unemployed	0.3	0.1	-0.2	0.5	No	2.1	2.0	-0.2	0.3	No
AF, at work	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	No	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	No
AF, not at work	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	No	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	No
Not in labor force	1.8	0.8	-1.0	0.8	Yes	4.9	4.5	-0.5	0.6	No

The net difference rates for the three major categories of the employment status concept were significantly lower for ‘employed’ and ‘not in labor force’ and not statistically different for ‘unemployed’ (Table 5). Because the net difference rates for ‘employed’ were negative in both the control and test panels, we can see that more people in the CFU were classified as ‘employed’ than had been in their original control and test interviews. These results suggest that, while the test questions are moving the employment estimates in the right direction, we are still underestimating employment compared to the results from the CFU, which used the CPS battery of questions to establish employment status.

Table 5: Employment Status Statistical Comparison, Control Vs. Test

Employment Status	Net Difference Rate					Simple Response Variance				
	Control vs CFU (%)	Test vs CFU (%)	Diff (%)	Margin of Error (%)	Signif	Control vs CFU (%)	Test vs CFU (%)	Diff (%)	Margin of Error (%)	Signif
Employed	-2.1	-0.9	-1.2	0.7	Yes	4.9	4.4	-0.5	0.6	No
Unemployed	0.3	0.1	-0.2	0.5	No	2.1	2.0	-0.2	0.3	No
Not in labor force	1.8	0.8	-1.0	0.8	Yes	4.9	4.5	-0.5	0.6	No

5.5 Does the test battery reduce (or at least not increase) response variability in the employment status estimates?

The simple response variance measures how much the responses vary between control or test and the CFU for the given response category. It is used when the CFU re-asks the original question (control question for control households and test question for test households), and it provides a measure of the reliability or consistency of a question item. The smaller the simple response variance, the better the reliability.

In this case, there were no significant differences in the simple response variances for any of the employment status categories between the control and test panels. However, the simple response variances show that there was considerable inconsistency between the control and test panels and the CFU. The majority of these inconsistencies was in the categories ‘employed, at work’ and ‘not in labor force.’

Cases where employment status changed from ‘not in the labor force’ in the control and test panel to ‘employed, at work’—for the same time period—in the CFU were particularly troubling and were investigated further. There were about half as many incidents of this discrepancy in the test panel than in the control. Since about 80 percent of returns were by mail, and respondents did not have the benefit of interviewer assistance when completing the self-reported forms, this part of the analysis focused on the mail cases only.

The two-part question did not appear to make a difference for respondents who reported they owned a business or farm; approximately the same number changed employment status in the followup reinterview between the control and test panel (54 versus 48 cases).

For those respondents who were not business owners, however, the difference was more dramatic. In the control panel, 416 respondents answered ‘no’ to the *at work last week* question on the paper form and ‘yes’ to the *at work last week* question in the reinterview, effectively moving them from ‘not in labor force’ to ‘employed, at work’ between interviews. In the test panel, only 117 respondents changed status between the self-reported paper form and reinterview. This is more evidence that the second part of the question was effective at capturing

marginal workers who may have otherwise not considered themselves to have worked last week, particularly those who do not have regular jobs or who work minimal hours.

5.6 Do the changes to the *at work last week* question impact the distribution of responses to that question, producing a balance between the ‘at work’ and the ‘with a job but not at work’ categories that is closer to the CPS balance than in the control version?

Because of the small number of people in the ‘employed, but not at work’ category, we cannot address this question with the content test. Also, because of the changes to the *at work last week* question, the populations of people eligible to answer that question in the control and test may not be comparable.

5.7 Do the changes to the *temporarily absent* question impact the distribution of responses to that question by increasing the proportion of nonworkers who respond ‘yes’ to the question?

The percentage of the population 16 years and older who were ‘employed, not at work’ was lower in the test panel than in the control (1.6 percent versus 2.0 percent). In the control panel, 6.2 percent of respondents answered ‘yes’ to the *temporarily absent* question, compared with 5.8 percent of the test panel respondents.

However, it is problematic to view the results of this question in isolation because the skip patterns of the employment series created different populations between the control and test panels. The test panel had the additional *at work last week* question that may have moved people who normally would have had to answer the *temporarily absent* question, by responding ‘no’ to the work question, out of universe.

5.8 Do the changes to the *looking for work* questions impact the distribution of responses to that question by increasing the proportion who respond ‘no’ to the question?

There is no difference in the proportion of the respondents in the control and test panels who answered ‘no’ to the *looking for work* question. However, as previously stated, the addition of the word ‘actively’ does not seem to pose any problem for respondents as the nonresponse rates were unaffected for this question. The item nonresponse rate measures the proportion of housing unit or person responses with missing data.

5.9 Do the changes to the *at work last week* question adversely impact item nonresponse?

There was no significant difference between the nonresponse rates for the *at work last week* questions in the control and test panels (Table 6).

5.10 Do the changes to the *temporarily absent* question adversely impact item nonresponse?

Table 6 shows the nonresponse rate for the *temporarily absent* question was lower in the test panel (3.4 percent) than in the control panel (4.1 percent). The *temporarily absent* question is one of the components used to determine unemployment.

5.11 Do the changes to the *looking for work* questions adversely impact item nonresponse?

There was no significant difference between the nonresponse rates for the *looking for work* questions in the control and test panels (Table 6).

Table 6: Labor Force Item Nonresponse Rates, Control Vs. Test

Questionnaire Item	Control (%)	Test (%)	Difference (%)	Margin of Error (%)	Significant
Worked Last Week	5.3	5.5	0.2	± 0.6	No
Temporarily Absent	4.1	3.4	-0.7	± 0.5	Yes
Looking for Work	2.2	2.2	-0.1	± 0.9	No
On Layoff	6.7	4.5	-2.2	± 0.7	Yes
Recall	7.1	6.8	-0.2	± 3.5	No
Available to Work	8.7	9.5	0.8	± 3.7	No
Employment Status Recode	10.0	8.6	-1.4	± 0.7	Yes

5.12 Does the distribution of responses and the item nonresponse rate for the *at work last week* question adversely impact the universe for the *journey to work* questions?

The impact of the changes to the *at work last week* question on the journey to work series was measured by comparing response rates for the first question in the series. There was no significant difference in the response rates for the journey to work series of questions.

6. SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The selection criteria for the battery of test questions were based on the results for the three major categories of the employment status concept. The results showed that the test questions did, in fact, produce a higher estimate of employed people. While the test questions did not produce a lower estimate of unemployed people, the overall unemployment rate was lower for the test panel. The unemployment rate is the more meaningful measure because it excludes

people who are not in the labor force. Finally, the net difference rate, our measure of response error, for the estimates of ‘employed’ and ‘not in the labor force’ was lower in the test panel and the rate for ‘unemployed’ was not significantly different between the control and test panels. Our findings indicate that, empirically, the test version of the questions performed better than the existing ACS questions.

The minimum criteria for selecting the test version were (1) estimates of unemployment were lower in the test version and estimates of employed are the same or higher in the test version and (2) the net difference rate for employment status was the same or lower in the test panel. The minimum criteria for selecting the test version were met.

However, while the test questions may have produced more favorable estimates than the control questions, there remains room for improvement. The comparison of the test and the CFU results show that respondents are answering the employment series of questions inconsistently. The structure and wording of these questions should be revisited in future ACS content tests.

We also identified some topics for further research based on our review of paper questionnaires at the National Processing Center in Jeffersonville, IN. Elderly respondents seemed to have more trouble with skip patterns than younger respondents and were more likely to leave the labor force series blank. They also seemed eager to find a way to express that they are retired, either by writing the word “retired” somewhere on the form or underlining or circling the word “retired” in Question 28. Skip patterns were a major problem on the paper form. Employed people answered questions they should have skipped (the unemployment and not in labor force questions) and unemployed people did not answer the questions they should have.

References

Asiala M. and Navarro A. (2006). "Experimental Design for the 2006 American Community Survey Content Test," American Statistical Association 2006 Proceedings of the Section on Survey Research Methods [CD-ROM].

Census 2000 Evaluation Study B.7: Accuracy of Data for Employment Status as Measured by the CPS-Census 2000 Match

Census 2000 Auxiliary Evaluation: Comparing Employment, Income, and Poverty: Census 2000 and Current Population Survey

Appendix A: Information Page

CONTENT TEST INFORMATION PAGE For EMPLOYMENT STATUS QUESTIONS (CFU required)

Question Wording:

Current ACS Wording	Content Test Wording
<p>LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for either pay or profit? Mark (X) the “Yes” box even if the person worked only 1 hour, or helped without pay in a family business or farm for 15 hours or more, or was on active duty in the Armed Forces.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No → <i>SKIP to question 29</i> <p>-----</p> <p>b. LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, labor dispute, etc. → <i>SKIP to question 32</i> <input type="radio"/> No → <i>SKIP to question 30</i> <p>-----</p> <p>Has this person been looking for work during the last 4 weeks?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No → <i>SKIP to question 32</i> 	<p>a. LAST WEEK, did this person work for pay at a job (or business)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes → <i>SKIP to question 24</i> <input type="radio"/> No – Did not work (or retired) <p>b. LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for pay, even for as little as one hour?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No → <i>SKIP to question 29</i> <hr/> <p>b. LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave, other family/personal reasons, bad weather, etc. → <i>SKIP to question 32</i> <input type="radio"/> No → <i>SKIP to question 30</i> <p>-----</p> <p>During the LAST 4 WEEKS, has this person been ACTIVELY looking for work?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="radio"/> Yes <input type="radio"/> No → <i>SKIP to question 32</i>

Research Questions & Evaluation Measures:

No.	Research Questions	Evaluation Measures
1.	Do the changes to the ‘at work last week’, ‘temporarily absent’ and ‘looking for work’ questions reduce the estimates of unemployed (making it closer to a CPS estimate)?	Compare the estimates of unemployed between the test and control versions
2.	Do the changes to the ‘at work last week’, ‘temporarily absent’ and ‘looking for work’ questions increase the estimates of employed (making it closer to a CPS estimate)?	Compare the estimates of employed between the test and control versions
3.	Do the changes to the ‘at work last week’, ‘temporarily absent’ and ‘looking for work’ questions reduce response error (bias) in the employment status estimates?	Compare net difference rates between the test and control for employed and unemployed Review cross-classifications of the distributions of test vs. re-interview values
4.	Do the changes to the 'at work last week' question impact the distribution of responses to that question, producing a balance between the “at work” and the “with a job but not at work” categories that is closer to the CPS balance than in the control version?	Compare the distributions between the test and control versions
5.	Do the changes to the 'temporarily absent' question impact the distribution of responses to that question by increasing the proportion of nonworkers who respond “yes” to the question?	Compare the distributions between the test and control versions
6.	Do the changes to the 'looking for work' questions impact the distribution of responses to that question by increasing the proportion who respond “no” to the question?	Compare the distributions between the test and control versions
7.	Do the changes to the ‘at work last week’ question adversely impact item nonresponse?	Compare item nonresponse rates between the test and control versions
8.	Do the changes to the ‘temporarily absent’ adversely question impact item nonresponse?	Compare item nonresponse rates between the test and control versions
9.	Do the changes to the ‘looking for work’ questions adversely impact item nonresponse?	Compare item nonresponse rates between the test and control versions
10.	Does the distribution of responses and the item non-response rate for the ‘at work last week’ question adversely impact the universe for the ‘journey to work’ questions?	Compare the number of respondents completing the first ‘journey to work’ question between the test and control versions, accounting for erroneous

	responses to the 'at work last week' question
--	---

Selection Criteria:

Research Q	Criteria
1	The estimate of unemployment for the test panel is lower than the estimate of unemployment for the control panel
2	The estimate of employment for the test panel is higher than the estimate of employment for the control panel
3	The net difference rates for employment status are lower in the test panel than the control panel
4, 5, 6	(only examined as supporting data for the first three research questions)
7, 8, 9	(only examined as supporting data for the first three research questions)
10	Not considered as part of the selection criteria – included for informational purposes

Minimum criteria for selecting the test version:

- Estimates of unemployment are lower in the test version and estimates of employed are the same or higher in the test version., and
- Net difference rate for employment status is the same or lower in the test panel

Appendix B: Cognitive Testing Report

ACS Labor Force Questions: Results from Cognitive Interview Testing¹

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¹Disclaimer: This paper reports the results of research and analysis undertaken by Census Bureau staff. It has undergone a Census Bureau review more limited in scope than that given to official Census Bureau publications. This paper is released to inform interested parties of ongoing research and to encourage discussion of work in progress.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. BACKGROUND.....	1
II. OBJECTIVES.....	1
III. MULTI-METHOD RESEARCH PLAN.....	1
IV. COGNITIVE INTERVIEW TESTING METHODOLOGY.....	2
A. General.....	2
B. Protocol for Cognitive Interviewing.....	3
C. Administrative Information and Respondent Demographics.....	3
V. RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	4
A. At Work Question.....	5
1. Question Wording.....	5
2. Discussion of Version 1 Results.....	6
3. Discussion of Version 2 Results.....	8
4. Reference Period - “last week”.....	10
5. Recommendations for the “At Work” Question.....	11
6. Justification for Recommendations.....	11
7. Sponsor Decision.....	12
B. Temporarily Absent Question.....	12
1. Question Wording.....	12
2. Discussion of Results.....	13
3. Recommendations for the “Temporarily Absent” Question.....	14
4. Justification for Recommendations.....	15
5. Sponsor Decision.....	15
C. Looking for Work Question.....	15
1. Question Wording.....	15
2. Discussion of Results.....	16
3. Reference Period - “last 4 weeks”.....	17
4. Recommendations for the “Looking for Work” Question.....	17
5. Justification for Recommendations.....	18
6. Sponsor Decision.....	18
D. Weeks Worked Question.....	18
1. Question Wording.....	18
2. Discussion of Results.....	19
3. Recommendations for the “Weeks Worked” Question.....	20
4. Justification for Recommendations.....	21
5. Sponsor Decision.....	21
VI. OUTCOME OF 2006 ACS CONTENT TEST.....	21

VII. FINAL DECISIONS FOR ACS 2008 PRODUCTION
SURVEY.....22

REFERENCES

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Appendix A	Census 2000 /ACS and CPS Labor Force Questions Wording
Appendix B-1	Proposed Research on Improving the Employment Status Questions in the ACS in Preparation for the 2006 ACS Content Test - HHES, September 2004
Appendix B-2	Preliminary Behavior Coding Data: ACS Employment Status Items - BLS, October 2004
Appendix B-3	Preliminary Interviewer Debriefing Findings/Data: ACS Employment Status Items - BLS, October 2004
Appendix C-1	SAQ Version 1 Question Wording for Cognitive Testing
Appendix C-2	SAQ Version 2 Question Wording for Cognitive Testing
Appendix C-3	CATI Version 2 Question Wording for Cognitive Testing
Appendix C-4	CAPI Version 2 Question Wording for Cognitive Testing
Appendix D-1	SAQ Version 1 Cognitive Interview Protocol
Appendix D-2	SAQ Version 2 Cognitive Interview Protocol
Appendix D-3	CATI Version 2 Cognitive Interview Protocol
Appendix D-4	CAPI Version 2 Cognitive Interview Protocol
Appendix E-1	SAQ Recommended Question Wording for 2006 ACS Content Test
Appendix E-2	CATI/CAPI Recommended Question Wording for 2006 ACS Content Test

I. BACKGROUND

During mid-2004, the Housing and Household Economic Statistics Division (HHES) determined that employment and unemployment results obtained through the Census 2000 data revealed substantial differences from those obtained through the Current Population Survey (CPS) (Palumbo and Siegel 2004.) Given that the American Community Survey (ACS) is utilizing the same questions as those in Census 2000, HHES expects to see similar differences in the estimates of employment and unemployment resulting from the ACS. Examination of the 2003 ACS and CPS found that the ACS estimate of employed persons was about 4 percent below CPS and the unemployed estimate in ACS was approximately 25 percent higher than CPS (Palumbo 2005.)

The Census Bureau recognizes that the CPS, sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), is the official source of labor force estimates for the U.S. It is therefore in the interest of the Census Bureau for the ACS estimates to be as similar to the CPS estimates as possible. There are several differences in the data collection methods (question wording, sequencing, interview modes, interview period, staffing, etc.) used for the two surveys, as well as the reference periods and universes. Nonetheless, the public expects that whenever multiple estimates for a given topic are released from the Census Bureau, they should be the same. While it is important for the estimates to be similar, it is equally important for the Census Bureau to understand the reasons for these differences and specifically to assess the impact of the question wording on these differences. For this reason a research program was proposed to examine possible reasons for lower estimates of employment and higher estimates of unemployment in the ACS. The current wording for the CPS and the ACS labor force questions are contained in Appendix A.

II. OBJECTIVES

The primary objective of this research is to develop alternative question wording that can be tested in the split-panel ACS 2006 Content Test. The control treatment in the content test will be the current ACS question wording. The test treatment will include the recommended alternative resulting from this research. This research will determine whether the ACS question wording should be modified in an effort to improve the ACS labor force estimates and bring them closer in line with the CPS estimates. Given that the ACS is a multi-mode survey (self-administered questionnaire (SAQ), computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI), and computer-assisted personal visit interview (CAPI), cognitive testing of the question wording in all modes is necessary. The ACS 2006 Content Test will use only two modes (SAQ and CAPI) due to time constraints.

