

MEMORANDUM

Date: July 25, 2007

To: Shelly Martinez, Desk Officer
Office of Management and Budget

From: Lynda T. Carlson, Division Director
Division of Science Resources Statistics

Via: Suzanne Plimpton, Reports Clearance Officer
National Science Foundation

Subject: Notification of information collection under generic clearance

The purpose of this memorandum is to inform you of NSF's plans to conduct a series of cognitive interviews to develop a new set of questions for the National Survey of Recent College Graduates (NSRCG) under the generic clearance for survey improvement projects (OMB number 3145-0174).

Background

The Division of Science Resources Statistics (SRS) uses three surveys to produce estimates on different portions of the U.S. science and engineering workforce, collectively known as the Scientists and Engineers Statistical Data System (SESTAT). One of these surveys is the NSRCG, whose sample includes recent bachelor's and master's graduates in science, engineering and health (SE&H) fields from U.S. universities. This survey is conducted every two to three years.

The NSRCG (as well as the other SESTAT surveys) contains two types of questions: core and module. Core questions are those that are asked in every survey round to understand the basic employment, educational and demographic characteristics of the science and engineering labor force. Module questions are periodically asked on the surveys to address special topics. The NSRCG questionnaire currently contains a set of core questions on community college experience (e.g. attendance at community college, associate's degree attainment). In the past, the NSRCG questionnaire contained a module of questions on the reasons for attending a community college.

Through the 1990s and into the current decade, the role of community colleges in postsecondary education has increased. In order to better understand the influence of these institutions on science and engineering education, SRS would like to improve the core and module questions on community college experience that have been fielded in the past in the NSRCG, as well as to develop a set of new questions for the next round of the NSRCG.

The NSRCG is next scheduled to be administered in October of 2008, using a multi-mode approach of a self-administered mail survey, computer-assisted telephone interviews and a web

survey. The 2008 NSRCG sample will consist of individuals who earned SE&H degrees at a U.S. institution in academic years 2006 and 2007.

Proposed Questionnaire Testing

SRS plans to field a series of cognitive interviews to improve the battery of questions on community college attendance in the NSRCG.

Through the cognitive interviews, SRS will test the performance of previously asked questions on community college experience, as well as to refine new questions for 2008. SRS has already developed a small number of new questions to collect data on the timing of community college attendance, and the influence of such attendance on educational and career pathways. The goal of testing these new questions in planned cognitive interviews is to ensure that the questions perform as intended and are clearly understood by the respondents. Some research work was begun earlier¹ and this current work will expand upon that.

SRS also hopes to identify and document the nature and extent of any problems in the existing and/or new questions on the community college experience. This information can be collected through respondent observation in cognitive interviews, and probing follow-up questions. We hope to further refine the question and response category wording based on these interview results when possible, while keeping in mind the importance of preserving the long-term trend data.

Participants will be recruited systematically throughout WSU Pullman-Moscow area and Vancouver, WA areas by asking school staff of science departments for people who have recently completed a bachelors degree in a science, engineering or health field, and inquire as to whether they have attended a community college or colleges as part of their educational process. Recruitment will attempt to find recent graduates who are currently enrolled in graduate school for at least half of the participants.

Potential participants will be called and informed about the goal of the study, which is to evaluate a set of proposed questions for the National Science Foundation's national survey of college graduates, conducted every two or three years. Explanations will include the voluntary nature of their participation in the cognitive interview, the nature and length of the interview, and that they will receive \$35 in appreciation for the help they provide. They will also be asked to sign a consent form prior to the interview, a draft of which is attached.

¹ Dr. Don Dillman at the Washington State University (WSU) Social and Economic Science Research Center (SESRC) has conducted 15 cognitive interviews of individuals attending WSU, who indicated having attended community colleges to understand their overall community college experience. These interview results directly led to the development of questions for the second round of planned cognitive interviews, which will also be conducted by the SESRC. Due to an oversight, SRS inadvertently did not obtain clearance for the first round of cognitive interviews by SESRC.

Burden Hours for Cognitive Interviews

A maximum of 25 cognitive interviews are being planned. There will initially be 15 cognitive interviews conducted, with an additional 10 to be conducted as necessary. The estimated completion time of each interview is approximately 60 minutes. The total maximum estimated burden for this research is 25 hours. Each interviewee will receive \$35 for their participation.

Clearance Package

Included in this clearance package is the draft cognitive interview questionnaire. If any significant changes are made to this instrument prior to testing, SRS will submit a revised version to OMB prior to conducting the cognitive interviews.

The contact person for questions regarding this research is:

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ATTACHMENTS

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