U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
On behalf of the Standard Occupational Classification Policy Committee (SOCPC)

February 2010
Questions should be emailed to soc@bls.gov

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How do the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics and the Census Bureau determine if they can collect and report on an occupation? (See Classification Principle 9.)

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) develops estimates of occupational employment and wages for wage and salary workers in nonfarm establishments in its Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) Survey. This survey collects information from business establishments sampled by industry and geographic area. BLS looks at the definition, and at the size and dispersion of (estimated) employment, in determining whether it can collect and report data on an occupation. For OES survey respondents to report on an occupation, the duties or work performed of the occupation must be uniquely defined, i.e., clearly differentiated from those of any other occupations. If the occupation is widely dispersed across areas and/or industries, employment in an occupation must be sizeable to be reliably measured. If the occupation is highly concentrated in a single industry or area, smaller levels of employment can be reliably measured.

The Census Bureau develops estimates of occupational employment of the population with its household-based Current Population (a joint program with BLS) and American Community Surveys. As with BLS above, the Census Bureau is concerned about the size and dispersion of employment in an occupation in determining if it can collect and report data on that occupation. In addition, the Census Bureau considers whether the respondents to its household surveys, who may provide information for themselves as well as for other household members, are likely to report the job titles and job activities associated with an occupation accurately and completely. Household survey respondents tend to give general or informal, rather than specific or technical, occupational titles. For example, a household survey respondent may report "doctor," rather than "pediatrician." This makes it difficult for the Census Bureau to report on such specialized occupations.

2. What is the difference between an occupation and a job?

An occupation is a category of jobs that are similar with respect to the work performed and the skills possessed by the incumbents. A job is the specific set of tasks performed by an individual worker. "Turnpike toll collector" is an example of a job that corresponds to the occupation 41-2011 Cashiers.

3. Why doesn't every job title have its own code in the SOC?

Occupational classification schemes examine and organize the millions of jobs and tens of thousands of job titles in the economy into occupations based upon their similarities as determined by the scheme's classification principles. The organizing principle of the SOC system is work performed rather than job title so there are many fewer occupation codes in the SOC than there are jobs in the economy.

4. What is the difference between the SOC Classification Principles and the Coding Guidelines?

The SOC Classification Principles form the basis on which the SOC system is structured. The Coding Guidelines are intended to assist SOC users in consistently assigning SOC occupational codes to survey responses.

5. Who uses the SOC?

Government agencies that collect and publish occupational statistical data use the SOC. See FAQ number 6 for more detail. At the Federal level, these agencies and programs include:

> Department of Commerce
> > Census Bureau
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> Department of Defense
> Department of Education
> Department of Health and Human Services
> Department of Labor
> > Bureau of Labor Statistics
> > > Employment Projections Program
> > > Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey
> > > National Compensation Survey
> > > National Longitudinal Surveys
> > > Occupational Employment Statistics
> > > Occupational Health and Safety Statistics
> >
> > Employment and Training Administration
> > Employment Standards Administration
>
> Department of Transportation
> Department of Veterans Affairs
> > National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics
>
> Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
> National Science Foundation
> > Division of Science Resources Statistics
>
> Office of Personnel Management

6. Where can I get information on the occupations in the SOC?

Depending on the type of information you are seeking, you may obtain information from several agencies:

a) The U.S. Census Bureau publishes occupational data annually, collected through the American Community Survey (ACS), for the Nation, all States and the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and all counties and places with populations of at least 65,000. The Census Bureau also publishes 3-year ACS data for geographic areas with populations of at least 20,000 and 5-year ACS data for all geographies in the U.S. and Puerto Rico. Census 2010 will collect, classify, and publish occupational data for Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of

Northern Mariana Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Other household surveys publish occupational data at varying levels of detail and geography. Standard tabulations are available through the American FactFinder via the Internet at http://www.census.gov. Information about occupation coding and written reports on occupational trends can be found at http://www.census.gov/hhes/www/ioindex/ioindex.html. For additional information, contact the Census Bureau's Question and Answer Center at http://ask.census.gov or contact the Call Center at (301) 763-INFO.

b) The Department of Defense publishes data that cross-reference military occupational codes of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard with civilian equivalent occupations. Additional information on available data products can be obtained on the Internet at http://www.dmdc.osd.mil; or by writing to Director, Defense Manpower Data Center, 1600 Wilson Blvd., Suite 400, Arlington, VA 22209-2593.

c) The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) publishes data collected through the School and Staffing Survey (SASS) on the employment of elementary and secondary teachers, principals, and other school staff, as well as detailed information on their education, training, and background characteristics. NCES publishes detailed data on postsecondary instructors and professors collected through the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS). In addition, NCES conducts various longitudinal studies that follow high school and college students into their working years and uses the SOC to classify their occupations. Products based on data from these various surveys and programs are available from the specific surveys and programs, which can be found at http://nces.ed.gov/surveys.