III. MULTI-METHOD RESEARCH PLAN

To address the problems identified by the earlier studies examining Census 2000 compared to CPS, we decided to use a multi-method approach to identify potential problems with, and possible solutions for, the ACS questions. The multi-method approach provides data from sources including substantive experts, survey methodologists, ACS interviewers and

respondents, and data from the ACS telephone questionnaire assistance logs.

The overall research plan for this project is provided in Appendix B-1. An interagency workgroup was established to carry out the research plan and ultimately develop the questions used for cognitive testing. The workgroup consisted of staff from the Statistical Research Division (SRD), HHES, Population Division (POP), American Community Survey Office (ACSO) at the Census Bureau and staff from the BLS.

Expert reviews from the substantive experts at the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), POP, and the BLS, as well as a survey methodologist at the BLS were conducted. Expert reviewers provided valuable information and recommendations to assist the workgroup to develop alternative ACS question wording for cognitive testing.

The results of behavior coding of ACS telephone interviews are contained in Appendix B-2. BLS staff coded fifty-one household interviews, providing data for 104 persons. BLS staff also conducted two interviewer debriefings with staff from the Hagerstown Telephone Center and the Tucson Telephone Center. A total of 15 ACS interviewers participated in the debriefings. As part of the interviewer debriefing, interviewers were asked to rate the targeted ACS items to assess the relative magnitude of problems experienced with each of item. The results of the interviewer debriefings are contained in Appendix B-3.

The focus of this report is the cognitive interview testing which was the final step in the multi-method research plan and is described fully in the next section.

IV. COGNITIVE INTERVIEW TESTING METHODOLOGY

A. General

Once the expert reviews, behavior coding results and interviewer debriefings results were reviewed, the interagency workgroup met to discuss potential question wording to address some of the identified problems. Two versions of the “work” question and the “looking for work” question were developed for cognitive testing. One version of the “temporarily absent from work” question and the “weeks worked” question was developed.

Cognitive testing needed to simulate all three modes of interviewing used in the ACS. Therefore, self-administered questionnaires were developed in addition to questionnaire designs used to simulate CATI and CAPI. Appendices C-1 through C-4 contain the question wording used in each of the three modes, as well as the two alternative versions of the “work” and “looking for work” questions, identified as “Version 1” and “Version 2.”

It should be noted that abbreviated versions of the ACS survey instruments were developed to facilitate the time constraint posed by the cognitive interview technique. The goal was to keep the length of the cognitive interview to less than one hour. Therefore, only those items critical to the flow of the labor force items were included in the questionnaires used for cognitive

interviewing.

B. Protocol for Cognitive Interviewing

The cognitive interviews consisted of 40 one-on-one intensive interviews. Laboratory participants were recruited to represent different labor force statuses.

A protocol for the researchers conducting the cognitive interviews was developed which contained both the general and targeted concurrent probes used during the interviews and retrospective probes used after the interview. For each of the test items, participants were asked to paraphrase the question asked of them, and define specific terms, phrases, and reference periods critical to the specific item. This information helps researchers determine participants' understanding of the questions of interest. Appendices D-1 through D-4 contain the protocols used for each of the respective modes and questionnaire version. The protocols show the probing questions used by the researchers.

C. Administrative Information and Respondent Demographics

Forty persons were recruited through newspaper ads, contacts with unemployment agencies, word of mouth and from our database of potential laboratory participants. Participants were provided \$35. The interviews were conducted by four survey methodologists very experienced with the cognitive interviewing methodology. All interviews were audio taped (with permission of the participant.)

Fifteen of the interviews were conducted in the Boston area by the Center for Survey Research of the University of Massachusetts at Boston. The balance were conducted in the Washington DC and Baltimore, MD areas. Some of the simulated "CATI" interviews were conducted with residents of other areas such as Rhode Island, the State of Washington, and Alaska.

Provided below in Table 1 and Table 2 is information related to the administration of the 40 interviews and the demographics of the 40 laboratory participants.

Table 1. Number of Cognitive Interviews by Questionnaire Version and Interview Mode.

Questionnaire Version/Mode	SAQ	CATI	CAPI	TOTAL
Version 1	22*	0	0	22
Version 2	3	10	5	18
TOTAL	25	5	10	40
*The decision to test most of the Version 1 questionnaires in an SAQ mode was due to the need to analyze the two-part design of the “at work” question for which there is less control in the SAQ mode.				

Table 2. Demographic Characteristics of Laboratory Participants.

Gender		Age		Race		Education	
Male	17	<25	4	White	26	H.S. grad or less	10
Female	23	25-34	6	Black	13	Some college	12
		35-54	17	Other	1	College grad	10
		55+	13			College grad +	8
TOTAL	40		40		40		40

Note: In considering the results discussed in the next section, the usual caveat applies regarding cognitive interviews. Participants were not randomly selected and the results are not generalizable to the larger population. It should also be noted that the participants included in this research were older and had a higher educational attainment level than the general population.

V. RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section, there is a subsection for each of the topic areas. Within the subsection, the original ACS question wording is provided, followed by the test question wording. For items where there were two alternatives tested, they are labeled appropriately. Following the question

wording is a summary of the results of cognitive testing. The results are followed by a recommendation of question wording to be used in the ACS 2006 Content Test. The final decision regarding acceptance/rejection of the recommendation is also provided.

A. At Work Question

1. Question Wording

Original ACS At Work Question

LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for either pay or profit?

Mark (X) the “Yes” box even if the person worked only 1 hour, or helped without pay in a family business or farm for 15 hours or more, or was on active duty in the Armed Forces.

Yes

No

Tested At Work Questions: Version 1

a. LAST WEEK, did this person work for pay at a job (or business)?

Yes - SKIP to question X

No - Did not work (or retired)

b. LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for pay, even for as little as one hour?

Yes

No - SKIP to question Y

Tested At Work Question: Version 2

Did this person work for pay at ANY time LAST WEEK?

Yes

No - SKIP to question

The purpose of the “at work” question is to measure whether a person performed any work for pay during the reference period of last week (which is intended to be the Sunday through Saturday of the week prior to interview week.) In addition, if a person worked without pay in a family farm or business for 15 hours or more during the reference week, that person should have the “yes” box marked and consequently be included in the estimates of persons “at work.” Currently, the ACS employment estimates are lower than the CPS estimates. Persons “at work” are one component of the employed. Results from earlier research (Esposito 2004b, Fronczek 2004) indicate that the following problems may exist with the current ACS “at work” question wording:

- respondents experience some confusion with the phrase “either pay or profit”;

- contingent, temporary, marginal, casual workers who work only a few hours or don't have a "regular" job or those who are self-employed may be confused by the question;
- the italicized statement after the question may be posing problems for respondents; and,
- retired persons are unclear how to answer this question, particularly if they are doing a minimal amount of part-time work.

2. Discussion of Version 1 Results

To remedy the problems identified above, the Version 1 "at work" test question was designed to:

- eliminate the phrase "either pay or profit";
- eliminate the parenthetical instruction about unpaid work in a family farm or business;
- help contingent, temporary, marginal, part-time, or self-employed workers identify themselves as "at work" by having a separate question asking about "ANY work for pay, even for as little as one hour"; and,
- include a more specific response option for the "no" category in the (a) question so that persons who are retired and do not work at all will have a response option suitable for their situation and hopefully reduce whatever confusion which existed before.

(Note that unpaid family workers are an extremely small proportion (less than 1 percent) of persons "at work." It was decided that the confusion presented by the wordy language necessary to identify such workers is not worth the risk of not identifying a potentially larger proportion of persons who are "at work" and who may be confused by the wordy language.)

Results from cognitive interviewing indicate that laboratory participants clearly understood the Version 1 "at work" questions, referred to herein as (a) and (b). When asked to paraphrase the questions in their own words, participants seem to be consistent in recognizing that the (b) question was intended to obtain information about more casual work arrangements which might not be captured in the (a) question. Several participants who already had a broad interpretation (e.g., casual workers, temporary workers, etc.) of the (a) question, were able to give an even broader explanation (e.g. people working only 1 hour, people mowing lawns for pay, teenagers babysitting, etc.) of the (b) question when probed. It seems likely that persons performing work which is marginal, casual, part-time, day labor, etc. will have a greater chance of being identified with this two-part series. Obviously, only a field test in which there is greater likelihood of encountering such people will be able to fully inform us as to the validity of this statement.

In terms of other potential problems, there were only a couple of participants who indicated verbally or otherwise that either of the two questions was confusing. (And even those participants gave what appeared to be correct answers and moved on.) Participants who were not "at work" and went through both questions gave no indication that they found the questions to be redundant or burdensome. In addition, participants seemed very clear on the understanding of "work for pay at a job (or business)." Hardly anyone indicated that they thought they would

have to receive the pay in the same week as the work was performed in order to say that they had “worked for pay.” (This was a concern we had when designing this specific question.) The overwhelming majority of participants clearly understood that the question was asking whether they worked, even though the payment for the work might come at a later time.

Examples of the question paraphrases provided by participants are provided below:

Paraphrase examples of (a) and (b):

- a. “If I was capable of working, whether I managed to work anytime during the week.”
 - b. “Even the smallest amount, did I work maybe just an hour,... where I received funds of any kind.”
-
- a. “Did you have any kind of job where you get paid by somebody.”
 - b. “Even just very little work, an hour, if you worked at all.”
-
- a. “Did you work for pay. In other words were you working at all.”
 - b. “I think it’s poking at, suppose you’re retired but your landlord pays you \$10 an hour for one hour every week to bring out the garbage cans to the sidewalk and then bring in the empties. I think it’s trying to capture that kind of activity.”
-
- a. “Is specifically about a “job” where they have your social security number.”
 - b. “Is about any work for pay, like mowing a lawn or occasional bartending.”
-
- a. “Means you go to work and get paid by a business or company.”
 - b. “About “under the table work,” while the other is about more formal work.”
-
- a. “Does this person work for pay at a job. They want to know if I have a steady job.”
 - b. “The first one (a) is to see if you might have steady work that might likely have health insurance and the second one (b) is if you’re making any money at all from working.”
-
- a. “Last week, within the last 7 days, did the person work at a job.”
 - b. “That would be..doing like job for someone or like a one time thing. It’s not a career. It’s not something I work for an employer.”
-
- a. “Did you work last week.”
 - b. “Did you work at all last week, even if it was for 10 minutes, did you work at all.”
-
- a. “It says last week did this person work for pay at a job or business.”
 - b. “Did you work for money. Even for as little as one hour. You’re trying to cover people like myself who do work for other people, not as a business, but as a job with word of mouth.”
-
- a. “Did you work in the last week - were you employed.”
 - b. “If he had done something, like occasionally he will do automobile detailing for people

in the neighborhood and they will pay him \$50. I would consider that covered under that question because he did work and he got paid for it.” R differentiates between (a) and (b) in that a job or business is something that you participate in on a regular basis, something that is scheduled. “The other one (b) is just casual laborer... covers anything that anyone did for money that might not be classified as a job.”

- a. “Did I go to work.”
- a. “ Did I work for pay last week.”
- a. “If the person did anything for which they’re going to be paid, in the last 7 days.”
- a. “I think it’s very straightforward. He works 3 days a week, and he gets paid for it.”
- a. “If I worked for any type of money for a job or business. Could be like a regular employee or a side job or any type of work.”
- a. “Are you employed.”
- a. “Was I employed last week. Did I go to work.”

A few participants using the SAQ missed the skip associated with the “Yes” response. None of them seemed confused by the followup item (b). They marked (b) “Yes” as well and moved on. Only one participant who did this mentioned that (b) seemed redundant.

For participants using the Version 1 SAQ who did not report “yes” to either component of the “at work” question, they were to follow a skip instruction which takes them around the “journey to work” question, since that series of questions would be inappropriate for such persons. Many participants missed the skip and erroneously continued through the “journey to work” questions. Some participants became very confused. Others remarked that those questions did not apply to them and moved on until they got to a question which they thought was applicable.

3. Discussion of Version 2 Results

As with the Version 1 questions, this question (Version 2) was designed to remedy some of the problems identified in the current ACS “at work” question. In the event that there is space on the ACS questionnaire for only one “at work” question, we want to have a single question which has been cognitively tested. Therefore, the Version 2 “at work” question was designed to:

- eliminate the phrase “either pay or profit”;
- eliminate the parenthetical instruction about unpaid work in a family farm or business; and,
- help contingent, temporary, marginal, part-time, and self-employed workers identify themselves as “at work” by having a phrase which reads “...work for pay at ANY time last week.”

The results of the Version 2 testing are interesting in that it appears that the single question alone might also be successful at capturing persons “at work.” However, the results should be viewed somewhat cautiously for the following reason: marginal, casual, part-time work only seemed to

be mentioned when specific situations related to those circumstances were posed to the participants who then mentioned that such work should be counted. In other words, many of the participants did not indicate that this question wording was intended to pick up any kind of work regardless of how few hours might have been worked, or how irregular the work might be. In the two part Version 1 “at work” questions, participants were much more likely to volunteer on their own that such work was intended to be picked up in the (b) question.

The Version 2 question did not seem to present confusion to participants. No one seem puzzled by the question or didn’t know how to answer it or what to do. With some Version 2 cases, researchers presented the Version 1 questions to participants after receiving their paraphrases of Version 2. After seeing both version of the “at work” questions, the participants indicated that they thought the Version 1 series made it more clear what was being asked than did the Version 2 question. (It was for a small number of cases for which both versions were presented.)

As with the Version 1 question, no one responding to the Version 2 question thought that they had to be paid in the same week the work was performed in order for it to be counted.

Examples of question paraphrases are provided below:

“Have I worked in the last week and I know I haven’t so “no”.”

“Asking if I worked.” When probed, participant said that even if she worked for an hour or two we would be interested in that being reported .”

“It’s asking if I did any kind of work or performed any kind of service for which I was reimbursed financially.”

“If I worked last week. Well, it means did I get paid for working last week.” When probed, participant said if he had only worked one or two hours he would have said yes to the question.”

“Um... Whether I worked somewhere last week where I was getting paid at. Participant said the reference period of “last week” makes it sound seem like it’s a temporary thing.”

“Do I have a job where I’m making money.”

“Was I employed doing anything last week, whether it was through your job or you were paid for a service.”

“Being paid for your services.” When probed, participant said if a person raked leaves and was paid \$10, that’s still work for pay.”

“Any job would be included and any other work you did that you got paid for.”

“Work for pay means any kind of work - full time, part time, intermittent, etc., as long as it’s for pay.”

“ Did I work and did I get paid.”

“Did I receive any benefits [money] in the last week.” When probed, participant said she would count something even if it was just a one-day thing for cash.”

“Work for pay; putting hours in to provide a service or skill in trade for money.”

4. Reference Period - “last week”

The interpretation of the reference period “last week” varied. Provided below are the interpretations along with the number of participants providing that interpretation. The total is greater than 40 because some participants gave two interpretations:

Interpretation of “Last Week”	Number of Participants
Sunday - Saturday	9
Monday - Friday:	15
7 days prior to interview day	11
Other	7
TOTAL	42

The intended definition for the reference period is Sunday - Saturday of the week preceding the week of interview. Only 9 participants had a correct interpretation. Although there were 15 participants classifying the reference period as Monday through Friday, for most of these people, that was their work schedule or the work schedule of the people in their household. The more curious reference period interpretation was that of “7 days prior to the interview day” which basically is a rolling reference period. It may be that if we want a defined reference period of Sunday - Saturday of last week, that it should be clearly identified as such within the

questionnaire. Perhaps an introduction identifying the reference week as Sunday to Saturday of the week prior to the respondent completing the questionnaire could be included.

(Note: It should be acknowledged that it is unknown what effect, positive or negative, misinterpretation of the reference week may have on respondents' answers to the "at work" question. ACS and HHES staff need to determine the importance of adherence to the official reference period and whether they want to pursue additional research in this area.)

5. Recommendations for the "At Work" Question

Provided below are the recommendations for the "At Work" question, based on the cognitive interview results.

- (1) Adopt the Version 1 "at work" questions, provided below.
 - a. LAST WEEK, did this person work for pay at a job (or business)?
Yes - SKIP to question X
No - Did not work (or retired)
 - b. LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for pay, even for as little as one hour?
Yes
No - SKIP to question Y
- (2) Include an instruction, in an appropriate place in the questionnaire, informing respondents that the reference period of "last week" should be defined as Sunday to Saturday of the week prior to the week they are completing the questionnaire (if that is what ACS wants as the reference period.) See "Note" above regarding this suggestion.

6. Justification for Recommendations

As mentioned above, when asked to paraphrase the questions in their own words, participants seem to be consistent in recognizing that the Version 1 (b) question was intended to obtain information about more casual work arrangements which might not be captured in the (a) question. Several participants who already had a broad interpretation of the (a) question, were able to give an even broader explanation of the (b) question when probed. It seems likely that persons performing work which is marginal, casual, part-time, day labor, etc. will have a greater chance of being identified with this two-part series than with the single question approach. A by-product of this may also be reducing the number of persons who it is suspected erroneously go through the "looking for work" question. Hopefully, persons will be captured to a greater extent within the labor force status in which they should be classified.

Because of the high proportion of participants who had an interpretation of the reference week, other than that intended, the inclusion of the instruction defining the reference period may be beneficial.

7. Sponsor Decision

The sponsor (ACSO) agreed to the recommendation to use the two-part question (Version 1) of the “at work” question in the “test” treatment for the 2006 ACS Content Test. Because of space constraints on the SAQ, the sponsor did not agree to the recommendation to include an instruction defining the reference period of “last week.”

