

Memorandum

June 28, 2010

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 that the National Science Foundation (NSF) Division of Science Resources Statistics (SRS) plans to conduct 30 cognitive interviews under the generic clearance for survey improvement projects (OMB number 3145-0174) for the Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED).

Background

The Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED) began in 1957–58 to collect data continuously on the number and characteristics of individuals receiving research doctoral degrees from all accredited U.S. institutions. The results of this annual survey are used to assess characteristics and trends in doctorate education and degrees. This information is vital for educational and labor force planners within the federal government and in academia. The SED is sponsored by the following 6 federal agencies: National Science Foundation (NSF), National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Education, U.S. Department of Agriculture, National Endowment for the Humanities, and National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The Science Resources Statistics Division (SRS) is responsible for the conduct of the SED.

In recent years, the scientific and academic communities have shown increased interest in interdisciplinary research and lauded interdisciplinarity as a method of improving our ability to answer complex scientific questions. As a result, a variety of researchers, advocates, academic institutions, and scientific foundations have made concerted efforts to promote interdisciplinary scholarship. However, we lack understanding of the nature of interdisciplinarity and those who practice interdisciplinary research.

The SED asks respondents to report the field(s) of their dissertation researcher. Beginning in 2001, respondents were given the option of reporting both a primary as well as a secondary field. In 2004, the wording of the question was changed slightly. Given the ambiguity surrounding the meaning of interdisciplinary (and related terms), there is concern about how individuals interpret and respond to this item.

Cognitive Interviews

In order to sort through these issues and better understand how respondents interpret these questions, SRS will conduct a series of cognitive interviews with individuals who have recently completed or are about to complete their dissertation research. A total of thirty cognitive interviews are planned.

The project will target individuals at Washington State (WSU) who are either nearing the completion of their doctoral program (they must be in the dissertation-writing stage) or have recently completed their doctoral degree (within the last six months). In order to examine the primary item of interest (how individuals respond to the question of whether their dissertation research is interdisciplinary), it will be necessary to include researchers who are expected to report interdisciplinary research as well as those who are expected to be unlikely to report interdisciplinary research. The target is to have two-thirds of the interviewees with individuals who are likely to report interdisciplinary research and one-third of the interviews with those thought to be unlikely to report interdisciplinary research.

Incentive Payments

Individuals will be asked to come to a cognitive laboratory and participate in an interview that is expected to last approximately one hour. Participants will be offered an honorarium of \$30.00.

Confidentiality

At the outset of the interview, respondents will be informed of their privacy and confidentiality rights, including the right to decline participation altogether and the right to refuse any individual question item in the interview. They will be informed that the information is being solicited under the authority of the National Science Foundation Act of 1950 and be presented with a consent form to sign.

Burden Information

A total of 30 cognitive interviews are planned. We expect recruitment activities will take about 15 minutes per contact and that 90 contacts will be needed to recruit 30 participants. We expect that the interviews will last about 60 minutes in length. Thus, the estimated total maximum burden is 52.5 hours (30 interviews x 1 hour per interview + 90 contacts x 15 minutes per contact).

Contact Information

The contact person for questions regarding this research is:

Jeri M. Mulrow
Division of Science Resources Statistics
National Science Foundation
4201 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 965
Arlington, VA 22230
703-292-4784
jmulrow@nsf.gov