d) Biennially, the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Employment Projections (EP) Program publishes the *Occupational Outlook Handbook* and *Career Guide to Industries*. In addition, EP publishes the *Occupational Outlook Quarterly*. For more information about these publications, visit the EP Web site at http://www.bls.gov/emp or contact the Chief, Division of Occupational Outlook, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2 Massachusetts Ave. NE., Room 2135, Washington, DC 20212, telephone (202) 691-5700.

e) The Current Population Survey (CPS), a joint program of the Census Bureau and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, uses the 2002 Census occupational classification system, which is derived from the 2000 Standard Occupational Classification. CPS data series are available on this classification beginning with year 2000. The CPS previously used the 1990 Census occupational classification, which was adapted from the 1980 SOC. CPS data series on the earlier classification are available from 1983-2002; these data are not directly comparable with the current series. The Bureau of Labor Statistics publishes national-level estimates of occupational employment, unemployment, and earnings with demographic detail from the CPS. The CPS homepage on the BLS website is at

http://www.bls.gov/cps/home.htm; contact information for the BLS CPS program can be found at http://www.bls.gov/cps/contact.htm.

f) The Bureau of Labor Statistics' National Compensation Survey (NCS) program provides comprehensive measures of occupational wages; employment cost trends; and benefit incidence and detailed plan provisions. Detailed occupational earnings are available for selected metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas, nine Census divisions, and on a National basis. Employment cost trends and information on the incidence and detailed provision of employee benefit plans are published for major occupational groups. For more information, see the NCS Web site at http://www.bls.gov/ncs/home.htm, call (202) 691-6199, or send an e-mail to NCSInfo@bls.gov. Correspondence may be sent to U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics National Compensation Survey, 2 Massachusetts Ave., NE., Room 4175, Washington, DC 20212-0001.

g) The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Occupational Employment Statistics (OES) program produces cross-industry occupational employment and wage estimates for the Nation, all States, the District of Columbia, Guam, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, metropolitan areas, metropolitan divisions, and nonmetropolitan areas. OES also publishes national industry-specific occupational employment and wage estimates for sectors and 3-, 4-, and selected 5-digit North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) industries. Data are available from the OES home page at http://www.bls.gov/oes/home.htm. For assistance with these data, contact the OES program at (202) 691-6569 or oesinfo@bls.gov. Industry-specific data for States and metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas may be available from the State workforce agencies by contacting the individual State or States for which information is needed. Contact information for the State workforce agencies is available at http://www.bls.gov/bls/ofolist.htm.

h) The Employment and Training Administration's (ETA) Occupational Information Network (O*NET) system is a comprehensive database of occupational competency profiles. ETA sponsors the development, updating, and dissemination of O*NET information through a grant with the North Carolina Employment Security Commission. The O*NET system is based on the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) system and also provides information on additional detailed occupations within a SOC category in selected instances. The O*NET Content Model of occupational descriptors is the foundation for a series of survey questionnaires that go out to incumbent workers in various occupations which form the basis for the O*NET occupational competency profiles. The O*NET system is the successor to the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, which was last published by the Department of Labor in 1991. O*NET information is available via the Internet at http://online.onetcenter.org and also as a downloadable electronic database from the O*NET Resource Center: http://www.onetcenter.org/database.html. For more information, contact O*NET Customer Support at onet@ncmail.net or contact the Department of Labor at o-net@dol.gov . You can also write to the O*NET project director at Office of

Workforce Investment, Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, FPB Room S 4231, 200 Constitution Ave., NW., Washington, DC 20210.

i) The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) uses SOC occupational classifications, and equivalent Census occupational classifications, to create broader categories as part of the Commission's data survey and enforcement programs. Under the survey program, employer workforce information is collected periodically from private-sector firms on the Employer Information Report (EEO-1), and public sector employers on the State and Local Government Report (EEO-4). More information may be obtained from the Commission's Web site at http://www.eeoc.gov.

j) The National Science Foundation (NSF) Division of Science and Resources Statistics (SRS) Web site provides access to the Scientists and Engineers Statistical Data System (SESTAT), a comprehensive and integrated system of information about the employment, educational and demographic characteristics of scientists and engineers in the United States. It is intended for both policy analysis and general research, having features for both the casual and more intensive data user. More information may be obtained from the SESTAT Web site at http://www.nsf.gov/statistics/sestat.

7. Whom should I contact if I have a question about the SOC?

You may call the SOC information line at 202-691-6500, or send an e-mail to SOC@bls.gov.