B. Temporarily Absent Question

1. Question Wording

Original ACS Temporarily Absent Question

LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?
Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, labor dispute, etc.- SKIP to question X
No - SKIP to question Y

Tested Temporarily Absent Question (SAQ)

LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?
Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave, other personal reasons, etc. -SKIP
to question X
No - SKIP to question Y

Tested Temporarily Absent Question (CATI/CAPI)

LAST WEEK, (was <Name>/were you) TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business because of vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave or some other personal reason?

Yes → go to X
No → go to Y

The purpose of the “temporarily absent” question is to obtain a measure of the second component of persons considered to be employed: persons who have a job that they did not work at last week because of illness, vacation, maternity leave, bad weather, labor disputes, etc. Results from earlier research (Palumbo and Siegel 2004) indicate that the following problems may exist with the current ACS “temporarily absent” question wording:

- persons who are “temporarily absent” because they are on maternity or paternity leave did not consider themselves to be temporarily absent from their job. This obviously can lead to under reporting and consequently, an underestimate of “employed”

- persons.
- question wording for this item is different in the various modes of the ACS (self-administered, CATI and CAPI);
- question wording for this item is also very different from the current CPS wording which uses a different design approach and multiple items to obtain this information.

2. Discussion of Results

To remedy the problems identified above, the “temporarily absent” test question was designed to:

- include “maternity leave” as one of the listed reasons for being absent from a job; and
- make the questions consistent between modes.

Note that the question wording between the ACS self-administered questionnaire and the tested wording are virtually identical, with the exception of the inclusion of the reasons “maternity leave,” “other personal reasons, etc.” and the deletion of the reason “labor dispute.”

Results from cognitive interviewing are rather interesting, primarily because the problems identified are not related to the original problems which we were trying to address. First, it should be mentioned that the issue of maternity/paternity leave wasn’t thoroughly tested because we had difficulty recruiting persons on maternity leave. However, a whole other set of problems surfaced with this question.

There were 21 participants who were administered this question. Of the 21, five participants originally answered the question “no,” but then after the probing discussion, they said their answer should be “yes.” Others were not sure how to mark the question for a variety of reasons: the reference period of “last week,” the use of the word “temporarily,” and the use of the word “absent.” In addition, there were several participants who were “on call” and weren’t sure how this question applied to them. There were two clear cut cases where participants marked “no,” were confident of their answer, but in fact, their situations were clearly cases where “yes” should have been marked. It should be noted that for the most part, the participants just answered the question without any comments. It was only after they were asked to paraphrase the question, look at the examples of reasons absent, etc. that the participants then began expressing their doubts about their answers and posed questions about specific issues within the item.

The overwhelming majority of participants reported that the list of reasons in the “yes” category seem to represent typical reasons for being absent from work. They also thought it was clear that the list was not an exhaustive list, but just examples. However, there were two participants who remarked that all the reasons listed pertained to reasons why a person would not be at a job, but not reasons why the job might not be there for the person (e.g. in the case of bad weather or slack work.) In the original ACS question, labor dispute was a reason listed. However, when designing the test question and adding examples, we felt compelled to delete an example (labor dispute) so the list didn’t become too burdensome, appear to be an exhaustive list and take up too

much space.

The number and type of problematic issues about this question cannot all be addressed only through tweaking of the question wording. Some of the ambiguities are going to remain given that over half of the ACS data are collected through self-administered questionnaires and there are obviously no interviewers there on-the-spot to address respondents' questions. To address the weaknesses of this question will require a separate research effort, if there is interest in such work.

Since CPS is the gold standard for labor force estimates and part of this research is to improve the ACS so the estimates are more in line with those of CPS, a few comments must be made. It should be noted that in CPS, since 1994, the measure of persons temporarily absent (which in CPS is referred to as "persons with a job") is obtained through a direct question asking respondents if they had a job last week, either full or part-time. If they report "yes," then a followup question is asked to ascertain the main reason they did not work "last week." There are clearly defined criteria as to what constitutes a "job" and interviewers are trained to be able to address those criteria if respondents are uncertain or communicate their particular story. Obviously the enforcement of the criteria can only be exercised if respondents verbalize a response that is not just "yes" or "no." With ACS, the initial question is different and there is no followup question to ascertain the reason a person was absent from work.

3. Recommendations for the "Temporarily Absent" Question

Based on the cognitive interview findings, the following is recommended:

- (1) Modify the test wording to include "slack work" in the example of reasons for being absent, as provided below:

LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?

Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave, other personal reasons, slack work
etc - SKIP to question X

No - SKIP to question Y

- (2) Explore evaluation methods (e.g. respondent debriefings) that might be employed during the ACS 2006 Content Test which might provide additional information on this item.
- (3) Determine if there is additional research which can be done with this item outside of the ACS 2006 Content Test, perhaps with a vehicles such as SRD's Questionnaire Design Experimental Research Survey (QDERS).

4. Justification for Recommendation

Within the scope of this research, we are limited to only tweaking the wording to the question and the response options. We are not permitted, due to space constraints on the ACS, to add more questions in order to communicate the meaning of the question. The cognitive interviews demonstrated that the majority of participants understood the question and considered the list of reasons for being absent from work as a list of examples, not an exhaustive list. Adding a nonpersonal reason to the list of reasons will help to convey to respondents that we are interested in absences due to when the job is not available for them; not only when they are not available for the job.

5. Sponsor Decision

After discussions with the sponsor and the Interagency Committee on the ACS of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the researchers and sponsor agreed on a modified version of the recommended question. The modified version included different wording for the examples in the “yes” response. The question agreed upon for the test version of the 2006 ACS Content Test is displayed below.

LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?
Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave, other family/personal reasons, bad weather, etc. - SKIP to question X
No - SKIP to question X

C. Looking For Work Question

1. Question Wording

Original ACS Looking for Work Question

Has this person been looking for work during the last 4 weeks?

Tested Looking for Work Question: Version 1

During the LAST 4 WEEKS, has this person been ACTIVELY looking for work?

Testing Looking for Work Question: Version 2

During the LAST 4 WEEKS, has this person been looking for work?

The purpose of the “looking for work” question is to measure whether a person performed any active job search methods to look for work during the reference period of the last 4 weeks (which is intended to be the Sunday through Saturday of the 4 weeks prior to interview week).

Currently, the ACS unemployment estimates are higher than the CPS estimates. In CPS, there is a screener question to determine if a person has been doing anything to find work in the last 4 weeks. Then there is a followup question asking specifically what all of the things are that the person has done to find work. Persons who have conducted only passive job search methods are excluded from being counted among the unemployed. However, ACS does not have the followup question about job search activities. Therefore, the notion of active versus passive job search methods needs to be communicated to respondents in some other manner.

Results from earlier research (Palumbo and Siegel) indicate that the following problems may exist with the current ACS “looking for work” question wording:

- there is no distinction between active versus passive job search methods;
- contingent, temporary, marginal, casual workers who misclassify themselves as not “at work” (earlier in the survey), and who may be looking for work as their typical process specific to their type of work, may be artificially inflating the unemployed estimates of the ACS.

To address these suspected problems, the “looking for work” test question was designed to:

- make an effort to eliminate passive job seekers from responding “yes” to the “looking for work” question by including the word “actively.”
- benefit from the recommended Version 1 two-part “at work” question. It is intended that fewer marginal, casual, temporary workers will come through the “looking for work” question and consequently not be in the universe of respondents and reduce the suspected artificial inflation of persons classified as unemployed in the ACS.

2. Discussion of Results

Results from cognitive interviewing indicate that the inclusion of the word “actively” in the “looking for work” question provides respondents with a clearer idea of what should be counted as looking for work. When answering the Version 1 survey question, participants would sometimes repeat the word “actively” prior to giving their response, clearly indicating that word caused them to think more about the situation. When participants paraphrased the “actively looking for work” question, they almost always provided examples of active job search methods. Participants were also asked for their interpretation of the word “actively” within the context of the question. The reported interpretations were consistent with the intent of the concept.

When presented with the scenario of “looking at newspapers ads and not following up with employers” many participants accurately stated that they would not consider that as looking for work and gave suitable reasons for their opinion. For some participants who answered the Version 2 question which did not include the word “actively,” after they had provided feedback on that question, researchers showed them the Version 1 question which included the word “actively” and asked if their responses would be the same. A few participants said their responses would be different because that Version 1 question “conveys something different, that you want a job.” One participant said the word “actively” is being specific. Another participant who thought “looking at ads” would be considered as “looking for work” said her response

would be different if the question asked about “actively looking for work” because “actively” tends to imply that you at least send in a resume or something.... that browsing the want ads is looking for work, but is kind of a “passive type thing.”

There were a few participants who went off on tangents providing paraphrases having to do with a person looking for a job they enjoy, or if they are not happy with their job and start looking for work. Because of the context within the cognitive interview, some participants did not comprehend that this question would only be asked of persons who had not reported they were working.

From the information gathered in these interviews there does not appear to be a negative effect associated with including the word “actively” in the “looking for work” question. But again, only an evaluation from a field test will be able to inform us more fully whether this is indeed the case.

3. Reference Period “last 4 weeks”

When probed on their interpretation of the reference period “the last 4 weeks,” it was clear that laboratory participants had many different definitions. The official definition is the Sunday through Saturday of the four weeks prior to the start of interview week. However, the interpretations provided during the cognitive interviews ranged from the past month, to the past three weeks, to the four weeks prior to the interview date, etc. Given that ACS is not producing monthly estimates and uses a rolling reference period, perhaps the interpretation of the reference period is not critical. If it is critical, then some thought needs to be given to communicating to respondents, through an instruction, how the time period is defined. However, we have no research indicating what effect such an instruction might have on respondents’ responses to the “looking for work” question in general. Again, this might be an area to be explored during the evaluation of the ACS Content Test or through an experiment on the Questionnaire Design Experimental Research Survey (QDERS.)

4. Recommendations for “Looking for Work” Question.

Based on the cognitive interview findings, the following is recommended:

- (1) Adopt the Version 1 “looking for work” question provided below.

During the LAST 4 WEEKS, has this person been ACTIVELY looking for work?

- (2) If ACS and HHES think it’s critical for the reference period to be interpreted correctly, then consideration should be given to additional research to determine the implications of an instruction defining the reference period.

5. Justification for Recommendations

Results from cognitive interviews clearly demonstrate that the use of the word “actively” communicates to laboratory participants the type of job search activity which is considered to be “active job search methods.” From our limited research, there was no indication of negative impact with the inclusion of the word “actively” in the “looking for work” question.

6. Sponsor Decision

The sponsor agreed with the recommended wording for the “looking for work” question.

D. Weeks Worked

1. Question Wording

Original ACS Weeks Worked Question

During the PAST 12 MONTHS, how many WEEKS did this person work? *Count paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service*

_____ Weeks

Tested Weeks Worked Question

During the PAST 12 MONTHS (a total of 52 weeks), in how many WEEKS did this person work, even for a few hours? *Include paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service as work.*

_____ Weeks

This “weeks worked” question became an add-on towards the end of the project planning so there is not as much information about the background of this question. Nor was anyone from the subject matter area who uses these data involved in our discussions when designing the test question for cognitive testing. The workgroup thought the purpose of the “weeks worked” question is to obtain the number of weeks a person worked during the past 12 months in order to provide some type of framework for the income and earnings data which are collected in the ACS.

Results from earlier research (Palumbo and Siegel) indicate that the following problems exist with this item:

- The level of inconsistency was in the high range in both the 1990 Census and 2000 Census Reinterview Survey.
- The results from the CPS/Census Match Study also revealed high levels of inconsistency between census and CPS responses.

The workgroup was requested to find a way to reduce the response variability for this question in the ACS.

Feedback from the expert reviews, ACS behavior coding (Esposito 2005a) and ACS interviewer debriefing (Esposito2005b) all indicate that this item has numerous problems which cannot be fixed with just minor wording tweaking. Realizing that not much gain would be made, we did make attempts to improve a few of the many problems with this question.

The test question was designed to:

- define the reference period of the “past 12 months” as “a total of 52 weeks”;
- include the reference to “even for a few hours” in order to communicate to respondents that we wanted them to report ANY weeks in which they had worked any hours; and,
- provide more clarification as to what should be counted as weeks worked. To accomplish this, we used the word “Include” at the beginning of the italicized instruction which appears immediately after the question.

2. Discussion of Results

All reports from researchers conducting the cognitive interviews stated that this was the worst question on the entire questionnaire. Interviewers previously reported through the ACS interviewer debriefing that this was by far the number one worst question. There are numerous problems with the question.

Problems with this question exist for persons with the following characteristics:

- Persons with multiple jobs through the year. Many persons who worked at several jobs during the year, but did not work continuously during the year had difficulty recalling the different jobs and even more difficulty remembering the number of weeks worked at the various jobs. These participants just guessed at their answer for the weeks worked question.
- Persons who worked multiple jobs concurrently during part of the year but may have been off from one job and not the other. Such persons sometimes forgot to count a week they may have worked at their secondary job, but not at their primary job.

- Persons who thought in terms of months and would multiply by 4 which produces an underestimate of weeks worked.
- Persons who thought the reference period of PAST 12 MONTHS was from January until the interview date or those who thought it was the last calendar year. Some participants did correctly think it was 12 months prior to interview date.
- Persons who focused on their weeks off, rather than weeks worked.
- Persons who focused on cumulative days off equaling “weeks” and then subtracting from 52. Many persons did not understand that we were focusing on the number of weeks in which they worked at all. Instead they would think of ANY weeks in which they took time off and then determine how many weeks those days off would make. Then they would subtract that out in addition to whole weeks they may have taken off.
- Persons working full-time jobs continuously during the year who took a week or two for paid vacation would frequently exclude those weeks from their reported weeks worked. (The issue of “paid” time off was usually lost in the calculation.)
- Persons who thought that they had to have “full weeks” in order for them to count it as a “week worked.” The issue of weeks in which people worked “even for a few hours” was lost in the calculation.
- Persons who were proxy reporting information for other household members. They frequently just did not know what the answer should be.
- Persons who thought it was way too difficult to figure out and they would just leave the item blank.

3. Recommendations for the “Weeks Worked” Question

Because of the numerous problems with this question, the workgroup could not initially make a recommendation for a question on “weeks worked” for the 2006 ACS Content Test.

Following our meeting with the Interagency OMB group, HHES had their staff who use these data meet with us to help develop an alternative question for the 2006 ACS Content Test. HHES informed us that the primary objective of the “weeks worked” question is to capture full-time, year round workers. A year-round worker is defined as a person who works 50 to 52 weeks, including paid time off. It is also important for HHES to be able to correlate earnings with total hours worked for data editing and imputation purposes. Therefore, we must retain the ability to have detailed “weeks worked” data.

Ultimately, the workgroup together with HHES, developed a two-part “weeks worked” question for the 2006 ACS Content Test. The questions were:

- a. During the PAST 12 MONTHS (52) weeks, did this person work 50 or more weeks?
Count paid time off as work.
Yes - SKIP to question X
No

- b. How many weeks DID this person work, even for a few hours, INCLUDING paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service?

50-52 weeks
48-49 weeks
40-47 weeks
27-39 weeks
14-26 weeks
13 weeks or less

4. Justification for Recommendations

The cognitive testing demonstrated so many problems with this question that could not be addressed by retaining a single question. Based on all the problems identified above, the work group thought it necessary to eliminate the totally open-ended question. In addition, we thought it was most important to first screen out those persons who work 50 weeks or more during the past 12 months. Part “a” of the question was designed to improve the measurement of year-round workers. Part “b” of the question was to capture those workers who worked only briefly and may have forgotten to include those weeks in their calculations.

5. Sponsor Decision

The sponsor worked with us to develop the “weeks worked” test question and therefore was in agreement with the question that was proposed. ACSO agreed that a two-part question could be tested.

VI. OUTCOME OF 2006 ACS CONTENT TEST

Results from the 2006 ACS Content Test were favorable towards the recommended test items contained in this report. Holder and Raglin report that results of the 2006 ACS Content Test do produce a higher estimate of employed persons when the test questions are used. They also report that the test questions did not produce a lower estimate of unemployed persons, but that the overall unemployment rate was lower for the test panel. They determined that empirically the

test versions of the employment and unemployment questions performed better than the existing ACS questions (Holder and Raglin, 2007a.)

Holder and Raglin (2007b) also determined from analysis of the 2006 ACS Content Test that the test version of the “weeks worked” question empirically performed better than the current ACS “weeks worked” question. The test question produced a higher estimate of year-round workers, an equal, though not better nonresponse rate and lower response error for the “50 to 52 weeks” response category.

Note that there are places within the Holder and Raglin reports which point to areas where there is still room for improvement and additional research is eventually needed. Refer to the reports for those details.

VII. FINAL DECISIONS FOR ACS 2008 PRODUCTION SURVEY

Recommendations were made by the Census Bureau to revise the 2008 ACS questionnaires to include the ACS 2006 Content Test “test” version question wording for the “at work,” “temporarily absent,” “looking for work,” and the “weeks worked” questions (Appendices E-1 and E-2.) OMB approval of the recommendations is pending.

