

**ACS Labor Force Questions:  
Results from Cognitive Interview Testing<sup>1</sup>**

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<sup>1</sup>Disclaimer: 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.

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## 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  
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- Appendix C-1    SAQ Version 1 Question Wording for Cognitive Testing
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## **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.**

<b>Questionnaire Version/Mode</b>	<b>SAQ</b>	<b>CATI</b>	<b>CAPI</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Version 1</b>	22*	0	0	22
<b>Version 2</b>	3	10	5	18
<b>TOTAL</b>	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.**

<b>Gender</b>		<b>Age</b>		<b>Race</b>		<b>Education</b>	
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
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>		<b>40</b>		<b>40</b>		<b>40</b>

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

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#### 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:

<b>Table 3. Interpretation of "Last Week" Reference Period by Laboratory Participants.</b>	
<b>Interpretation of "Last Week"</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>
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

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##### 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?

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##### Tested Looking for Work Question: Version 1

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

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##### 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

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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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## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

I would like to thank several colleagues for their assistance with this research. This includes Lorraine Randall who carried out the challenging task of recruiting cognitive interview laboratory subjects, and Joanne Pascale and Jeff Moore who conducted some of the cognitive interviews for this project and prepared detailed summary reports. Karen Bogen of the Center for Survey Research of the University of Massachusetts at Boston also conducted 15 of the cognitive interviews and prepared a detailed summary report. In addition, persons participating on the workgroup to develop the questions for testing included Tom Palumbo (HHES), Sharon Boyer (ACSO) from the Census Bureau and Jim Esposito and Anne Polivka from BLS. I am grateful to each of them for their contributions to the success of this project.

## ACS (Census 2000) and CPS Labor Force Questions Wording

ACS (Census 2000) Question		Corresponding CPS Question
Item	Question	
<b>Work Last Week</b>	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?
<b>Temporary Absence</b>	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>
<b>Layoff</b>	3. LAST WEEK, was this person on layoff from a job?	6. LAST WEEK, were you on layoff from a job?
<b>Recall</b>	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?

<b>Looking for Work</b>	5. Have this person been looking for work during the last 4 weeks?	9. Have you been doing anything to find work during the last 4 weeks?  10. What are all of the things you have done to find work during the last 4 weeks?
<b>Availability</b>	6. 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.)	11. LAST WEEK, could you have started a job if one had been offered?  12. Could you have returned to work LAST WEEK if you had been recalled  -Yes - No 13. Why is that?

**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.

Respon-  
sibility: 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.

Respon-  
sibility: 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.

### **~~WHAT~~ 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 <sup>1</sup>				N	Respondent Codes <sup>1</sup>							Comments <sup>2</sup>	
		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*		<b>2.89</b>	<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	<i>0.408</i>
<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)**

<b>Probe Question Wording</b>		
	<b>Q1</b>	“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.]
	<b>Q2</b>	“About how frequently do you read the ‘read-if-necessary’ statement when you ask this question [WK]?”
<b>INT ID</b>	<b>Probe</b>	<b>Interviewer [INT] Response</b>
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?*

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**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

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**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?*

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**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.  
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**\*\*\*\*\*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'.



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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?

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

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**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.

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\*\*\*\*\*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?

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

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**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?*

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**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?*

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**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.  
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\*\*\*\*\*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