8. Why are there different levels of detail in the SOC?

The four-tiered levels in the SOC enable users to choose the level or levels of detail corresponding to their interest and ability to collect data on different occupations. Users needing different levels of detail will still be able to compare data at the defined levels. Please see the description of alternative aggregations available at www.bls.gov/soc.

9. Why can't I find my job title in the SOC?

This volume lists occupations that may have many different job titles. It does not attempt to provide an exhaustive list of job titles. A list of additional titles called the Direct Match title file is available at http://www.bls.gov/soc. If your title is not listed, you may e-mail SOC@bls.gov to suggest its inclusion.

10. Which occupations in the SOC cover "professionals"?

The 2010 SOC does not classify or identify workers using the term "professional", or other similar terms such as "skilled" or "unskilled." The SOC was created solely for statistical purposes (see FAQ number 13) and the classification structure is not intended

to rank or group occupations by education, credentials, earnings, or any other similar user-defined indicator of status. However, government agencies or private users may define and use various terms to suit their own purposes. For example, the Employment and Training Administration's O*NET program classifies occupations into 1 of 5 "job zones," based on data regarding the levels of education, experience, and training needed for work in an occupation, ranging from "little or no" to "extensive" preparation (for more information, see http://online.onetcenter.org/help/online/zones).

11. Why are supervisors of workers in Major Groups 13-0000 through 31-0000 not listed? Where should they be classified?

Supervisors of workers in Major Groups 13-0000 through 29-0000 are classified with the occupations they supervise because they often must have the same type of training, education, and experience as the workers they supervise. Supervisors of workers in Major Group 31-0000 are usually classified in Major Group 29-0000. See the Classification Principles available at www.bls.gov/soc.

12. When is the next revision of the SOC scheduled?

The next major review and revision of the SOC is expected to begin in 2013 in preparation for the 2018 SOC. The intent of this revision schedule is to minimize disruption to data providers, producers, and users by promoting simultaneous adoption of revised occupational and industry classification systems for those data series that use both. Given the multiple interdependent programs that rely on the SOC, this is best accomplished by timing revisions of the SOC for the years following North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) revisions, which occur for years ending in 2 and 7. The next such year is 2018, which has the additional benefit of coinciding with the beginning year of the American Community Survey 5-year set of surveys that bracket the 2020 Decennial Census. Thus, OMB intends to consider revisions of the SOC for 2018 and every 10 years thereafter.

To ensure that the successful efforts of the SOCPC continue and that the SOC reflects the structure of the changing workforce, the SOCPC will continue its service as a standing committee. The SOCPC will meet periodically to monitor the implementation of the 2010 SOC across Federal agencies. This consultation will include regularly scheduled interagency communication to ensure a smooth transition to the 2010 SOC. The SOCPC will also perform SOC maintenance functions, such as recommending clarifications of the SOC occupational definitions, placement of new occupations within the existing structure, and updating title files.

13. Can the SOC be used for nonstatistical purposes?

The 2010 SOC was designed solely for statistical purposes. Although it is likely that the 2010 SOC also will be used for various nonstatistical purposes (e.g., for administrative, regulatory, or taxation functions), the requirements of government agencies or private users that choose to use the 2010 SOC for nonstatistical purposes have played no role in

its development, nor will OMB modify the classification to meet the requirements of any nonstatistical program.

Consequently, the 2010 SOC is not to be used in any administrative, regulatory, or tax program unless the head of the agency administering that program has first determined that the use of such occupational definitions is appropriate to the implementation of the program's objectives.

14. Where can I find how the 2010 SOC relates to the 2000 SOC?

The official crosswalks can be found at http://www.bls.gov/soc. Occupations are crosswalked from the 2010 SOC to the 2000 SOC and from the 2000 SOC to the 2010 SOC.

15. Where can I obtain an electronic version or additional printed versions of the SOC?

Information from the *SOC Manual 2010* can be found on the SOC homepage at http://www.bls.gov/soc. To obtain a CD-ROM version or additional print copies of the *SOC Manual 2010*, contact

 U.S. Department of Commerce
 National Technical Information Service
 5301 Shawnee Rd.
 Alexandria, VA 22312
 (703) 605-6000 or 1-800-553-NTIS (6847)
 Order Number: PB2010-105544 (hard cover)
 Order Number: PB2010-500061 (CD-ROM)

16. When will Federal statistical agencies begin using the 2010 SOC in survey collection?

Federal statistical agencies will begin using the 2010 SOC for occupational data they publish for reference years beginning on or after January 1, 2010. However, it is important to note that for some programs, full implementation of the 2010 SOC will occur in stages, as sufficient data are needed to produce estimates at the full level of occupational detail. Contact an agency or program directly for specific information on implementation. A schedule of implementation dates for programs within the Bureau of Labor Statistics will be available at http://www.bls.gov/soc.

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