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ACS (Census 2000) and CPS Labor Force Questions Wording

ACS (Census 2000) Question		Corresponding CPS Question
Item	Question	
Work Last Week	1. LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for either pay or profit? <i>Mark (X) the "Yes" box even if the person worked only 1 hour, or helped without pay in a family business or farm for 15 hours or more, or was on active duty in the Armed Forces.</i>	1. Does anyone in the household have a business or a farm? 2. LAST WEEK, did you do ANY Work for (either) pay (or profit)? 3. LAST WEEK, did you do any unpaid work in the family business or farm?
Temporary Absence	2. LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business? - Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, labor dispute, etc. -No	4. LAST WEEK< (in addition to the business,) did you have a job, either full or part time? Include any job from which you were temporarily absent. 5. What was the main reason you were absent from work LAST WEEK? <i>There are 14 answer categories including: on layoff; slack work; vacation/personal days, etc.</i>
Layoff	3. LAST WEEK, was this person on layoff from a job?	6. LAST WEEK, were you on layoff from a job?
Recall	4. <i>(For people on layoff)</i> Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?	7. Has your employer given you a date to return to work? 8. Have you been given any indication that you will be recalled to work within the next 6 months?

<p>Looking for Work</p>	<p>5. Have this person been looking for work during the last 4 weeks?</p>	<p>9. Have you been doing anything to find work during the last 4 weeks?</p> <p>10. What are all of the things you have done to find work during the last 4 weeks?</p>
<p>Availability</p>	<p>6. LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work if recalled?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yes, could have gone to work - No, because of own temporary illness - No, because of all other reasons (in school, etc.) 	<p>11. LAST WEEK, could you have started a job if one had been offered?</p> <p>12. Could you have returned to work LAST WEEK if you had been recalled</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Yes - No <p>13. Why is that?</p>

Proposed Research on Improving the Employment Status Questions in the American Community Survey (ACS) in Preparation for the 2006 ACS Content Test

Peter Fronczek, HHES

September 13, 2004

Background

Extensive research comparing Census 2000 data on employment status with similar data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) revealed substantial differences between the two in the count of people employed, unemployed, and not in the labor force. Since the same employment status questions are used in the American Community Survey (ACS) as were used in the census, we expect to see these same differences between the ACS and CPS (and in fact, this is turning out to be true). As the CPS is the source of the official estimates of the unemployed and the unemployment rate, one of the goals of the ACS is to come as close to the CPS estimates as possible while recognizing the inherent differences in the two surveys.

The exact reasons for the differences between the CPS and ACS employment status estimates are unknown but the research so far suggests the involvement of several factors, including the design and wording of the set of six questions used in the ACS. The focus of the proposed research described here is to identify the best modifications to the current set of questions, so that these modifications can be field tested in the 2006 ACS Content Test.

Proposed research

The research being proposed recognizes three constraining facts that are unlikely to change: (1) the “fixed” nature of some of the operational aspects of the ACS, such as residence rules, modes of collection, periodicity of collection (monthly); (2) the short time remaining before the test questions must be identified – as little 4 to 5 months; and (2) the lack of funding that is available for any pre-content test testing.

Given the constraints, we are proposing four areas of research that we think are feasible to do:

- Expert review of the current questions and processes, and Census 2000 evaluations to provide guidance on further research and question design in preparation for the 2006 Content Test.
- Review of the Jeffersonville telephone questionnaire assistance (TQA) logs to determine which employment status questions respondents are having problems with and what those problems are.

- Behavior coding of 60 to 70 CATI interviews with the purpose of identifying whether there are interviewer or respondent problems associated with the employment status questions for the telephone portion of the ACS.
- Cognitive interviews with several potential respondents in different types of work situations.

Expert Review

Method: Review of current questions and processes, along with the results of the Census 2000 evaluations on employment status.

Details: Experts in survey methodology would review the current ACS question wording, sequencing, and design for all modes of the ACS. Any potential problems or issues would be documented and used to guide further research and improve the questions that should be tested in an ACS content test. In addition, review of the extensive evaluation of employment status questions in Census 2000 may provide insight into improving the ACS questions.

Utility: Expert review will help us focus our other research more productively and will be part of the process that could lead to improved questions.

Responsibility: Census Bureau/CSMR; Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

Cost: Staff costs of Census Bureau and BLS personnel for conducting the expert review

Review of the Jeffersonville TQA logs

Method: Review of TQA logs and categorizing calls by question number and type of problem. [see Attachment A for results of this review]

Details: We have been given access to the TQA logs from the Jeffersonville Telephone Center. These logs record the calls that come into the center from respondents and the number of the question the respondent is referencing. They also offer the TQA operator the opportunity to record the type of problem the respondent is having with the question or concept.

Utility: From the information in the logs, we hope to identify which of the employment status questions are the most troublesome to respondents and the reasons why they present problems. Depending on the types of problems described, it may be possible to identify changes to questionnaire wording, formatting, or sequencing that will improve the employment status data in the ACS.

Responsibility: Census Bureau/HHES

Costs: Staff costs of Census Bureau personnel for reviewing, categorizing, and analyzing the logs.

Behavior coding

Method: Behavior coding 60 to 70 ACS CATI interviews using standard codes for interviewer and respondent behavior.

Details: The interviews can be audio taped and the coding done at a later time, however, the preferred method is to do the coding while the interviews are in progress at the Jeffersonville Telephone Center.

Utility: This research will provide insight into what aspects of the telephone collection process – interviewer or respondent problems - may be contributing to the differences in employment status estimates between the CPS and ACS. In addition, coding results from this operation could be compared to behavior coding done during current CPS interviews. We expect there may be differences in the codes assigned and this may provide further insight into why the two surveys differ.

Respon-
sibility: Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS)

Costs: Staff costs of BLS personnel for planning and conducting the behavior coding, and analyzing the results. Travel costs to the Jeffersonville Telephone Center.

Cognitive Testing

Method: Conduct interviews with potential ACS respondents with different employment situations.

Details: We would conduct a significant number of interviews with potential respondents who fall into various employment status categories – employed; unemployed, actively looking for work; unemployed, not actively looking for work; and contingent workers; retired people; and recent immigrants with limited English-language skills. The current set of employment status question and possible variations would be presented to the respondents and their reactions and understanding of those questions recorded and discussed.

Utility: Interviewing potential respondents with the current set of labor force questions and variations to those questions, obtaining their reaction to the questions and their understanding of the concepts we are attempting to identify, will help us determine whether modifying the questionnaire will help to improve the employment status data in the ACS.

Respon-

sibility: Census Bureau/CSMR/HHES

Cost: Staff costs of Census Bureau personnel for planning and conducting the cognitive testing, and analyzing the results.

An analysis of the results of the research described above, will lead to the development of alternative approaches to the current questions which could then be field tested in the 2006 ACS Content Test.

Preliminary Findings from Review of Telephone Questionnaire Assistance logs

The following is a brief summary of the preliminary findings from the review of the logs from the Telephone Questionnaire Assistance (TQA) operation for the ACS. These logs record the number of calls that came in on a particular question. In some cases the TQA operator recorded the type of problem the respondent had with the question or concept.

1. People who called for assistance with the employment questions tend to fall into four categories:
 - Retired people – some retired people were not sure if the questions applied to them since they were retired; others, who were doing part-time or casual work didn't think this 'counted' since they were retired.
 - Contingent or casual workers – some people who worked only a few hours or who did not have a 'regular' job were confused by the worked last week question.
 - Multiple job holders – since nothing specific was mentioned about having multiple job, some people in this situation did not know how to respond.
 - Teachers - some teachers on summer vacation did not know how to answer the worked last week question.
2. Requests for assistance most often involved the Work Last Week (question 23: LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for either pay or profit?), which is the first question in the labor force series. The notes from the census assistance representatives suggest that the callers were confused about what to consider "work"; there was also some confusion about the definition of "LAST WEEK."
3. Many callers reported difficulty in following the skip patterns of the labor force questions.
4. There were many more requests for assistance concerning questions 29a (LAST WEEK, was this person on layoff?) and 29b (LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?) than for questions 29c (Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?), 30 (Has this person been looking for work during the last 4 weeks?), or 31 (LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work?)

Date: 16 October 2004

To: Jennifer Rothgeb

From: Jim Esposito

Subject: Preliminary Behavior Coding Data [HTC]: ACS Employment Status Items

A. Background

As part of a multiple-method evaluation plan, American Community Survey (ACS) interviews were monitored and coded at the Census Bureau's Hagerstown Telephone Center (HTC) between October 4 through October 7. The coding process focused on the ACS employment-status items; at the request of the BOC, data were also collected for two other items, WKL and WKW (see **Attachment A**). A total of fifty-one (51) household interviews were coded, which encompassed employment data for 104 persons. Behavior coding data are summarized in **Table 1**; behavior codes are described briefly at the bottom of the table. More detailed item-based data are provided in **Attachment C**. Abbreviations used in Attachment C are clarified/described in **Attachment B**. A brief review and interpretation of these data are provided below.

B. Item-by-Item Review and Interpretation of Findings (see Table 1)

As one might have guessed given the relative proportions of persons in the American labor force (employed, unemployed, NILF), the most common sequence of items observed for person-based data was the WK-WLW sequence (for employed persons) followed by the WK-LA-AB-LK-WKL pattern (for the unemployed and those not-in-the-labor-force). The frequencies associated with the various ACS employment-status items reflect these patterns.

WAS LAST WEEK, did (name/you) do ANY work for either pay or profit?

Read if necessary: Include any work even if (he/she/you) worked only 1 hour, or helped without pay in a family business or farm for 15 hours or more, or (was/ were) on active duty in the Armed Forces.

Prior experience with the Current Population Survey (CPS) suggests that telephone-center interviewers are very good at reading questionnaire items as worded [e.g., exact (E) item readings in the 90-to-95% range], especially when questions are short and well-designed. The **WK** item was read exactly as worded 78% of the time and read with major changes 10% of the time. The 78% figure is somewhat misleading in that interviewers sometimes know from responses to prior ACS items (i.e., particularly the disability series) that target persons are either retired or disabled. In such cases, some interviewers will simply verify that the person did not work last week rather than read the item as worded. The 10% figure for major changes in item wording (MC code)

probably should not be interpreted in this way. In such cases, interviewers read the question in a manner that they feel will cause less problems for respondents (e.g., “Last week, were you working at a job?”; see Attachment C). Also, it is worth noting that the read-as-necessary statement was never read during the monitoring process. On the response side, respondents provide adequate answers to the WK item 98% of the time, which is not unusual for a yes/no question. However, in 21% of the responses to this item, respondents provided more information than just a yes or no answer (O-code, 12%) or information that interviewers could interpret as yes or no (Oc=9%); a high percentage of O-codes often reflects uncertainty with the intent of particular questionnaire item.

LA LAST WEEK, (was name/were you) on layoff from a job?

In spite of the fact that the LA item was only read as worded 67% of the time, there were relatively few problems observed with this question. As noted above, interviewers often know that target persons are retired or disabled from prior ACS items and interviewers attempt to reduce burden by verifying information rather than reading items as worded. That was the case with this item: 29% of the time, interviews verified that the person was not on layoff from a job; however, 7% of those verification attempts appeared to be “presumptive” (e.g., disabled persons who could have been laid off from a job).

AB (Was name/Were you) TEMPORARILY absent or on vacation from a job or business?

In spite of the fact that the AB item was only read as worded 60% of the time, there were relatively few problems observed with this question. As noted above, interviewers often know that target persons are retired or disabled from prior ACS items and interviewers attempt to reduce burden by verifying information rather than reading items as worded. That was the case with this item: 33% of the time, interviews verified that the person was not temporarily absent from a job. On the response side, 7% of responses were coded as Oc, which indicates that respondents did not answer the question directly, but provided information that could be interpreted unambiguously as a yes or no answer (e.g., my employer “let me go” after I went out on disability).

RE (Has name/Have you) been informed that (he/she/you) will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?

Item RE was only asked twice over the course of 51 household interviews. No problems were noted on either occasion.

LK (Has name/Have you) been looking for work during the LAST 4 WEEKS?

Interviewers appear to have little or no difficulty with this question. The LK item was read as worded 81% of the time and verified 17% of the time. On the response side, adequate answers

were provided 100% of the time; however, 12% of the time, respondents felt the need to provide more information than simply a yes or no answer (e.g., “Just looking at newspapers. Not really ready to work.”)

AVA LAST WEEK, could (name/you) have started a job if offered one (or returned to work if recalled)?

Item **AVA** was only asked eight times over the course of 51 household interviews. No problems were noted on either the interviewer side or the response side.

- AVB Why is that?**
- (1) Temporary illness
 - (2) Going to school or some other reason

Over the course of 51 household interviews, there was not a single administration of item **AVB**.

- WKL When did (name/you) last work, even for a few days?**
- (1) Within the past 12 months
 - (2) Between 1 and 5 years ago
 - (3) Over 5 years ago or never worked

Even though item **WKL** was read as worded 83% of the time, interviewers struggled with this item. In 37% of the cases, interviewers read one or more of the response options immediately after they read the question itself. Some respondents pause when this question is asked, perhaps trying to remember a specific date, month or year; they don't realize that a specific date or month is not required. Perhaps sensing this uncertainty, some interviewers read all three response options outright; others read the one response option (e.g., over 5 years ago) that seems most appropriate to the respondents status (e.g., retired) and age (e.g., 85). On the response side, respondents provided adequate answers 93% of the time, no doubt helped by the response options that interviewers sometimes provided. Inadequate answers (e.g., “Haven't worked in a long time.”) were relatively rare (5%).

WKW How many weeks did (name/you) work DURING THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS? Count paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service in the total.

As the interviewer and respondent codes confirm, item **WKW** is a very poorly designed questionnaire item, especially for an interviewer-administered survey. Interviewers find it difficult to read the question as worded, in part because the question itself precedes the clarification statement and in part because some of the information in the clarification statement (military service) is not relevant to the vast majority of persons for whom the question is asked, so interviewers sometimes leave it out. Respondents struggle with this item, too; some answer in months, because of the way the question is worded, and others seem to ignore the information about counting paid vacation and sick leave—of course, some respondents never hear that

information because sometimes the clarification statement is not read. As noted in my “expert review” memorandum, I believe this item may have more serious issues than just design problems (e.g., unjustified assumptions as to job status and job tenure over the past year).

C. Closing Remarks

The data and comments provided above should be considered preliminary. There are audiotapes from Jeffersonville that have not been coded as yet. Once they have, data will be consolidated and a final report will be prepared.

ACS/BC/M101604

TABLE 1. Percentage and Frequency of Interviewer and Respondent Behavior Codes for ACS Employment Status Items [All Data Collected at the Hagerstown Telephone Center, October 2004]

Q Label	N	Interviewer Codes ¹				N	Respondent Codes ¹							Comments ²	
		E	mC	MC	PVF		AA	qA	IA	RC	INT	D/R	O		
WK	(104)	78% (81)	4% (4)	10% (10)	13% (14)	(104)	98% (102)		2% (2)					21% (22)	V=10%; P=3%. O=12%; Oc=9%.
LA	(45)	67% (30)	2% (1)		36% (16)	(44)	98% (43)		2% (1)					2% (1)	V=22%; V-=7%; F=4%.
AB	(43)	60% (26)	2% (1)		37% (16)	(43)	100% (43)							7% (3)	V=28%; Vs=5%. Oc=7%.
RE	(2)	100% (2)				(2)	100% (2)								Very low N.
LK	(42)	81% (34)	5% (2)		14% (6)	(41)	100% (41)							12% (5)	V=12%. O=5%; Oc=7%.
AVA	(8)	100% (8)				(8)	100% (8)								Very low N.
AVB	(0)					(0)									No observations.
WKL	(41)	83% (34)		5% (2)	63% (26)	(41)	93% (38)	2% (1)	5% (2)					5% (2)	P=15%; V=12%; F=37%.
WKW	(62)	60% (37)	21% (13)	19% (12)	31% (19)	(63)	57% (36)	3% (2)	27% (17)	8% (5)			3% (2)	16% (10)	P=18%; P-=3%; F=8%. O=10%; Oc=6%.

Superscript 1: Because of multiple codes being assigned for a particular question, row percentages for interviewer or respondent behavior codes may sum to values greater than 100 percent.

Superscript 2: In the “Comments” column, aggregated column code categories (e.g., PVF; O) are decomposed, when informative, so that percentages associated with specific codes (e.g., V or F) can be provided.

ABBREVIATIONS: “N” refers to the number of times a question was asked (interviewer behavior codes) or a response given (respondent behavior codes); N is the *base* for all percentage calculations in a particular row. With regard to interviewer codes: “E” refers to an exact question reading, “mC” to a minor change in question wording, “MC” to a major change in wording, and “PVF” to probe, verify, or feedback, respectively. “Vs” refers to a silent verify (i.e., interviewer enters information the respondent provided earlier in lieu of asking the question). With regard to respondent codes: “AA” refers to an adequate answer

(i.e., an answer that matches a precoded response category), “**qA**” refers to a qualified answer, “**IA**” refers to an inadequate answer (i.e., one that does not match a precoded response category), “**RC**” refers to a request for clarification, “**INT**” refers to an interruption (usually with an answer) by the respondent, “**D**” refers to a response of “don’t know”, “**R**” refers to a refusal to answer the question, and “**O**” refers to other (i.e., a miscellaneous category). Use of the negative sign (-) indicates that a particular interviewer behavior was poorly executed; for example, **V-** might refer to a probe question that was leading.

