

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of our plans to conduct additional research under the generic clearance for questionnaire pre-testing research (OMB number 0607-0725). The Statistical Research Division will be conducting split panel testing to examine whether the creation of a user account, consisting of a user ID and password, should be required for participants to access the Internet version of the American Community Survey (ACS) that is currently being developed for field testing around the year 2010. This user ID and password would be an additional step to the login process, since respondents will already be required to enter their ACS/household ID and PIN from the paper form they receive in the mail.

Having the respondents create a user account would conform to Federal Desktop Core Configuration Standards and would increase the security of their responses in the event that they did not complete the survey on the first pass and needed to return later to finish it. Specifically, it will be less likely that another user will be able to either accidentally or intentionally access another respondent's saved responses. Finishing the survey in more than one visit to the Web site is a likely scenario for many respondents because the ACS is a lengthy survey – the 2009 paper ACS survey indicates that the estimated time burden for completion is 38 minutes, including time for reviewing the instructions and answers.

This investigation will focus on the login process in which respondents must engage before being able to respond to the survey questions and complete the survey. The testing has one primary goal: to determine whether there will be a difference in the user experience (e.g., the time it takes for the respondent to reach the first question, user satisfaction score, and rate of completion of login process) when given the *option* to create a user account, consisting of a user ID and password, before taking the survey versus when *required* to create such an account. In the optional account creation condition, participants will be given the option to create an account again after they attempt to leave the survey without completing it. We will also be collecting eye-tracking data to examine which visual aspects of the login process were noticed and used by the respondents.

Between March and April 2009, staff from the Census Bureau's usability lab will conduct a maximum of 40 usability interviews, 20 using the *option* treatment and 20 using the *required* treatment. We will use novice participants and target the following participant characteristics:

- At least one year of Internet experience, with little or no exposure to the Census Web site or to Census terminology;
- Familiar and comfortable with searching for information on the Internet;
- No known disabilities;
- Any amount of education; and
- Not a federal employee.

We will recruit from our internal database made up of respondents in the Metropolitan DC area who have volunteered to participate in a usability study at the Census Bureau. Participants will be randomly assigned to one of two conditions (i.e., optional account creation [consisting of a user ID and password] vs. required account creation.)

The sessions will take place in the Census Bureau's usability lab. Each experimental session will include a test administrator and one participant. Participants will be asked to fill out an initial questionnaire with demographic questions on their age, sex, and education level. The questionnaire also contains questions about the respondents' computer and Internet experience and is included as Attachment A.

The testing procedure will consist of asking the participant to use a real ACS paper version of the survey (including the mail envelope and label needed to start the login process) to access the survey. A sample ACS envelope and label are included as Attachment B, and a copy of the paper survey is included as Attachment C. Then, depending on the condition, the participant will either be allowed the *option* of creating an account with a user ID and password in order to access the ACS online form or will be *required* to do so. Then, the participant will complete a small subset of questions using a prototypical online ACS form following the login segment. Attachment D contains the test protocol for this study, and Attachment E contains screen shots of the current appearance of each step of the login process and a sample survey question. Following the testing procedure, each participant will complete a Questionnaire for User Interface Satisfaction (QUIS, Attachment F). We will read a set of debriefing questions aloud to the participant. These questions can be found in Attachment G. Since the participant will only be completing a few survey questions when they will be led to believe they will be completing the whole survey, a debriefing statement will be read to the participants. This statement is included as Attachment H.

Participants will be informed that their response is voluntary and that the information they provide is confidential and will be seen only by employees involved in the research project. Participants will be paid \$40 for their assistance in this project.

The estimated time for completion of the experimental session is one hour. Thus, the total estimated burden time for this research is a maximum of 40 hours.

The contact person for questions regarding data collection and statistical aspects of the design of this research is listed below:

Kathleen T. Ashenfelter, Ph.D.
Center for Survey Methods Research
Room 5K020K
U.S. Census Bureau
Washington, D.C. 20233
(301) 763- 4922
Kathleen.T.Ashenfelter@Census.Gov