Date: 18 October 2004
To: Jennifer Rothgeb
From: Jim Esposito
Subject: Preliminary Interviewer Debriefing Findings/Data [HTC and TTC]:
ACS Employment Status Items

A. Background

As part of a multiple-method evaluation plan, fifteen American Community Survey (ACS) interviewers were debriefed in two separate sessions; one group was debriefed in person (Hagerstown Telephone Center, October 8) and the second was debriefed via videoconference (Tucson Telephone Center, October 13). Nine HTC interviewers participated in the first debriefing and six TTC interviewers participated in the second debriefing; at my request, all six of the TTC interviewers were bilingual and *their debriefing focused on ACS interviews conducted with Spanish-language respondents*.

Prior to the start of ACS interviewing in October, participating interviewers were provided with a log form on which to record any problems they or respondents had experienced with the employment-status items during October interviewing. A debriefing protocol, which included an item-rating task, was prepared prior to the debriefing session. After the moderator and the interviewers had introduced themselves, and prior to a formal discussion of the employment-status items, the moderator asked interviewers to rate each item using a rating form provided by the moderator (see **Table 1**). The rating task makes it possible to assess the relative magnitude of problems experienced with each of the target items, something that is difficult to do when interviewers are simply asked to discuss problems in a group setting.

A brief item-by-item summary of the problems/issues mentioned during the discussion phase of the debriefing are provided below.

B. Item-by-Item Summary of Issues/Problems

As noted in the summary of behavior coding findings, the most common sequence of items observed for person-based interviews was the WK-WKW sequence (for employed persons) followed by the WK-LA-AB-LK-WKL pattern (for the unemployed and those not-in-the-labor-force). It stands to reason that the information provided for high-frequency items (WK, WKW) will have greater empirical grounding than items that are asked less frequently (LA, AB, LK and WKL) or those that are asked very infrequently (RE, AVA, AVB).

LAST WEEK, did (name/you) do ANY work for either pay or profit?

Read if necessary: Include any work even if (he/she/you) worked only one hour, or helped without pay in a family business or farm for 15 hours or more, or (was/ were) on active duty in the Armed Forces.

Of the nine items evaluated (see **Table 1**), HTC interviewers rated **WK** as the second most difficult item in the set (2.89) and TTC interviews rated it first (2.83). Some of the problems/issues identified by interviewers are summarized below. Also, see **Table 2** for other qualitative information relevant to the WK item.

HTC Debriefing Session: WK

Some **RSPs** (respondents) will answer: “Other than my usual job.” Or, “Well, yeah, I worked (in a testy tone).” Or “I had a job.” **INTs** (interviewers) claim this is not a rare event. Suggested revised wordings: “Last week, did you work at a job or business.” “Last week, did you have a job?”

In some cases, when a RSP asks what do you mean by that item (WK), the INT will answer: “Did you have a job?” In fact, one INT mentioned that he “routinely” adds that question after asking WK as worded. One INT mentioned that RSPs who have English as a second language really seem to have a problem with this item (and with the layoff question).

Sometimes multiple-job holders and the self-employed will raise issues with this question. For example, some multiple-job holders will ask: “Do you mean, other than my regular job?” or “At which job?”

Some RSPs, especially those who work at “standard/regular jobs” (e.g., full or part-time jobs; 52 weeks a year; corporate or government employer), are confused by the phrase “pay or profit”.

The WK question is the place where some of those who are retired from the workforce or disabled announce their status; sometimes this information becomes available when RSPs answer the disability questions, which precede the employment-status items. Especially problematic for such individuals is when INTs continue to ask the employment items without acknowledging that the person is retired or disabled; sometimes, such individuals feel that INTs are not listening. Some INTs go into “verification mode” after the RSP identifies himself (or the target person) as retired or disabled; others acknowledge the RSP’s status but tell the RSP that they have to read the questions as worded—that usually works. One INT actually elaborates on the WK question’s intent by asking such RSPs if they have done *any type of work for pay or profit*—this is excellent interviewing practice, but I suspect it is rare.

Sometimes RSPs will answer “no” to this question when the INT knows the answer should be “yes”. One INT attributes this to a “lapse in memory” and he probes, “So, you didn’t work last week?”, to which the RSP says, “Oh, yeah, I worked.” Usually, it is something that the RSP has said earlier in the interview that strongly suggests that he/she does work. Sometimes INTs don’t catch the error until several questions later, when the RSP says, “Well, I worked last week.” One INT mentioned having RSPs who would answer “no” because they got paid bi-weekly or monthly.

INTs rarely read the “read-if-necessary” statement, though on occasion they do have to clarify that the question refers to *any work for pay*, even if only one day, during the reference week. Also, no problems were noted with respect to the reference period, “last week”. [See Table 2 for other relevant qualitative information on these issues.]

TTC Debriefing Session: WK

One INT communicated the following: “Most of the time, when it is a Hispanic case, [the RSP] will say ‘no’. And then you ask them again, and they don’t understand what you mean by ‘pay or profit’. They will say, ‘What do you mean, something besides my job, my regular job?’” This happens “quite a bit.” A second INT agreed, they don’t understand “pay or profit”. When asked how she might reword the question, she said: “Did you work last week.” A third INT said that this problem/issue is not limited to Spanish-language households: “They think we are asking about something outside their regular employment.” Probing is often required: “You did *not* work last week *at all*? Did you have some type of work?” To which RSPs will say, “Just my regular job.” If an INT does not probe, she/he runs into problems later on when the temporarily-absent or layoff questions are asked. With respect to “pay of profit”, some RSPs are confused as to how to respond: Some will answer ‘no’ if they are not asked this question during a pay week. Some INTs have experienced this problem with RSPs paid on a bi-weekly basis, while others have not.

There is a Spanish version of the ACS, but the translation is not always optimal. The WK item is a case in point. Some INTs feel the question need to be more direct: “Did you work or not?”

In a moment punctuated with levity and seriousness, when asked about volunteer work, the group just burst out into laughter when one member of the group replied that their RSPs are not interested in *volunteer* work. A second INT quietly added that many Latinos need to work two jobs just to survive. There is no confusion with respect to volunteer work.

Possible alternative wordings of the WK question: (1) “Did you work last week?”; (2) “Did you have a job?”; or (3) “Last week, did you work?”

When asked what they do if a RSP is identified as retired on disabled earlier in the ACS (e.g., during the disability series), most INTs acknowledge the person’s status and either verify the expected answer to each of the employment items or tell the RSP they still have to ask the questions as worded.

Note: The TTC group lost two members at this point (childcare responsibilities). We completed the debriefing session with four participants.

LA LAST WEEK, (was name/were you) on layoff from a job?

Of the nine items evaluated (see Table 1), HTC interviewers rated **LA** as the fifth most difficult item in the set (1.78) and TTC interviews rated it sixth (1.17). Some of the problems/issues identified by interviewers are summarized below.

HTC Debriefing Session: LA

Some INTs report/contend that the concept of “layoff” is not well understood by RSPs (see next bullet). Some RSPs understand it to mean a temporary separation from a job (e.g., seasonal layoffs) and others understand it to mean a permanent separation (e.g., downsizing). One INT said she has to explain this concept frequently; the explanation seems to work for her, because she then experiences fewer problems when she gets to the question on recall to work (RE). For some RSPs, the reasoning seems to be: “They had a job and they are not working, so they are laid-off.” Some employers tell their employees that they are being “laid-off” so they can collect unemployment benefits.

One INT mentioned a case where the spouse said her husband was “laid off” but the INT learned later in the series that the husband wasn’t really laid off, he was downsized (fired) and replaced by a younger worker. The INT backed up and changed the entry to the layoff question. A brief discussion ensued on the concept of “layoff”. Some interviews reserve the term layoff for temporary breaks in service from an employer; others view it as a euphemism for losing a job permanently. [Note: These comments were communicated earlier in the debriefing, during the discussion of the WK question.]

TTC Debriefing Session: LA

One INT noted that, in Spanish, the term “suspendido” (phonetic spelling)—suspended—is used to communicate the concept of “layoff.” From his perspective (a native English speaker), it almost sounds like this might refer to having done something wrong and being “on suspension from work”, as opposed to being laid off. The native Spanish-speaking INTs did not perceive this wording as problematic.

When asked how a seasonal worker might answer the question on layoff, one RSP said that such individuals would just say that they were not working. Seasonal workers, almost by definition, are on the move: If not going to another job someplace else, they are heading home to see family or they are doing something else. Sometimes they work for the same employer, but assume a different set of duties.

AB (Was name/Were you) TEMPORARILY absent or on vacation from a job or business?

Of the nine items evaluated (see Table 1), HTC interviewers rated **AB** as the sixth most difficult item in the set (1.44) and TTC interviews rated it third (1.67). Some of the problems/issues identified by interviewers are summarized below.

HTC Debriefing Session: AB

No problems/issues identified.

TTC Debriefing Session: AB

One INT mentioned that some RSPs request clarification on what is meant by “temporary”, which does not appear to be difficult to explain.

RE (Has name/Have you) been informed that (he/she/you) will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?

Of the nine items evaluated, HTC interviewers rated **RE** as the least difficult item (1.11) in the set and TTC interviews rated it sixth (1.17). Some of the problems/issues identified by interviewers are summarized below.

HTC Debriefing Session: RE

One INT mentioned that this is where she gets the “real story” on layoff; that is to say, this is where a RSP will explain what actually happened (i.e., the person is on temporary layoff and expects to be recalled or that she/he was downsized, fired or laid off permanently).

TTC Debriefing Session: RE

INT note that there is a great deal of variety in the work that Latinos do. Many work standard/regular jobs (e.g., 40 hours a week, 52 weeks a year); others do more seasonal work. With regard to the latter, my impression from this brief discussion is that there are few opportunities for seasonal workers to rest between jobs, and therefore they experience only brief periods of unemployment. Of course, this lay impression could be totally inaccurate.

LK (Has name/Have you) been looking for work during the LAST 4 WEEKS?

Of the nine items evaluated, HTC interviewers rated **LK** as the sixth most difficult item in the set (1.44) and TTC interviews rated it eighth (1.00). Some of the problems/issues identified by interviewers are summarized below.

HTC Debriefing Session: LK

One INT contends that most RSPs will answer “yes” to this question, “whether they were [looking] or not. Because they are embarrassed that they have to look.” For younger target persons (e.g., 15 year olds), a parent will often say, “[He/she] is not old enough to work.”

When specifically asked by the moderator, INTs mentioned that RSPs rarely (if ever) ask what we mean by “looking for work.” Also, they rarely volunteer what they were doing if they were looking.

TTC Debriefing Session: LK

No problems/issues identified.

AVA LAST WEEK, could (name/you) have started a job if offered one (or returned to work if recalled)?

Of the nine items evaluated, HTC interviewers rated **AVA** as the sixth most difficult item in the set (1.44) and TTC interviews rated it eighth (1.00). Some of the problems/issues identified by interviewers are summarized below.

HTC Debriefing Session: AVA

One INT said that he had had RSPs who answered, “Well, nobody offered me one.”

TTC Debriefing Session: AVA

No problems/issues identified.

AVB Why is that?

- (1) **Temporary illness**
- (2) **Going to school or some other reason**

Of the nine items evaluated, HTC interviewers rated **AVB** as the third most difficult item in the set (2.00) and TTC interviews rated it fifth (1.20). Some of the problems/issues identified by interviewers are summarized below.

HTC Debriefing Session: AVB

One INT mentioned that when she gets a “no” answer to this question it was because the target person was going to college or was a stay-at-home mom.

TTC Debriefing Session: AVB

The only time this question tends to be asked is when the target person is younger and still in school; he/she, therefore, cannot take a job immediately.

WKL When did (name/you) last work, even for a few days?

- (1) Within the past 12 months
- (2) Between 1 and 5 years ago
- (3) Over 5 years ago or never worked

Of the nine items evaluated, HTC interviewers rated **WKL** as the third most difficult item (2.00) in the set and TTC interviews rated it fourth (1.50). Some of the problems/issues identified by interviewers are summarized below.

HTC Debriefing Session: WKL

Several INTs said that they often read the response options to RSPs; this is especially true with respect to retired persons—they seem to be the ones that have the most difficulty with this item. When the target person is very old (e.g., 90s), the INT may simply read the last response option, which is generally sufficient to get a codeable response.

On rare occasions, a RSP will answer this question with a response of “last week.” When this happens, some INTs recognize there is a problem and will back up to the WK question and emphasize the wording “ANY work” last week. One INT noted that some RSPs get into the mode of answering “no” to a series of prior questions (e.g., like the disability and military service items that precede the employment items) and sometimes this carries over to the WK question, even though there is a transition statement (which not all INTs read). This misreporting seems to be particularly true when the RSP is answering for other persons in the household.

TTC Debriefing Session: WKL

INTs often read all three of the response options when asking this question. When interviewing the man of the household about his spouse, one INT mentioned that she first reads the three response options and then adds “or has she ever worked outside the home.”

WKW How many weeks did (name/you) work DURING THE PAST TWELVE MONTHS? Count paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service in the total.

Of the nine items evaluated, HTC interviewers rated **WKW** item the most difficult item (3.00) in the set and TTC interviews rated it second (2.67). Some of the problems/issues identified by interviewers are summarized below.

HTC Debriefing Session: WKW

One INT expressed the group’s feeling very succinctly: “Worst question on the entire survey.” One INT suggested a more explicit reference period (e.g., from October 2003 through October 2004); especially now, near the end of the calendar year, some RSPs will simply use the full calendar year as their reference period January through December).

Another INT mentioned that some RSPs apparently do not know that there are 52 weeks in a year.

This question is very problematic for teachers, who are not certain how to handle summer vacations. One INT probes to determine if the teacher has a ten- or a twelve-month contract, or simply asks if the teacher was paid during the summer months. [Note: Nine- or ten-month contracts are problematic in that an INT will often multiply by four to compute the number of weeks (e.g., 9 times 4 equals 36), which for a nine-month contract is incorrect—a more accurate answer would be 39 months, and that is only if the person does not take a second job during the summer months.] INTs claim that they always read the “clarification statement” that follows WKW, and maybe those INTs participating in the HTC debriefing actually do; but, on the whole, behavior-coding data suggests otherwise.

This item is also problematic for multiple-job holders. One INT probes multiple-job holders as follows: “Since you have more than one job, please describe the one at which you have worked the most hours.” [Note: This INT seemed to be basing his strategy on what gets done in the CPS with respect to multiple-job holders (i.e., RSPs are told to report on their main job.) Other INTs consider all jobs and all the weeks during the past twelve months for which the person may have been paid. One INT offered the following incisive comment: “The thing with the employment questions, which does get to be hairy sometimes when people have two or three jobs, is that for some of the questions you are only asking about that one job [the main job] ... but then when it comes to total income, we want all of them.”

One INT mentioned a case in which the respondent had started a 40-hours-per-week job fairly recently, in addition to a 20-hours a week job at which he had been working for some time; it was the INT’s understanding that he was supposed to collect industry-and-occupation data for the full-time job, and not the part-time job. This INT said she/he takes both jobs into account when collecting data for WKW; even if that is true, it would seem to be the case that RSPs might answer this item incorrectly if

they are not explicitly informed to include all jobs worked during the past twelve months.

One INT confirmed that it is really important to be skeptical about (and probe after) answers like “50 weeks”, because most RSPs probably don’t hear, or don’t process, the information provided in the clarification statement (i.e., count paid vacation); as a result, they do not include those two weeks of paid vacation. There appear to be differences among INTs with respect to how much probing they are willing to do in order to get an accurate answer to this question.

INTs generally agreed that the WKW item is difficult for parents of teenage children; they just don’t always know what these kids are doing.

TTC Debriefing Session: WKW

One INT reads the question as worded and immediately adds that there are 52 weeks in a year. Often, a RSP will answer 48 weeks, to which this INT feels compelled to probe regarding paid vacation—and often she finds that the RSP was paid for those four missing weeks. A second RSP was surprised by how many RSP don’t seem to know that there are 52 weeks in a year. Whenever he gets an answer of less than 52 weeks, like the first INT, he probes to determine if the RSP (or the target person) was paid for any of those missing weeks. This second INT specifically tells RSPs that this question refers to all jobs held during the reference period.

C. Responses to General Probes

G1 Do the questions in the employment-status series flow well (e.g., absence of awkward transitions; little or no redundancy)? If not, where and how can the flow be improved?

HTC Debriefing Session:

One INT asked if there was some way to simplify the employment-status series for retired persons.

TTC Debriefing Session:

Note: Did not have time to ask this probe question to the Tucson group.

G2 Any problems with proxy responding, such as teens answering for the household or parents answering for teens?

HTC Debriefing Session:

INTs avoid interviewing teenagers largely because parents go ballistic when they do so. The only exception would be when INTs are down to the last few days of interviewing for the month—and are desperate for completes.

TTC Debriefing Session:

Again, INTs avoid younger RSPs; in fact, it is often counter-productive to do so since they often do not know the answers to many of the ACS questions. A second INT noted, however, that the Latin 15-year-olds know more than their Anglo counterparts about what is going on in the household, because they are usually the interpreters for the family.

One INT noted that RSPs will answer the ACS questions for themselves, but they are very reluctant to answer for other household members. A second RSP added that a parent often knows where an older child works, but few if any of the details about the job.

G3 If there was one question in the employment-status series that you could change, what would it be? How would you change this item?

HTC Debriefing Session:

Items WK and WKW; more specifically, fix WK and change (or get rid of) WKW. With respect to WK, ask about a job or business; get rid of “pay or profit.” With respect to WKW, use an explicit reference period.

TTC Debriefing Session:

One INT suggested that we drop “pay or profit” from the WK item. Just ask, “Last week, did you do any work?”

D. Closing Remarks

The data and comments provided above should be considered preliminary. When time permits, a more detailed final report will be prepared.

Table 1. Difficulty Ratings Assigned to ACS Employment Status Questions

Item	TC	Interviewer Number									Mean	SD	
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9			
<i>WK</i>	HTC	4	3	2	2	4	2	2	3	4*		2.89	<i>0.928</i>
	TTC	3	2	3	5	2	2					2.83	<i>1.169</i>
<i>LA</i>	HTC	2	1	4	1	2	1	3	1	1		1.78	<i>1.093</i>
	TTC	1	1	1	1	2	1					1.17	0.408
<i>AB</i>	HTC	1	1	2	2	1	1	2	2	1		1.44	<i>0.527</i>
	TTC	2	1	2	2	1	2					1.67	<i>0.516</i>
<i>RE</i>	HTC	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2	1		1.11	<i>0.333</i>
	TTC	1	1	1	1	1	2					1.17	<i>0.408</i>
<i>LK</i>	HTC	2	1	1	1	2	1	1	2	2		1.44	<i>0.527</i>
	TTC	1	1	1	1	1	1					1.00	<i>0.000</i>
<i>AVA</i>	HTC	2	2	1	1	1	1	2	2	1		1.44	<i>0.527</i>
	TTC	1	1	1	1	1	1					1.00	<i>0.000</i>
<i>AVB</i>	HTC	-	2	-	1	-	-	3	2	-		2.00	<i>0.817</i>
	TTC	1	1	-	1	1	2					1.20	<i>0.447</i>
<i>WKL</i>	HTC	2	2	2	3	2	1	2	2	2		2.00	<i>0.500</i>
	TTC	1	2	2	1	2	1					1.50	<i>0.548</i>
<i>WKW</i>	HTC	3	4	3	4	2	5	3	1	2		3.00	<i>1.225</i>
	TTC	2	2	4	2	3	3					2.67	<i>0.817</i>

Question and Scale Used to Rate Problematic ACS Employment-Status Questions

Q. Based on your experiences with this item since you have been conducting ACS interviews, about how frequently did the *respondents* you interviewed have difficulty providing an adequate answer to this question?

A/1: Never or rarely → 0 to 10% of the time

B/2: Occasionally → some % between A and C

C/3: About Half the Time → approximately 40-to-60% of the time

D/4: A Good Deal of the Time → some % between C and E

E/5: Almost Always or Always → 90 to 100% of the time

Abbreviations: “TC” for telephone center; “HTC” for Hagerstown Telephone Center (N=9); “TTC” for Tucson Telephone Center (N=6). A dash (-) is used to signify that there was an insufficient number of cases to rate item.

*** Notes:** TTC interviewers (all of whom were bilingual) were asked to base their ratings on their Spanish-language interviews only. HTC interviewer number 9 assigned a range of values for the WK item (i.e., “C-E”); the average of these values was used (D; 4).

Table 2. Unscripted Probes for the ACS “Work” Question (WK)

Probe Question Wording		
	Q1	“If while you were interviewing <i>today</i> , a respondent asked what we mean by ‘last week’, how would you answer?” [Note: At the HTC, “today” was a Friday. At the TTC, “today” was a Tuesday.]
	Q2	“About how frequently do you read the ‘read-if-necessary’ statement when you ask this question [WK]?”
INT ID	Probe	Interviewer [INT] Response
HTC1	Q1 Q2	[Interviewer misunderstood what was being asked.] 0%
HTC2	Q1 Q2	“Between Sunday and Saturday of last week. Give calendar dates.” 0.5%
HTC3	Q1 Q2	“From last Sunday to Saturday and give dates from calendar.” 1%
HTC4	Q1 Q2	“Within the last seven days.” 0%
HTC5	Q1 Q2	“The last seven days.” 0%
HTC6	Q1 Q2	“Sunday through Saturday.” 0%
HTC7	Q1 Q2	“Week ago today or Monday thru Friday last week.” 0%
HTC8	Q1 Q2	“Last Week, meaning from Sunday, 10/3, to Saturday, 10/10.” 1%
HTC9	Q1 Q2	“Go to calendar and give dates of last week.” “Maybe 1%, very rarely.”
TTC1	Q1	“From last Sunday through the following Saturday, just as in

		CPS.”
	Q2	0%
TTC2	Q1	“I would say or mention the date and days previous to date when question is being asked.”
	Q2	10%
TTC3	Q1	“Sunday through Saturday of last week.”
	Q2	5%
TTC4	Q1	“Sunday through Saturday of week prior to interview week.”
	Q2	10%
TTC5	Q1	[Blank.]
	Q2	30%
TTC6	Q1	“Past work week.”
	Q2	100%

Question Wording for Cognitive Testing

10/22/2004

ACS Labor Force Questions Test Version 1 - - (SAQ)

Q23a. LAST WEEK, did this person work for pay at a job (or business)?

Yes - - SKIP to question 24.

No - - Did not work (or retired)

Q23b. LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for pay, even for as little as one hour?

Yes

No - - SKIP to 29

--

Q24 - Q28 - JOURNEY TO WORK QUESTIONS

F *Answer questions 29-32 ONLY IF this person did NOT work last week. Otherwise, SKIP to question 33.*

--

Q29a. LAST WEEK, was this person on layoff from a job?

Yes - - SKIP to question 29c

No

Q29b. LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?

Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave, other personal reasons, etc. ---
SKIP to question 32

No --SKIP to question 30

Q29c. Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?

Yes - - SKIP to question 31

No

Q30. During the LAST 4 WEEKS, has this person been ACTIVELY looking for work?

Yes

No- - SKIP to question 32

Q31. LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work if recalled?

- Yes, could have gone to work
 - No, because of own temporary illness
 - No, because of all other reasons (in school, etc.)
-

Q32. When did this person last work, even for a few days?

- Within the past 12 months
 - 1 to 5 years ago - SKIP to question 35
 - Over 5 years ago or never worked - SKIP to question 41
-

Q33. During the PAST 12 MONTHS (a total of 52 weeks), in how many WEEKS did this person work, even for a few hours? Include paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service as work.

Weeks

10/22/2004

ACS Labor Force Questions - Test Version 2 (SAQ)

Q23. Did this person work for pay at ANY time LAST WEEK?

- Yes .
- No - - SKIP to 29

-

Q24 - Q28 - JOURNEY TO WORK QUESTIONS

F *Answer questions 29-32 ONLY IF this person did NOT work last week. Otherwise, SKIP to question 33.*

-

Q29a. LAST WEEK, was this person on layoff from a job?

- Yes - - SKIP to question 29c
- No

-

Q29b. LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?

- Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave, other personal reasons, etc. --- SKIP to question 32
- No --SKIP to question 30

-

Q29c. Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?

- Yes - - SKIP to question 31
- No

-

Q30. During the LAST 4 WEEKS, has this person been looking for work?

- Yes
- No- - SKIP to question 32

-

Q31. LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work if recalled?

- Yes, could have gone to work
- No, because of own temporary illness
- No, because of all other reasons (in school, etc.)

-
Q32. When did this person last work, even for a few days?

Within the past 12 months

1 to 5 years ago - SKIP to question 35

Over 5 years ago or never worked - SKIP to question 41

--
Q33. During the PAST 12 MONTHS (a total of 52 weeks), in how many WEEKS did this person work? Include paid vacation, paid sick leave and military service as work.

Weeks

11/30/2004

ACS Labor Force Questions - Test Version 2 (CATI)

Q19. **Now I am going to ask some questions about work-related activities.**

Did (you/name) work for pay at ANY time LAST WEEK?

Yes → go to 20

No → go to 25

DK → go to 25

Ref → go to 25

Q20 - Q24 - JOURNEY TO WORK questions

Q25. **LAST WEEK, (was <Name>/were you) on layoff from a job?**

Yes → go to 27

No → go to 26

DK → go to 26

Ref → go to 26

Q26. **LAST WEEK, (was <Name>/were you) TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business because of vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave or some other personal reason?**

Yes → go to 30

No → go to 28

DK → go to 28

Ref → go to 28

Q27. **Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?**

Yes → go to 29

No → go to 28

DK → go to 28

Ref → go to 28

Q28. **During the LAST 4 WEEKS, (has <Name>/have you) been looking for work?**

Yes → go to 29

No → go to 30

DK → go to 29

Ref → go to 29

Q29. **LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work if recalled?**

Yes, could have gone to work

No, because of own temporary illness

No, because of all other reasons (in school, etc.)

Q30. **When did this person last work, even for a few days?**

Within the past 12 months

1 to 5 years ago - SKIP to next person.

Over 5 years ago or never worked - SKIP to next person.

Q31. **In the past 12 months, there were 52 weeks. In how many of these weeks did (<Name>/you) work, even for a few hours? Count paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service as work.**

_____ (Go to Q32)

Q32. **During the PAST 12 MONTHS, in the WEEKS WORKED, how many hours did this person usually work each WEEK?**

_____ Usual hours worked each WEEK

11/29/2004

ACS Labor Force Questions - Test Version 2 (CAPI)

Q19. Now I am going to ask some questions about work-related activities.
Did (you/name) work for pay at ANY time LAST WEEK?

Yes → go to 20

No → go to 25

DK → go to 25

Ref → go to 25

Q20 - Q24 - JOURNEY TO WORK questions

Q25. LAST WEEK, (was <Name>/were you) on layoff from a job?

Yes → go to 27

No → go to 26

DK → go to 26

Ref → go to 26

Q26. LAST WEEK, (was <Name>/were you) TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business because of vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave or some other personal reason?

Yes → go to 30

No → go to 28

DK → go to 28

Ref → go to 28

Q27. Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?

Yes → go to 29

No → go to 28

DK → go to 28

Ref → go to 28

Q28. During the LAST 4 WEEKS, (has <Name>/have you) been looking for work?

Yes → go to 29

No → go to 30

DK → go to 29

Ref → go to 29

Q29. **LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work if recalled?**

- Yes, could have gone to work
 - No, because of own temporary illness
 - No, because of all other reasons (in school, etc.)
-

Q30. **When did this person last work, even for a few days?**

- Within the past 12 months
 - 1 to 5 years ago - SKIP to next person.
 - Over 5 years ago or never worked - SKIP to next person.
-

Q31. **There were 52 weeks in the past 12 months. In how many of these weeks did (you/Name) work, even for a few hours? Include paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service as work.**

Weeks
_____ (Go to Q32)

Q32. **During the PAST 12 MONTHS, in the WEEKS WORKED, how many hours did this person usually work each WEEK?**

_____ Usual hours worked each WEEK

11/9/2004

Cognitive Interview Protocols

ACS Labor Force Questions - Test Version 1 (SAQ)

Labor Force Questions - (Researcher: Refer to Appendix for the BLS definitions of labor force concepts and their measurement objectives.)

Q8a. LAST WEEK, did this person work for pay at a job (or business)?

Yes - - SKIP to question 9.

No - - Did not work (or retired)

Q8b. LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for pay, even for as little as one hour?

Yes

No - - SKIP to 14

Research Objective: From Q8a and 8b we want to determine if we are picking up marginal, casual workers and whether they are being picked up in Q8a or Q8b. We want to get a sense of what type of work they do, how much they work, if the work is paid work and if they do this work on a regular basis. We are also interested in knowing if we are correctly measuring those who work at more regular jobs. We also want to determine respondents' interpretation of the terms "last week", "work", "job", and "business". Also, for persons perceived or for whom it's known are retired, self-employed, and/or students we want to get a sense of their work arrangement.

*****PROBES** (Administer AFTER respondent has ANSWERED the ACS question he/she reads.)

If yes, to Q8a:

For Person 1 only: ● In your own words what is question 8a asking?

● Look at Q8a.

What is your interpretation of the phrase "work for pay"?

What is your interpretation of the term "job"?

● How did you interpret the parenthetical phrase "(or business)"?

● Are you paid on a weekly basis?

If no, ask: Did this question cause any confusion for you?

● The question asks about "last week". Which days (period of time) do you think that covers?

For Persons 1-5:

● Tell me a little about the work that you/(name) did last week.

● About how many hours did you/(name) work last week?

● Were you/Was (name) being paid for the hours you/(name) worked last week?

If yes, to Q8b :

For Person 1 only: ● In your own words, what is question 8b asking?

● What was it about the questions that prompted you to report no in Q8a, but yes in Q8b?

● What is your interpretation of the phrase "work for pay" ?

● Q8b includes the phrase "even for as little as one hour". What do you think we are trying to communicate by that phrase?

● The question asks about "last week". Which days (period of time) do you think that covers?

● Now look back at Q8a. In your opinion, what is question 8a asking?

● And in Q8a, what is your interpretation of the term "job"?

- Looking at Q8a, how did you interpret the parenthetical phrase (or business)?

- For Persons 1-5:**
- Okay, now please tell me a little about the work that you/(name) did last week.
 - About how many hours did you/(name) work last week?
 - Were you/Was (name) being paid for the hours you/(name) worked last week?
 - Do you/Does(name) do this work every week?
 - What is the work arrangement that you /(name) have/has in terms of the schedule and work that you do/(name) does?

If “no” to 8b (and these probes have not been asked before).

For Person 1 only: ● Now look back at Q8a. In your own words what is question 8a asking?

- Look at Q8a.
What is your interpretation of the phrase “work for pay”?
What is your interpretation of the term “job”?
- How did you interpret the parenthetical phrase “(or business)”?
- And now looking at Q8b. In your own words, what is Q8b asking?
- Q8b includes the phrase “even for as little as one hour”. What do you think we are trying to communicate by that phrase?
- The question asks about “last week”. Which days (period of time) do you think that covers?

For Persons 1-5: ● You answered “no” to Q8a and Q8b for (name). Just to make sure we’ve covered everything, is there ANY type of work either paid or unpaid that (name) did last week, either part-time or full-time?

If yes, ask: Tell me a little about the work that (name) did? (Probe to see if it was paid/unpaid, number of hours worked, etc.)
What was it about Q8a and Q8b that caused you not to answer ‘yes’ that this person was working?

Q9 - Q13 - JOURNEY TO WORK QUESTIONS (not included in our research, therefore there are no probes.)

Q14a. LAST WEEK, was this person on layoff from a job?

Yes - - SKIP to question 14c
No

Q14b. LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?

Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave, other personal reasons, etc.--SKIP to question 17
No --SKIP to question 15

Research Objective: We want to determine if respondents absent from work are reporting no, rather than yes. For those reporting no, we want to probe to make sure they don’t have ANY work from which they were absent last week. If they do, then we want to probe to find out the reason they were absent and why they answered no instead of yes to this question. Additional information about type of job, hours usually worked, paid vs unpaid etc. is asked about so we can get an overall sense of their situation.

****** PROBES:**

If yes to Q14b:

For Person 1 only: ● *In your own words what is this question asking?*

For Persons 1-5:

- *What was the main reason you/(name) was/were absent from work last week? (Note: If R indicates they are on layoff, probe to find out what it was about Q14a that prompted them to report 'no' in 14a.)*
- *Tell me a little about the job or business you/(name) were/was absent from last week.*
- *What type of job or business is it?*
- *How many hours do you/does (name) usually work at that job each week?*
- *Were you/Was (name) being paid for the hours you/(name) didn't work last week?*
- *When do you expect to return to work?*
- *How long have you been absent from your job?*
- *What is the work arrangement that you/(name) has/have in terms of the schedule and work that you/(name) do/does at this job or business?*

If no to Q14b:

For Person 1 only: ● *In your own words, what is this question asking?*

For Persons 1-5:

- *Do you/Does (name) have ANY type of job or business that you/(name) did not work at last week?*
 - *If yes:*
 - *What was the reason you did not work last week?*
 - *What was it about the question wording in Q14b that caused you not to report that you were absent from a job or business last week?*
- *Have you/Has (name) ever been absent from a job or business for reasons other than the reasons listed in the question.*
If yes, ask: What were the reasons for those absences?
How would you have answered Q14b if absent from your job or business for those reasons?

Q14c. Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?

Yes - - SKIP to question 16
No

Q15. During the LAST 4 WEEKS, has this person been ACTIVELY looking for work?

Yes
No- - SKIP to question 17

Research Objectives: For Q15, we want to determine whether the person performed active vs passive job search methods. We also want to determine the respondent's interpretation of the reference period. And, in general, we want to know the respondent's interpretation of the question.

**** **PROBES**

If yes:

For Person 1 only:

- *In your own words what is this question asking?*
- *What does it mean to you to "ACTIVELY" look for work?*
- *The question specifies "ACTIVELY looking for work". What kinds of things that a person might do to look for work do you think this is asking about?*

- *With what frequency do you think a person would have to do something in order for it to count as “ACTIVELY looking for work”?*
- *What time period were you thinking about when answering Q15?*
- *The question asks about “during the last 4 weeks”. How would you define the last 4 weeks?*

For Persons 1-5:

- *What are all of the things you/(name) have/has done to find work during the last 4 weeks?*
- *Can you tell me more about what you/(name) did to look for work?*
- *When did you/(name) last do any of these activities to find work?*
- *How frequently during the last four weeks did you/(name) do any of these activities to find work?*

If no:

For Person 1 only:

- *In your own words what is this question asking?*
- *The question specifies “ACTIVELY looking for work”. What kinds of things a person might do to look for work do you think this is asking about?*
- *What time period were you thinking about when answering this question?*
- *The question asks about “during the last 4 weeks”. How would you define the last 4 weeks?*

For Persons 1-5:

- *Is there anything that you have/(name) has done during the last 4 weeks to find work?*
- *Do you/Does (name) currently want a job?*

Researcher: If after probing about each household member who came through Q15, there has been no mention of anyone who was reported to have ONLY looked for work by checking newspaper ads or internet sites, ask the following question:

- *How would you have answered Q15 if a member of your household had checked newspaper ads or internet sites, and nothing else, as a means of looking for work or a job?*

Q16. LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work if recalled?

- Yes, could have gone to work
- No, because of own temporary illness
- No, because of all other reasons (in school, etc.)

Q17. When did this person last work, even for a few days?

- Within the past 12 months
- 1 to 5 years ago - SKIP to next person.
- Over 5 years ago or never worked - SKIP to next person.

Q18. During the PAST 12 MONTHS (a total of 52 weeks), in how many WEEKS did this person work, even for a few hours? Include paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service as work.

Weeks _____ (Go to Q19)

Objectives: We want to determine respondents' interpretation of the question. We specifically want to know about the weeks they are reporting or not reporting. Were there weeks for which they were on vacation, on sick leave? Were they paid vs unpaid weeks. We're curious if folks who work only a few hours some weeks are reporting those weeks in response to this question. For teachers or other seasonal workers we want to know how they are responding to this question. Are they reporting weeks worked or weeks paid? Are they reporting the weeks they might have worked at other jobs in-between their teaching or seasonal jobs?

*****PROBES:**

- Person 1 only:**
- *In your own words what is this question asking?*
 - *What period of time were you thinking about when you answered the question?*

- Persons 1-5:**
- *How did you calculate the answer?*
 - *Tell me a little about your work situation during the past 12 months.*
 - *Did you work at more than one job during the past 12 months?*
If yes, ask: When reporting the number of weeks worked, did you report the weeks that you worked at all jobs?
 - *Did you have any weeks during the past 12 months in which you were on paid sick leave? Paid vacation? Leave for military service?*
If yes, ask: Did you include those weeks in your answer?
 - *Did you have any weeks you did not work which you were not paid for?*
If yes, ask: Did you include those weeks in your answer?

 - *Were there any weeks in which you worked only a few hours? Did you include those weeks in your answer?*

Q19. During the PAST 12 MONTHS, in the WEEKS WORKED, how many hours did this person usually work each WEEK?

____ Usual hours worked each WEEK

Continue with the questions for next person in household.

*******Retrospective PROBES: Administer AFTER the interview has been completed for everyone in the household.**

Family Business or Farm

(Administer if information about a family business or farm (and hhld members working in it) was not discussed earlier.)

- Does anyone in this household have a business or farm?
- Whose business or farm is it?
- Are there any persons in the household who worked at the business last week?
- Were they paid for the work they did?
- About how many hours did they work last week?

If respondent identifies a person who did any paid work or a person who worked without pay (for >15 hours), redirect respondent to Q8A and 8B and ask respondent what it was about those questions that prompted them to respond 'no' rather than 'yes'.

Note to researchers: HHES would like us provide information about when a person goes down a wrong path (specific to the labor force questions) or when they leave one of these questions blank. Specifically HHES is concerned that the presence of Instruction D may be causing some people incorrectly to skip questions 14-17. Or actually the reverse could also happen - folks who are suppose to skip items 14-17 don't skip them and continue down the path even though it is inappropriate. So note whenever this occurs and probe respondents when they seem to taking a wrong path and then catch themselves. OR at the end, refer them back to the item where they took a wrong path and probe as to what it was about the instruction or skip item which prompted them to go down a specific path.

11/9/2004

Cognitive Interview Protocol
ACS Labor Force Questions - Test Version 2 (SAQ)

Labor Force Questions - (Researcher: Refer to Appendix A for the BLS definitions of labor force concepts and their measurement objectives.)

Q23. Did this person work for pay at ANY time LAST WEEK?

Yes

No –SKIP to question 14

Research Objective: From Q8 we want to determine if we are picking up marginal, casual workers. We want to get a sense of what type of work they do, how much they work, if the work is paid work and if they do this work on a regular basis. We are also interested in knowing if we are correctly measuring those who work at more regular jobs. We also want to determine respondents' interpretation of the terms "last week", and "work". Also, for persons perceived or for whom it's known are retired, self-employed, and/or students we want to get a sense of their work arrangement.

*****PROBES (Administer AFTER respondent has ANSWERED the ACS question he/she reads.)**

If yes, to Q8:

- For Person 1 only:**
- In your own words what is question 8a asking?
 - Look at Q8a.
What is your interpretation of the phrase "work for pay"?
 - Are you paid on a weekly basis?
If no, ask: Did this question cause any confusion for you?
 - The question asks about "last week". Which days (period of time) do you think that covers?

- For Persons 1-5:**
- Tell me a little about the work that you/(name) did last week.
 - About how many hours did you/(name) work last week?
 - Were you/Was (name) being paid for the hours you/(name) worked last week?
 - Do you/Does(name) do this work every week?
 - What is the work arrangement that you /(name) have/has in terms of the schedule and work that you do/(name) does?

If "no" to Q8 (and these probes have not been asked before).

- For Person 1 only:**
- Now look back at Q8. In your own words what is question 8 asking?
 - What is your interpretation of the phrase "work for pay"?
 - The question asks about "last week". Which days (period of time) do you think that covers?

- For Persons 1-5:**
- You answered "no" to Q8 for (name). Just to make sure we've covered everything, is there ANY type of work either paid or unpaid that (name) did last week, either part-time or full-time?
If yes, ask: Tell me a little about the work that (name) did? (Probe to see if it was paid/unpaid, number of hours worked, etc.)

What was it about Q8 that caused you not to answer 'yes' that this person was working?

Q9 - Q13 - JOURNEY TO WORK QUESTIONS (not included in our research, therefore there are no probes.)

Q14a. LAST WEEK, was this person on layoff from a job?

Yes - - SKIP to question 14c
No

Q14b. LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?

Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave, other personal reasons, etc.--SKIP to question 17
No --SKIP to question 15

Research Objective: We want to determine if respondents absent from work are reporting no, rather than yes. For those reporting no, we want to probe to make sure they don't have ANY work from which they were absent last week. If they do, then we want to probe to find out the reason they were absent and why they answered no instead of yes to this question. Additional information about type of job, hours usually worked, paid vs unpaid etc. is asked about so we can get an overall sense of their situation.

****** PROBES:**

If yes to Q14b:

For Person 1 only: ● *In your own words what is this question asking?*

For Persons 1-5:

- *What was the main reason you/(name) was/were absent from work last week? (Note: If R indicates they are on layoff, probe to find out what it was about Q14a that prompted them to report 'no' in 14a.)*
- *Tell me a little about the job or business you/(name) were/was absent from last week.*
- *What type of job or business is it?*
- *How many hours do you/does (name) usually work at that job each week?*
- *Were you/Was (name) being paid for the hours you/(name) didn't work last week?*
- *When do you expect to return to work?*
- *How long have you been absent from your job?*
- *What is the work arrangement that you/(name) has/have in terms of the schedule and work that you/(name) do/does at this job or business?*

If no to Q14b:

For Person 1 only: ● *In your own words, what is this question asking?*

For Persons 1-5: ● *Do you/Does (name) have ANY type of job or business that you/(name) did not work at last week?*

- *If yes:*
 - *What was the reason you did not work last week?*
 - *What was it about the question wording in Q14b that caused you not to report that you were absent from a job or business last week?*
- *Have you/Has (name) ever been absent from a job or business for reasons other than the reasons listed in the question.*
If yes, ask: What were the reasons for those absences?
How would you have answered Q14b if absent from your job or business for those reasons?

Q14c. Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?

Yes - - SKIP to question 16
No

Q15. During the LAST 4 WEEKS, has this person been ACTIVELY looking for work?

Yes
No - - SKIP to question 17

Research Objectives: For Q15, we want to determine whether the person performed active vs passive job search methods. We also want to determine the respondent's interpretation of the reference period. And, in general, we want to know the respondent's interpretation of the question.

**** **PROBES**

If yes:

For Person 1 only:

- *In your own words what is this question asking?*
- *What does it mean to you to "ACTIVELY" look for work?*
- *The question specifies "ACTIVELY looking for work". What kinds of things that a person might do to look for work do you think this is asking about?*
- *With what frequency do you think a person would have to do something in order for it to count as "ACTIVELY looking for work"?*
- *What time period were you thinking about when answering Q15?*
- *The question asks about "during the last 4 weeks". How would you define the last 4 weeks?*

For Persons 1-5:

- *What are all of the things you/(name) have/has done to find work during the last 4 weeks?*
- *Can you tell me more about what you/(name) did to look for work?*
- *When did you/(name) last do any of these activities to find work?*
- *How frequently during the last four weeks did you/(name) do any of these activities to find work?*

If no:

For Person 1 only: ● *In your own words what is this question asking?*

- The question specifies “**ACTIVELY** looking for work”. What kinds of things a person might do to look for work do you think this is asking about?
- What time period were you thinking about when answering this question?
- The question asks about “during the last 4 weeks”. How would you define the last 4 weeks?

For Persons 1-5:

- Is there anything that you have/(name) has done during the last 4 weeks to find work?
- Do you/Does (name) currently want a job?

Researcher: If after probing about each household member who came through Q15, there has been no mention of anyone who was reported to have ONLY looked for work by checking newspaper ads or internet sites, ask the following question:

- How would you have answered Q15 if a member of your household had checked newspaper ads or internet sites, and nothing else, as a means of looking for work or a job?

Q16. LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work if recalled?

- Yes, could have gone to work
- No, because of own temporary illness
- No, because of all other reasons (in school, etc.)

Q17. When did this person last work, even for a few days?

- Within the past 12 months
- 1 to 5 years ago - SKIP to next person.
- Over 5 years ago or never worked - SKIP to next person.

Q18. During the PAST 12 MONTHS (a total of 52 weeks), in how many WEEKS did this person work, even for a few hours? Include paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service as work.

Weeks
 _____ (Go to Q19)

Objectives: We want to determine respondents’ interpretation of the question. We specifically want to know about the weeks they are reporting or not reporting. Were there weeks for which they were on vacation, on sick leave? Were they paid vs unpaid weeks. We’re curious if folks who work only a few hours some weeks are reporting those weeks in response to this question. For teachers or other seasonal workers we want to know how they are responding to this question. Are they reporting weeks worked or weeks paid? Are they reporting the weeks they might have worked at other jobs in-between their teaching or seasonal jobs?

*****PROBES:**

- Person 1 only:**
- In your own words what is this question asking?
 - What period of time were you thinking about when you answered the question?

- Persons 1-5:**
- *How did you calculate the answer?*
 - *Tell me a little about your work situation during the past 12 months.*
 - *Did you work at more than one job during the past 12 months?*
 If yes, ask: When reporting the number of weeks worked, did you report the weeks that you worked at all jobs?
 - *Did you have any weeks during the past 12 months in which you were on paid sick leave? Paid vacation? Leave for military service?*
 If yes, ask: Did you include those weeks in your answer?
 - *Did you have any weeks you did not work which you were not paid for?*
 If yes, ask: Did you include those weeks in your answer?

 - *Were there any weeks in which you worked only a few hours? Did you include those weeks in your answer?*

Q19. During the PAST 12 MONTHS, in the WEEKS WORKED, how many hours did this person usually work each WEEK?

_____ Usual hours worked each WEEK

Continue with the questions for next person in household.

*******Retrospective PROBES: Administer AFTER the interview has been completed for everyone in the household.**

Family Business or Farm

(Administer if information about a family business or farm (and hhld members working in it) was not discussed earlier.)

- Does anyone in this household have a business or farm?
- Whose business or farm is it?
- Are there any persons in the household who worked at the business last week?
- Were they paid for the work they did?
- About how many hours did they work last week?

If respondent identifies a person who did any paid work or a person who worked without pay (for >15 hours), redirect respondent to Q8A and 8B and ask respondent what it was about those questions that prompted them to respond 'no' rather than 'yes'.

Note to researchers: HHES would like us provide information about when a person goes down a wrong path (specific to the labor force questions) or when they leave one of these questions blank. Specifically

HHES is concerned that the presence of Instruction D may be causing some people incorrectly to skip questions 14-17. Or actually the reverse could also happen - folks who are suppose to skip items 14-17 don't skip them and continue down the path even though it is inappropriate. So note whenever this occurs and probe respondents when they seem to taking a wrong path and then catch themselves. OR at the end, refer them back to the item where they took a wrong path and probe as to what it was about the instruction or skip item which prompted them to go down a specific path.

11/30/2004

Cognitive Interview Protocol
ACS Labor Force Questions - Test Version 2 (CATI)

Labor Force Questions - (Researcher: Refer to Appendix A for the BLS definitions of labor force concepts and their measurement objectives.)

Q19. Now I am going to ask some questions about work-related activities.
Did (you/name) work for pay at ANY time LAST WEEK?

Yes → go to 20
 No → go to 25
 DK → go to 25
 Ref → go to 25

Research Objective: From Q19 we want to determine if we are picking up marginal, casual workers.. We want to get a sense of what type of work they do, how much they work, if the work is paid work and if they do this work on a regular basis. We are also interested in knowing if we are correctly measuring those who work at more regular jobs. We also want to determine respondents' interpretation of the terms "last week", "work for pay". Also, for persons perceived or for whom it's known are retired, self-employed, and/or students we want to get a sense of their work arrangement, if any.

*****PROBES** (Administer *AFTER* respondent has ANSWERED the ACS question he/she reads.)

If yes, to Q19:

For Person 1 only:

- *In your own words what is this question asking?*
- *What is your interpretation of the phrase "work for pay"?*
- *Are you paid on a weekly basis?*
- *If no, ask: Did this question cause any confusion for you?*
- *The question asks about "last week". Which days (period of time) do you think that covers?*
- *Tell me a little about the work that you/(name) did last week.*
- *About how many hours did you/(name) work last week?*
- *Were you/Was (name) being paid for the hours you/(name) worked last week?*

For Persons 2-5:

- *Okay, now please tell me a little about the work that you/(name) did last week.*
- *About how many hours did you/(name) work last week?*
- *Were you/Was (name) being paid for the hours you/(name) worked last week?*
- *Do you/Does(name) do this work every week?*
- *What is the work arrangement that you /(name) have/has in terms of the schedule and work that you do/(name) does?*

If “no” to Q19

For Person 1 only:

- In your own words what is this question asking?
- What is your interpretation of the phrase “work for pay”?
- The question asks about “last week”. Which days (period of time) do you think that covers?

For Persons 1-5:

- Just to make sure we’ve covered everything, is there ANY type of work either paid or unpaid that (name) did last week, either part-time or full-time?
If yes, ask: Tell me a little about the work that (name) did? (Probe to see if it was paid/unpaid, number of hours worked, etc.)
Reread Q19 and ask respondent what was it about that question that caused him/her not to answer ‘yes’ that (name) was working?

Q20-24 - JOURNEY TO WORK QUESTIONS (not included in our research, therefore there are no probes.)

Q25. LAST WEEK, (was <Name>/were you) on layoff from a job?

Yes → go to 27
No → go to 26
DK → go to 26
Ref → go to 26

Q26. LAST WEEK, (was <Name>/were you) TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business because of vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave or some other personal reason?

Yes → go to 30
No → go to 28
DK → go to 28
Ref → go to 28

Research Objective: We want to determine if respondents absent from work are reporting no, rather than yes. For those reporting no, we want to probe to make sure they don’t have ANY work from which they were absent last week. If they do, then we want to probe to find out the reason they were absent and why they answered no instead of yes to this question. Additional information about type of job, hours usually worked, paid vs unpaid etc. is asked about so we can get an overall sense of their situation.

**** PROBES:

If yes to Q26:

For Person 1 only:

- In your own words what is this question asking?

For Persons 1-5:

- What was the main reason you/(name) was/were absent from work last week? (Note: If R indicates they are on layoff, probe to find out what it was about Q25 that prompted them to report ‘no’ in 25.)
- Tell me a little about the job or business you/(name) were/was absent from last week.
- What type of job or business is it?
- How many hours do you/does (name) usually work at that job each week?
- Were you/Was (name) being paid for the hours you/(name) didn’t work last week?

- *When do you expect to return to work?*
- *How long have you been absent from your job?*
- *What is the work arrangement that you/(name) has/have in terms of the schedule and work that you/(name) do/does at this job or business?*

If no to Q26:

For Person 1 only:

- *In your own words, what is this question asking?*

For Persons 1-5:

- *Do you/Does (name) have ANY type of job or business that you/(name) did not work at last week?*
 - *If yes:*
 - *What was the reason you did not work last week?*
 - *What was it about the question wording in Q26 that caused you not to report that you were absent from a job or business last week?*
- *Have you/Has (name) ever been absent from a job or business for reasons other than the reasons I mentioned in the question.*
If yes, ask: What were the reasons for those absences?
How would you have answered Q26 if absent from your job or business for those reasons?

Q27. Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?

Yes → go to 29
 No → go to 28
 DK → go to 28
 Ref → go to 28

Q28. During the LAST 4 WEEKS, (has <Name>/have you) been looking for work?

Yes → go to 29
 No → go to 30
 DK → go to 29
 Ref → go to 29

Research Objectives: For Q28, we want to determine whether the person performed active vs passive job search methods. We also want to determine the respondent's interpretation of the reference period. And, in general, we want to know the respondent's interpretation of the question.

**** PROBES

If yes:

For Person 1 only:

- *In your own words what is this question asking?*
- *What are all of the things you/(name) have/has done to find work during the last 4 weeks?*
- *Can you tell me more about what you/(name) did to look for work?*
- *When did you/(name) last do any of these activities to find work?*
- *How frequently during the last four weeks did you/(name) do any of these activities to find work?*
- *The question specifies "looking for work". What kinds of things that a person might do to look for work do you think this is asking about?*
- *With what frequency do you think a person would have to do something in order for it to count as "looking for work"?*
- *If the question specified "ACTIVELY looking for work" would that have a different meaning to you?*

- *What does it mean to you to “ACTIVELY” look for work? What type of job search activities would you consider to be “ACTIVE” methods?*
- *What time period were you thinking about when answering this question.*
- *The question asks about “during the last 4 weeks”. How would you define the last 4 weeks?*

For Persons 2-5:

- *What are all of the things you/(name) have/has done to find work during the last 4 weeks?*
- *Can you tell me more about what you/(name) did to look for work?*
- *When did you/(name) last do any of these activities to find work?*
- *How frequently during the last four weeks did you/(name) do any of these activities to find work?*

If no:

For Person 1 only:

- *In your own words what is this question asking?*
- *The question specifies “looking for work”. What kinds of things a person might do to look for work do you think this is asking about?*
- *What time period were you thinking about when answering this question?*
- *The question asks about “during the last 4 weeks”. How would you define the last 4 weeks?*
- *Is there anything that you have/(name) has done during the last 4 weeks to find work?*
- *Do you/Does (name) currently want a job?*
- *If the question specified “ACTIVELY looking for work” would that have a different meaning to you?*
- *What does it mean to you to “ACTIVELY” look for work? What type of job search activities would you consider to be “ACTIVE” methods?*

For Persons 2-5:

- *Is there anything that you have/(name) has done during the last 4 weeks to find work?*
- *Do you/Does (name) currently want a job?*

Researcher: If after probing about each household member who came through Q28, there has been no mention of anyone who was reported to have ONLY looked for work by checking newspaper ads or internet sites, ask the following question:

- *How would you have answered this question if a member of your household had checked newspaper ads or internet sites, and nothing else, as a means of looking for work or a job?*

Q29. LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work if recalled?

- Yes, could have gone to work
- No, because of own temporary illness
- No, because of all other reasons (in school, etc.)

Q30. When did this person last work, even for a few days?

- Within the past 12 months
 - 1 to 5 years ago - SKIP to next person.
 - Over 5 years ago or never worked - SKIP to next person.
-

Q31. In the past 12 months, there were 52 weeks. In how many of these weeks did (<Name>/you) work, even for a few hours? Count paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service as work.

_____ (Go to Q32)

Objectives: We want to determine respondents' interpretation of the question. We specifically want to know about the weeks they are reporting or not reporting. Were there weeks for which they were on vacation, on sick leave? Were they paid vs unpaid weeks. We're curious if folks who work only a few hours some weeks are reporting those weeks in response to this question. For teachers or other seasonal workers we want to know how they are responding to this question. Are they reporting weeks worked or weeks paid? Are they reporting the weeks they might have worked at other jobs in-between their teaching or seasonal jobs?

*****PROBES:**

- Person 1 only:
- *In your own words what is this question asking?*
 - *What period of time were you thinking about when you answered the question?*

- Persons 1-5:
- *How did you calculate the answer?*
 - *Tell me a little about your work situation during the past 12 months.*
 - *Did you work at more than one job during the past 12 months?*
If yes, ask: When reporting the number of weeks worked, did you report the weeks that you worked at all jobs?
 - *Did you have any weeks during the past 12 months in which you were on paid sick leave? Paid vacation? Leave for military service?*
If yes, ask: Did you include those weeks in your answer?
 - *Did you have any weeks you did not work which you were not paid for?*
If yes, ask: Did you include those weeks in your answer?

 - *Were there any weeks in which you worked only a few hours? Did you include those weeks in your answer?*

Q32. During the PAST 12 MONTHS, in the WEEKS WORKED, how many hours did this person usually work each WEEK?

_____ Usual hours worked each WEEK

Continue with the questions for next person in household.

*****Retrospective PROBES: Administer AFTER the interview has been completed for everyone in the household.

Family Business or Farm

(Administer if information about a family business or farm (and hhld members working in it) was not discussed earlier.)

- Does anyone in this household have a business or farm?
- Whose business or farm is it?
- Are there any persons in the household who worked at the business last week?
- Were they paid for the work they did?
- About how many hours did they work last week?

If respondent identifies a person who did any paid work or a person who worked without pay (for >15 hours), return to Q19 and ask respondent what it was about that question that prompted them to respond 'no' rather than 'yes'.

11/29/2004

Cognitive Interview Protocol
ACS Health and Labor Force Questions - Test Version 2 (CAPI)

Labor Force Questions - (Researcher: Refer to Appendix A for the BLS definitions of labor force concepts and their measurement objectives.)

Q19. Now I am going to ask some questions about work-related activities.
Did (you/name) work for pay at ANY time LAST WEEK?

- Yes → go to 20
 No → go to 25
 DK → go to 25
 Ref → go to 25

Research Objective: From Q19 we want to determine if we are picking up marginal, casual workers.. We want to get a sense of what type of work they do, how much they work, if the work is paid work and if they do this work on a regular basis. We are also interested in knowing if we are correctly measuring those who work at more regular jobs. We also want to determine respondents' interpretation of the terms "last week", "work for pay". Also, for persons perceived or for whom it's known are retired, self-employed, and/or students we want to get a sense of their work arrangement, if any.

****PROBES* (Administer *AFTER* respondent has *ANSWERED* the ACS question he/she reads.)

If yes, to Q19:

- For Person 1 only:*
- *In your own words what is this question asking?*
 - *What is your interpretation of the phrase "work for pay"?*
 - *Are you paid on a weekly basis?*
 - *If no, ask: Did this question cause any confusion for you?*
 - *The question asks about "last week". Which days (period of time) do you think that covers?*
 - *Tell me a little about the work that you/(name) did last week.*
 - *About how many hours did you/(name) work last week?*
 - *Were you/Was (name) being paid for the hours you/(name) worked last week?*

- For Persons 2-5:*
- *Okay, now please tell me a little about the work that you/(name) did last week.*
 - *About how many hours did you/(name) work last week?*
 - *Were you/Was (name) being paid for the hours you/(name) worked last week?*
 - *Do you/Does(name) do this work every week?*
 - *What is the work arrangement that you /(name) have/has in terms of the schedule and work that you do/(name) does?*

If “no” to Q19

For Person 1 only:

- In your own words what is this question asking?
- What is your interpretation of the phrase “work for pay”?
- The question asks about “last week”. Which days (period of time) do you think that covers?

For Persons 1-5:

- Just to make sure we’ve covered everything, is there ANY type of work either paid or unpaid that (name) did last week, either part-time or full-time?
If yes, ask: Tell me a little about the work that (name) did? (Probe to see if it was paid/unpaid, number of hours worked, etc.)
Reread Q19 and ask respondent what was it about that question that caused him/her not to answer ‘yes’ that (name) was working?

Q20-24 - JOURNEY TO WORK QUESTIONS (not included in our research, therefore there are no probes.)

Q25. LAST WEEK, (was <Name>/were you) on layoff from a job?

- Yes → go to 27
No → go to 26
DK → go to 26
Ref → go to 26

Q26. LAST WEEK, (was <Name>/were you) TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business because of vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave or some other personal reason?

- Yes → go to 30
No → go to 28
DK → go to 28
Ref → go to 28

Research Objective: We want to determine if respondents absent from work are reporting no, rather than yes. For those reporting no, we want to probe to make sure they don’t have ANY work from which they were absent last week. If they do, then we want to probe to find out the reason they were absent and why they answered no instead of yes to this question. Additional information about type of job, hours usually worked, paid vs unpaid etc. is asked about so we can get an overall sense of their situation.

**** PROBES:

If yes to Q26:

For Person 1 only:

- In your own words what is this question asking?

For Persons 1-5:

- What was the main reason you/(name) was/were absent from work last week? (Note: If R indicates they are on layoff, probe to find out what it was about Q25 that prompted them to report ‘no’ in 25.)
- Tell me a little about the job or business you/(name) were/was absent from last week.
- What type of job or business is it?
- How many hours do you/does (name) usually work at that job each week?
- Were you/Was (name) being paid for the hours you/(name) didn’t work last week?
- When do you expect to return to work?
- How long have you been absent from your job?

- *What is the work arrangement that you/(name) has/have in terms of the schedule and work that you/(name) do/does at this job or business?*
- If no to Q26:
For Person 1 only:*
- *In your own words, what is this question asking?*
- For Persons 1-5:*
- *Do you/Does (name) have ANY type of job or business that you/(name) did not work at last week?*
 - *If yes:*
 - *What was the reason you did not work last week?*
 - *What was it about the question wording in Q26 that caused you not to report that you were absent from a job or business last week?*
 - *Have you/Has (name) ever been absent from a job or business for reasons other than the reasons I mentioned in the question.
If yes, ask: What were the reasons for those absences?
How would you have answered Q26 if absent from your job or business for those reasons?*
- *****

Q27. Has this person been informed that he or she will be recalled to work within the next 6 months OR been given a date to return to work?

- Yes → go to 29
- No → go to 28
- DK → go to 28
- Ref → go to 28

Q28. During the LAST 4 WEEKS, (has <Name>/have you) been looking for work?

- Yes → go to 29
- No → go to 30
- DK → go to 29
- Ref → go to 29

Research Objectives: For Q28, we want to determine whether the person performed active vs passive job search methods. We also want to determine the respondent's interpretation of the reference period. And, in general, we want to know the respondent's interpretation of the question.

**** PROBES

- If yes:*
- For Person 1 only:*
- *In your own words what is this question asking?*
 - *What are all of the things you/(name) have/has done to find work during the last 4 weeks?*
 - *Can you tell me more about what you/(name) did to look for work?*
 - *When did you/(name) last do any of these activities to find work?*
 - *How frequently during the last four weeks did you/(name) do any of these activities to find work?*
 - *The question specifies "looking for work". What kinds of things that a person might do to look for work do you think this is asking about?*
 - *With what frequency do you think a person would have to do something in order for it to count as "looking for work"?*
 - *If the question specified "ACTIVELY looking for work" would that have a different meaning to you?*
 - *What does it mean to you to "ACTIVELY" look for work? What type of job search activities would you consider to be "ACTIVE" methods?*
 - *What time period were you thinking about when answering this question.*

- *The question asks about “during the last 4 weeks”. How would you define the last 4 weeks?*

For Persons 2-5:

- *What are all of the things you/(name) have/has done to find work during the last 4 weeks?*
- *Can you tell me more about what you/(name) did to look for work?*
- *When did you/(name) last do any of these activities to find work?*
- *How frequently during the last four weeks did you/(name) do any of these activities to find work?*

If no:

For Person 1 only:

- *In your own words what is this question asking?*
- *The question specifies “looking for work”. What kinds of things a person might do to look for work do you think this is asking about?*
- *What time period were you thinking about when answering this question?*
- *The question asks about “during the last 4 weeks”. How would you define the last 4 weeks?*
- *Is there anything that you have/(name) has done during the last 4 weeks to find work?*
- *Do you/Does (name) currently want a job?*
- *If the question specified “ACTIVELY looking for work” would that have a different meaning to you?*
- *What does it mean to you to “ACTIVELY” look for work? What type of job search activities would you consider to be “ACTIVE” methods?*

For Persons 2-5:

- *Is there anything that you have/(name) has done during the last 4 weeks to find work?*
- *Do you/Does (name) currently want a job?*

Researcher: If after probing about each household member who came through Q28, there has been no mention of anyone who was reported to have ONLY looked for work by checking newspaper ads or internet sites, ask the following question:

- *How would you have answered this question if a member of your household had checked newspaper ads or internet sites, and nothing else, as a means of looking for work or a job?*

Q29. LAST WEEK, could this person have started a job if offered one, or returned to work if recalled?

- Yes, could have gone to work
- No, because of own temporary illness
- No, because of all other reasons (in school, etc.)

Q30. When did this person last work, even for a few days?

- Within the past 12 months
- 1 to 5 years ago - SKIP to next person.
- Over 5 years ago or never worked - SKIP to next person.

Q31. There were 52 weeks in the past 12 months. In how many of these weeks did (you/Name) work, even for a few hours? Include paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service as work.

Weeks _____ (Go to Q32)

Objectives: We want to determine respondents' interpretation of the question. We specifically want to know about the weeks they are reporting or not reporting. Were there weeks for which they were on vacation, on sick leave? Were they paid vs unpaid weeks. We're curious if folks who work only a few hours some weeks are reporting those weeks in response to this question. For teachers or other seasonal workers we want to know how they are responding to this question. Are they reporting weeks worked or weeks paid? Are they reporting the weeks they might have worked at other jobs in-between their teaching or seasonal jobs?

*****PROBES:**

- Person 1 only:
 - *In your own words what is this question asking?*
 - *What period of time were you thinking about when you answered the question?*

- Persons 1-5:
 - *How did you calculate the answer?*
 - *Tell me a little about your work situation during the past 12 months.*
 - *Did you work at more than one job during the past 12 months?*
If yes, ask: When reporting the number of weeks worked, did you report the weeks that you worked at all jobs?
 - *Did you have any weeks during the past 12 months in which you were on paid sick leave? Paid vacation? Leave for military service?*
If yes, ask: Did you include those weeks in your answer?
 - *Did you have any weeks you did not work which you were not paid for?*
If yes, ask: Did you include those weeks in your answer?

 - *Were there any weeks in which you worked only a few hours? Did you include those weeks in your answer?*

Q32. During the PAST 12 MONTHS, in the WEEKS WORKED, how many hours did this person usually work each WEEK?

____ Usual hours worked each WEEK

Continue with the questions for next person in household.

*****Retrospective PROBES: Administer AFTER the interview has been completed for everyone in the household.

Family Business or Farm

(Administer if information about a family business or farm (and hhld members working in it) was not discussed earlier.)

- Does anyone in this household have a business or farm?
- Whose business or farm is it?
- Are there any persons in the household who worked at the business last week?
- Were they paid for the work they did?
- About how many hours did they work last week?

If respondent identifies a person who did any paid work or a person who worked without pay (for >15 hours), return to Q19 and ask respondent what it was about that question that prompted them to respond 'no' rather than 'yes'.

2006 ACS Content Test Question Wording for “At work,” Temporarily absent,” “Looking for Work,” and “Weeks Worked” Questions for Self-administered Questionnaire (SAQ)

AT WORK

- a. **LAST WEEK, did this person work for pay at a job (or business)?**
- Yes - SKIP to question X
 - No - Did not work (or retired)
- b. **LAST WEEK, did this person do ANY work for pay, even for as little as one hour?**
- Yes
 - No - SKIP to question X

TEMPORARILY ABSENT

LAST WEEK, was this person TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business?

- Yes, on vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave, other family/personal reasons, bad weather, etc. - SKIP to question X
- No – SKIP to question X

LOOKING FOR WORK

During the LAST 4 WEEKS, has this person been ACTIVELY looking for work?

- Yes
- No - SKIP to question X

WEEKS WORKED

- a. **During the PAST 12 MONTHS (52 weeks), did this person work 50 or more weeks? Count paid time off as work.**
- Yes - SKIP to question X
 - No
- b. **How many weeks DID this person work, even for a few hours, including paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service?**
- 50 to 52 weeks
 - 48 to 49 weeks
 - 40 to 47 weeks
 - 27 to 39 weeks
 - 14 to 26 weeks
 - 13 weeks or less

2006 ACS Content Test Question Wording for “At work,” “Temporarily absent,” “Looking for Work,” and “Weeks Worked” Questions for Interviewer-administered Questionnaire (CATI and CAPI)

AT WORK

a. **Now, I am going to ask a series of questions about employment.**

LAST WEEK, did (<Name>/you) work for pay at a job or business?

<1> Yes → go to X

<2> No (did not work or retired) → go to b.

DK → go to X

Ref → go to X

If the person did not work all last week because he/she was on vacation from his/her job, enter no.

b. **LAST WEEK, did (<Name>/you) do ANY work for pay, even for as little as one hour?**

<1> Yes → go to X

<2> No → go to X

DK → go to X

Ref → go to X

TEMPORARILY ABSENT

LAST WEEK, (was <Name>/were you) TEMPORARILY absent from a job or business because of vacation, temporary illness, maternity leave, other family or personal reasons, bad weather, etc.?

<1> Yes → go to X

<2> No → go to X

DK → go to X

Ref → go to X

LOOKING FOR WORK

During the LAST 4 WEEKS, (has <Name>/have you) been ACTIVELY looking for work?

<1> Yes → go to X

<2> No → go to X

DK → go to X

Ref → go to X

WEEKS WORKED

a. During the PAST 12 MONTHS or 52 weeks, did (<Name>/you) work 50 or more weeks? Count paid time off as work.

<1> Yes → go to X

<2> No → go to b.

DK → go to X

Ref → go to X

b. How many weeks DID (<Name>/you) work, even for a few hours, INCLUDING paid vacation, paid sick leave, and military service? Was it:

READ ALL ANSWER CATEGORIES

<1> 50 to 52 weeks

<2> 48 to 49 weeks

<3> 40 to 47 weeks

<4> 27 to 39 weeks

<5> 14 to 26 weeks

<6> 13 weeks or less